

**Our Participation in the Life of our Lord Jesus Christ through the Feasts of the Coptic
Orthodox Church**
The Feast of the Nativity
By: Andrew Doss

“Christ is born, glorify Him!”¹ With this greeting, St. Gregory of Nazianzus begins his Oration on the Feast of the Nativity – the celebration of the Incarnation of God the Logos. Man, unable to return to the knowledge of his Maker alone, abided in “darkness and the shadow of death,”² until God had compassion on him,³ sending His Only-Begotten Son to accomplish his salvation. Thus, the Logos was incarnate, uniting to Himself the complete human nature save for sin alone,⁴ to return humanity to the knowledge of the Father⁵ and to renew our nature, grant us the forgiveness of sin, recreate once more the image that was defaced when humanity sinned in Adam,⁶ and offering himself as a ransom for us by the sacrifice of the cross.⁷ Summarizing this profound truth, St. Gregory writes: “God was manifested to man by birth.”⁸ He continues:

“On the one hand Being, and eternally Being, of the Eternal Being, above cause and word, for there was no word before The Word; and on the other hand for our sakes also Becoming, that He Who gives us our being might also give us our well-being, or rather might restore us by His Incarnation, when we had by wickedness fallen from wellbeing.”⁹

In this glorious occasion, the cry of the Old Testament, “How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever,”¹⁰ is answered. No longer do we cry, “Bow down Your heavens, O Lord, and come down,”¹¹ for Christ has come. Let us observe the manner in which He has come:

“The Lord did not come to make a display. He came to heal and to teach suffering men. For one who wanted to make a display the thing would have been just to appear and dazzle the beholders. But for Him Who came to heal and to teach the way was not merely to dwell here, but to put Himself at the disposal of those who needed Him, and to be manifested

¹ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 38.1*

² *The Anaphora of the Coptic Divine Liturgy of St. Basil*

³ *The Thursday Tadakia, 2.5*

⁴ Hebrews 4:15

⁵ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation, 11*

⁶ Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22; See St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation, 13-14*

⁷ Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation, 9.1*; St. Basil, *Letter 261 to the Sozopolitans, 2-3*; St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, Homily 3*; See Fr. Shenouda M. Ishak, *The Second Annual Theology Convention at the Coptic Monastery of St. Shenouda, Rochester, NY, July 2013, Lecture 2: “Fall and Ransom”*

⁸ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 38.1*

⁹ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 38.3*

¹⁰ Psalm 13:1

¹¹ Psalm 144:5

according as they could bear it, not vitiating the value of the Divine appearing by exceeding their capacity to receive it.”¹²

As we chant in the Tadakia of Sunday: “By His coming, He enlightened us, we who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.”¹³ What is this enlightenment but the restoration of the relationship between God and man? As Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden of Eden,¹⁴ so we can now also see, touch, and handle¹⁵ God the Word, Who “became flesh and dwelt among us.”¹⁶ By His birth in the flesh, Christ, “the True Light,”¹⁷ offers us a rebirth and renewal of our nature and gives us the ability to once again know His Father.

The Church, in Her wisdom, presents to us the Fast of the Nativity, giving us the opportunity to share in the Old Testament’s anticipation of the coming of Christ and preparing us to receive God the Word. More than merely historical events which are remembered, every feast and every event from Christ’s life serves a deeper and personal purpose for us as Christians.

We must ask, in every one of the Lord’s fourteen feasts, two essential questions: first, “what are we celebrating,” including its historical, Christological, theological, ecclesiastical, and ritual significance, and second, “how does this feast relate to me personally?”¹⁸ As the Church celebrates these events, we are reminded of our role and share in the feasts. The Feast of the Nativity, as is the case with every feast of the Lord, has an important personal significance, and only when we come to experience the feasts in this holistic light can we begin to understand what they truly mean for us as Orthodox Christians.¹⁹

May we not let this glorious feast pass us by without welcoming Christ again into our lives — asking Him to “graciously come also and be with us”²⁰ — and glorifying Him, as St. Gregory of Nazianzus requests.

To God is due all glory.

¹² St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 43.1

¹³ *The Sunday Tadakia*, 5.4

¹⁴ Genesis 3:8

¹⁵ 1 John 1:1

¹⁶ John 1:14

¹⁷ John 1:9

¹⁸ Fr. Athanasius K. Farag, *Homily on the Nativity*, Delivered at St. Antonious and St. Mina Coptic Orthodox Church, East Rutherford, NJ, on January 8, 2016.

¹⁹ We do so by reading the Scriptural account(s) of the feast, examining closely the liturgical texts related to the feast (e.g. the Fraction, the Adam and Wados Psalis, the Aspasmosat), and reading what our Church Fathers teach about it.

²⁰ Litanies of the 3rd Hour Prayer