

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH  
CHRISTMAS EVE VESPERS, DECEMBER 24, 2022**

**“THE COMING OF THE GLADSOME LIGHT”**

In 1925, the “New York World” newspaper published a cartoon on Abraham Lincoln’s birthday. It showed a couple of Kentucky pioneers standing around and chatting. One said to the other, “Anything new been happening around here lately?” The second fellow replied, “Naw, nothing going on-----Oh, I guess a baby was born over at Tom Lincoln’s cabin yesterday, but that’s just another mouth to feed. No, nothing going on.” (“Upper Room”, 12/25/81) “Nothing going on”---just the birth of a baby who would grow up to save the Union and end slavery!

Imagine with me Christmas day in Bethlehem 2022 year ago. A couple of Bethlehem fellows are standing around visiting. One says to the other, “Anything new going on in town lately?” The second fellow replies, “No, nothing, just the same old same old. Oh, but I guess there was a baby born over at the inn last night. But that’s nothing, just another mouth to feed.” Just another baby! Nothing going on! Just the birth of the baby who would grow up to be the man who would save the human race and change the world!

That baby brought the light of God to a dark world. A few minutes ago we sang the hymn we sing every Saturday evening at Vespers-“O Gladsome Light”. This beautiful hymn is thought by historians to be the oldest Christian hymn not counting those in the Bible. It goes all the way back! “Gladsome” is an old English word which means “joyous” or “happy”. Something that is “gladsome” makes you glad! In this hymn we joyfully proclaim that the joyous light of God, Jesus Christ, came to us at Christmas.

The world was very dark and weary and badly needed something “gladsome”. The Lord was born and that dark and weary world started changing. And the Church began, filled with those who were filled with that Gladsome Light from God. They brought people to God, they took care of the orphans, they stopped the killing of babies, both born and unborn. They raised women from their degraded position in ancient times. And after a long and hard struggle (this one took many hundreds of years because it was so deeply imbedded in all human history), they ended slavery. And these light-filled people, God’s Church, produced truly good and holy people---the Saints.

All of that started on this night in Bethlehem 2022 years ago when the

Gladsome Light of Almighty God was born as a baby boy. And His light has been shining on us ever since.

Tonight and tomorrow we celebrate that baby full of light. That baby who is God. That baby who later said in the gospel of St. John---“*I am* the light.”

Is that Gladsome Light of God filling your life? Maybe not at all---maybe you are in spiritual darkness. Maybe it's in you a bit----a flickering flame, perhaps, nothing more. (But thank God, at least there's a flame to flicker!) Or maybe the light is bright in you-----but you know it could get a lot brighter!

Whatever category you see yourself in, Christmas is a good time to let Christ's light fill you! But that is up to you.

Let me tell you an experience of mine. I was 20 years old and it was the night of December 23, 1973. I grew up in Fargo----it was a very cold winter night (under zero), but not snowing or storming. I was walking home from work (about a mile) late at night. It was a very dark, moonless night. The sky was clear and the stars were shining so very brightly as they do in North Dakota on a cold winter night.

I was going through a spiritual struggle. I had been a strong believer all my life but was struggling at age 20 (as probably most folks do!) I still had faith but life was pulling me in many directions at once. And I was trying to decide---should I live totally for Jesus Christ?.....or just partly. This was the crisis I was in that night.

As I walked along I looked up at a lot at the sky where the multitude of stars were shining brightly. As their light poured down on me I was in awe thinking about how immense the universe was-----infinitely huge. And then even more in awe as I thought about how God must be even bigger, being He had created all those stars. And then, being it was Christmas time, I started to think about how that infinitely huge God had come down as a baby at the first Christmas----out of love for *me*. And if He did that for a little speck of a person like me, should I not love Him back? And so I decided that night, on that very cold walk, to go all out in my life for God. And although I have messed up plenty of times since then, that decision that night still is in effect.

This Christmas, God is calling out to you in a similar way. His light is shining on you, like those stars were shining on me. However much of His light you now have---none at all, some, or a lot---there is always a whole bunch more to have! For God's light, God's love for you, is infinite.

Take a big step this Christmas. Ask God to fill you with the light that came at Bethlehem!

May the light of Christmas, that Gladsome Light of our Lord Jesus Christ, fill you today and forever!