

ST. SAVA SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
ISSAQUAH, WA
PRIEST'S GREETING – JANUARY 2008

CHRIST IS BORN!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Is anything more wonderful than sharing the joy of a baby being born? This joy reminds us of God's goodness and love for us, for He created all of us in His likeness and image. How could one not see God in the face of a baby? As we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are also reminded of why He came in the form of a man, being at the same time God.

If humans were perfect beings there would have been no need for Christ to come. Unfortunately, our fallen nature prevents us from being perfect and causing us to quite often miss the mark set for us. God encourages us to be perfect as He is perfect. Yet, knowing that we can never be as God, it is a difficult road we must travel. Christ came as an example in human form to which we can easily relate to show us how to save our souls.

No one stays an innocent baby forever. We all grow up and are faced with all sorts of temptations that focus our attention toward our passions. Since our Savior is both God and man, he was able to ward off these temptations of the Evil One demonstrating that only with God can we fight the spiritual battle. Our first step in this process is to be baptized. Through baptism we receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit – God's Grace - that gives us the ability to stay on a godly path even though we might occasionally step off this path.

The day before Theophany—the Feast of Christ's baptism—is designated as Holy Cross Day and it isn't a coincidence that it falls before Theophany. We are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and the sign of the Cross is placed upon us as we are anointed with oil and chrism. Indeed, the Cross is our symbol of victory over the demons that continually attack us.

Christ came and said that we should be like children so that we may inherit God's Kingdom. As His children we are asked to come to Him, especially at a young age. We might look into a mirror now and realize that we don't look like babies anymore because the cares of this world have placed a mask over our original innocent face. The grace of God is trying to show forth, however, as we struggle to wash off our arrogant pride that leads us to sin.

Just as Christ was an example for us while on earth, showing us how to behave in a way that is pleasing to God and leading to our salvation, we can find other examples to follow in the lives of many godly saints of our Orthodox Church who literally "shone like the sun" while living on this earth. If we pursue a life of humility so that we can restore our original image, we can become like babes again – innocent and pleasing to God.

May God be merciful to all of us and grant you a blessed and prosperous new year!

Your unworthy intercessor before the newborn Christ Child,

Fr. Ilija Balach
January 2008