

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH
CHRISTMAS DAY
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2022**

**GALATIANS 4: 4-7
MATTHEW 2: 1-12**

“CHRISTMAS DECISIONS”

There are big decisions to make in life----sometimes very hard to make decisions! Some decades back, Bela Karolyi was one of the most famous men in Communist Romania. He was the leading gymnast coach in the country and the trainer of some great and successful gymnasts including the most famous one in the world, Nadia Comaneci. She, and some of his other athletes, won all kinds of Olympic medals and made Romania the leading country in the world in gymnastic competition. Karolyi got much of the credit and the Communist dictatorship was very appreciative of all the good publicity for their regime. So he was treated very well—his house was like a palace, he was given the best cars made, gourmet food, huge salary, all the perks..... He truly was living high. But Bela Karolyi wasn't happy---he hated Communism and wanted to be free. So one day he abandoned it all. He packed a small, easy to carry suitcase, traveled to the Hungarian border area, and at night he walked to a secluded rural area. When there were no guards around, he walked over into freedom----and poverty. There were some hard times ahead of him, but he was free. He made his tough decision and carried it out. (“Our Daily Bread”, 2/10/07)

For each of us, life is full of big decisions. How to live, what to live for? What to believe? Who to believe in? We are free to decide how we wish to decide.

Is life good? Or is it bad? Is there a God? Or is there no God? If there is a God, is He good? Or bad? Or a mix? We each have to decide. Our decisions won't change reality—what is real is real. The decisions are about what we *ourselves* believe.

God could have easily forced our choice. He could use the clouds to write huge letters in the sky reading---“I am real, so believe in me.” And then he could have boomed those same words out to us from the sky! But that's not God's style---He respects our freedom too much to do that.

So when the Lord came to earth at the first Christmas, He did so in such a way that leaves us freedom to decide----He came as a baby! One of the

reasons was to leave us our freedom, not to overwhelm us with something we couldn't possible doubt. When we look at the Christmas story, we have the freedom to make a necessary decision-----is that baby really divine or not?

God came down at Christmas 2022 years ago today. He came because He wanted to be with the people He created. He came to show us how much He loves us.

There was a man who moved up from having a few goldfish in a bowl to having a large salt water aquarium. A lot more work than goldfish----very careful feeding regimens, worries about filtration and temperature, etc. But he loved his fish so much it was worth it. But it saddened him that the fish were afraid of him. Whenever he got close to the aquarium the fish would dart to the other side---it was like they didn't like him and didn't want him around. He wished he could convince them he was a friend, not an enemy. But they wanted nothing to do with him. He thought to himself---the only way I could convince them I am their friend is if I could become a fish and get right in the water with them!

So as to convince us of His love for us, God the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, became one of us. You might say He got in the aquarium! He was born as truly one of us, He lived with us, He taught us, He helped us, He died for us. Pretty convincing! But we still individually have to decide about what to believe about it all.

Over the 2000 years since that baby was born, there has been lots of discussion, debates, arguments over what it all means. Thousands and thousands of books. 20 centuries of wondering about it all. But the decision about what *we* believe is still up to each one of us. Your parents can't make that decision for you. Your friends can't make it for you. Your church can't make it for you. Your priest can't make it for you. It's up to you.

So look at that baby. Look at the man He grew up to be. Read the gospels to see what He was like (that's where we find out all about Him---if you are trying to make a decision, it's so important you dig into those 4 short books!)

Then ask yourself---what do I believe about that baby? About the unique man He grew up to be?

And if you decide you believe the Christmas story is true, that decision should decide everything about your life. If it's true-----if God is real and if God is good-----that means, ultimately, that life is good. True, it is very difficult very often, but ultimately good.

That's why there's so much singing at Christmas time. If that baby is divine, then life is good. And so we should happily sing "Joy to the World"!

This is the day that decides everything---is life good or is life bad? It really all depends on if the story is true, if that infant is truly God come in the flesh. It all depends on a little baby boy wearing a diaper, crying to be nursed.....

It is your decision as to whether or not to believe it. I, of course, hope you'll decide it's true. But it is your own decision. So decide carefully---- your whole life depends on what you decide.

May God help you make the right decision: to believe Christmas is true; to believe God really came as a baby; to believe that God really is as good as the man that baby grew up to be, because that man is God in the flesh.

And if you firmly decide to believe it all, then there is *one more decision* to make after that-----to decide whether or not to devote your whole life to that man who was born at Christmas. To live for Him totally in the here and now and to live with Him forever after you die.

Make a firm decision, not a wishy-washy one. Don't be like the ancient Frank warriors. France is named for them---they were a very powerful tribe in Europe in the early Middle Ages. They were pagans and the Christian missionaries preached to them and convinced them to get baptized and become Christian. So they lined up by the thousands at various rivers to be immersed and leave their pagan beliefs behind. But the warriors of their nation really enjoyed fighting---killing their enemies, plundering and pillaging, etc. The priests doing the triple dunking in the rivers noticed something going on. As the warriors were put down into the water 3 times, many of them struggled to keep their right arm, their sword arm, out of the water and dry! They wanted to become Christians, but not totally! They wanted their sword arm to remain pagan.

Don't be like them! Don't hold back anything in your life! Decide---and if you decide the Christmas story is true, go all out for that decision, go all the way and totally live for God.

May God bless each of us as we celebrate the holy baby's birth!