

## Nativity Homily 2 / Luke 13:10-17

Last week we celebrated the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the temple. With the celebration of this feast we begin our period of preparing for the coming of Christ. As we heard in the troparion for this feast, this is the “prelude.” The Church prepares us for each of the feasts through a time of preparation; a time when we make ourselves ready. We do this by focusing less on what we eat and on other worldly concerns. If we are attentive to the services of the Church, we see how we are prepared for the upcoming feast. Nothing comes about unexpectedly; we are given signs to lead us to the next important event. If we invite people to dinner at our homes, what do we do to prepare? Do we not clean our homes, set the table, perhaps bring out the nice china, spend time getting the food ready? And if we are the ones invited, do we not prepare by dressing appropriately, perhaps buying flowers to bring? In similar fashion, the Church prepares us for the feast of the Nativity. And we in turn prepare ourselves to receive Christ and the great miracle of his incarnation, his taking on flesh and being born of a woman in order to restore and lift up our fallen human nature.

Today’s Gospel demonstrates what it means that Christ is the Incarnate Word. We are shown why it matters that God became Man. The world came into being through the Word of God; as we hear in the Psalms, ‘by the Word of the Lord the heavens and earth were created.’ Before the Incarnation, the Word/ the Logos was only known in shadows, for he had not been revealed to us. At the Incarnation everything changes, and the Word of God, Christ, is revealed to us. This is why the feast of the Nativity and Theophany are linked (and in ancient times were in fact celebrated together)—these two his events, the birth of Christ and his baptism in the Jordan, reveal to us on earth the Son of God, the Divine Word, the Messiah, Christ. In today’s

Gospel account Jesus heals a woman who suffered an infirmity for 18 years. By laying his hands on her she is immediately healed. Who could do such a thing? Who could restore someone to health, someone who had been infirm for so long, by His mere touch? Only He who created mankind can restore and heal mankind. We also hear in this Gospel account that she suffered because Satan had bound her. Here we learn that bodily affliction is in part due to Satan. It was on account of Satan that corruption came into the world when he tricked our forefathers Adam and Even into eating the fruit. We live in a fallen world; a world where there is sickness and suffering and death. The world was not created to be this way. Christ, the Word of God, came into the world to heal and restore it. Here in this Gospel account he heals this woman of her infirmity. Christ also heals our spiritual infirmities. It was necessary that Christ took on our full humanity, so that all of our humanity could be healed.

The services of the Church lead us to the Nativity of Christ; the hymns and songs prepare and instruct us. On Tuesday we remember St. Andrew the first called. Andrew was one of the first to recognize Christ as the Messiah. The hymns for St. Andrew begin to look ahead to the Nativity. In the Vespers service, we hear the following:

Adorn yourself, O Bethlehem.

Open your gates, O Eden.

Enter, O Magi, and see salvation swaddled in a crib.

Behold the star shining above the cave;

It announces the life-giving Lord who saves the human race.

Bethlehem is told to adorn itself to prepare for the coming of Christ. The Magi are told to send and see ‘salvation swaddled in a crib.’ Eden, once closed after the disobedience of Adam and Eve, is told to open its gates. Why? Why are Bethlehem and the Magi told to prepare and get ready? Because they are to announce the life-giving Lord who saves the human race. This idea of “announcing” the coming of Christ-- the way that Bethlehem and the Magi are told to prepare for the arrival of Christ—explains why in the West this time of year is known as Advent. We prepare for the arrival or approach, which is what the Latin term ‘Advent’ means. So let us hearken to the instruction given to us in the services. Let us begin to make ready. And we prepare and make ourselves ready by dwelling on what it means that God took on flesh and dwelt amongst us. We meditate on the meaning of this great event, the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, that inaugurates our salvation. We look to this act of healing in today’s Gospel and begin to understand that by the mere touch of our Creator we can be made whole and healed from bodily and spiritual infirmities. We make ourselves ready, so that we too can journey with the Magi and see salvation swaddled in a crib.