

DECEMBER 24, 2016---CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLE LIGHT VESPERS

ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

Hebrews 1: 1-12

“YOUR CANDLE”

Christ is born! Glorify Him! Tonight is a night of celebration. What are we celebrating? Or should we say, *who* are we celebrating? We are celebrating Jesus and how He came to our world. We are celebrating how He, the Second Person of the All-Holy Trinity, lowered Himself to come down to us.

How can He be described, this one who came down at Christmas? St. Paul describes him in tonight's epistle reading in Hebrews 1. I will read for you again the first three verses of that reading-----“In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of His nature, upholding the universe by His word of power.”

Let's look at that description a little.....St. Paul says that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is “the heir of all things.” Everything that exists belongs to Him. It's all His, because He is God. Then St. Paul says that it was through Christ that God “created the world”. Christ took part in the creation of the universe, because He is God. Then the apostle says the Son “bears the very stamp of His nature” meaning the nature of God. If Christ bears the stamp of God's nature, that means He has God's nature. That means He is God. And then St. Paul goes on to say that Christ is “upholding the universe by His word of power.” Christ upholds the universe. It all depends on Him, because He is God.

And this one who has been God from all eternity, this Second Person of the Trinity, came down to join us as a baby at the first Christmas 2000 years ago. And our world couldn't even give Him a room to be born in! You know the story of what happened on this night so many years ago. The Holy Theotokos and St. Joseph traveled around Bethlehem with their donkey looking for a room to stay as the Child was about to be born. If you've ever made a fast drive to the hospital for a baby to be born, you can imagine the stress! But no one would give them a place, except finally someone let them stay with his livestock in his manger in a cave in the back yard. That's the best our human race could do!

The Lord, all these years later, is again looking for a place.... He is looking for hearts to live in, to be born in.....

A common Christmas decoration is to have a candle lit in a window to be seen from outside (usually an electric candle these days). It's one of the simpler decorations and very nice to see. Historians of Christmas say there is a specific reason for those candles----at least, there was when the custom first started long ago in Europe. People put a candle in their window on Christmas Eve night as a way to show that they would gladly give Jesus a place to be born in their house. The candle was meant to say----“Jesus, welcome in! We won't turn you away like they did in Bethlehem.” (in Sacred Symbols That Speak, Vol. 1, Father Anthony Coniaris, Light & Life Publishing, p. 43)

And so that leads to the simple message of tonight's sermon----is there a candle lit in your heart inviting Jesus to come in? Promising Him that you won't turn Him away? A candle of welcome?

Light a candle in your heart. Welcome Him in. Say to Him tonight—"Be with me in my life, Lord. Fill me, guide me, live in me." The fact you're here tonight means there is a good probability that He is already in your life. Good! Then light a candle in your heart to ask Him to come deeper into your life, to more truly be the center of your existence. Your heart still has plenty of more room for Him to fill, to be born in!

Light a candle in your heart and let it shine even brighter than the candle you are tonight holding in your hand. Light a candle that says to Jesus Christ--"You are welcome, Lord. Please come in."

May the Lord, whose birth we celebrate, fill your heart and life more each day!
Christ is born! Glorify Him!

