

Rejoice, O Isaiah!
Fr. John Matusiak
Upbeat
V.2, n. 10, 1969

“...the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.”

Thus reads an Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah about the birth of the Savior. And in it, the hopes and desires of the Hebrew people in their long wait for the coming of the Savior who was to ransom mankind, are clearly seen.

In the birth of Christ, the holy saying of the Prophets and the hopes and desires of a tormented humanity are fulfilled. When the Creator saw man perishing in his sinful state, in His great love, He opened the heavens and sent His only-begotten Son down to earth. And it is Christ Emmanuel who has come and was made perfect man, born as a babe of the most pure Virgin Mary. He never, however ceased to be what He is from all eternity – that is, true God, One of the Holy Trinity. He became a young child, but remained the “wisdom and word and power, the Son and brightness of the Father” – the pre-eternal God, made man. It is in this difficult to understand union of the two natures of Christ that we find the very essence of Christmas.

Although the Orthodox Church stresses the divine mystery of God made man rather than the baby Jesus, we do find that the familiar sights of the Christmas story: the angels, the star, the wise men, the manger – are still present. None of these picturesque details are forgotten. But as the worshipper stands before the icon of the feast and sees all of these things, it is not enough for him to simply picture a gentle child lying in the straw. He must see much more than this; he must see the “only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all ages” – Emmanuel.

“Thou has made Thy dwelling in the cave, using the manger as Thy throne,” reads one of the Christmas hymns. And certainly the cave was more than just a cave. It was a palace for Christ the King, while the white swaddling clothes became His royal robes: “The Lord is King and has put on glorious apparel.” (Psalm 92:1)

Marking the sight of the Throne of the “Light that never sets” is a star, the “unknown and newly shining star that exceeded the brightness of all heavenly light.” It was this strange, divine star that led the Magi to the King of Kings: “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” (Isaiah 9:1) Yet little did they actually realize the greatness of His rule, His immeasurable power, or the vastness of His Kingdom. Likewise, Joseph, the spouse of Mary, and the shepherds were equally amazed when they came to pay homage to the Shepherd of shepherds, the Lamb of lambs. Both angels and man were united with one voice and one jubilant spirit in singing “Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth, peace, good will toward men,” praising the One Who has come in peace and has brought peace, and Who is Peace.

The birth of Christ – that mysterious and wonderful and joyous festival of divine love: the mystery of God’s manifestation as man, the wonder which is the beginning of our salvation, the joy over the reinstitution of love and peace. The prophecy has been fulfilled, “the Lord has sent deliverance unto His people” (Psalm 110:9), and truly, all creation is today able to join together and shout aloud:

“Rejoice, O Isaiah! A Virgin is with child, and shall bear a Son, Emmanuel, both God and man: and Orient is His Name!”