



**Orthodox Mission of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

St. Nicholas: Image of Faith Active in Love!

December 19, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

In truth you were revealed to your flock as a rule of faith, an image of humility and a teacher of abstinence; your humility exalted you; your poverty enriched you. Holy Father Nicholas, entreat Christ our God that our souls may be saved. (Troparion for the Commemoration of St. Nicholas)

As I approach my 71st Christmas, I have become very much aware of a significant change in the way people around me celebrate this great feast. Essentially, they don't. Forty or fifty years ago we clergy would remind people to focus on the sacred meaning of Christmas, the birth of the Christ Child in fulfillment of the ancient prophecies. We would preach on the great loving-kindness of our God in coming to the world in humility, to bear the sin of humanity, to show the true nature of God in word and deed, to take upon Himself the bitter sacrifice of self-giving upon the cross and to fill the darkness of our suffering and death with the bright joy, the inexhaustible light of His essence. We would encourage people to focus on this meaning of Christmas rather than the secular practice of self-indulgence. Many people heard what we said or wrote to them, pulled back from their secular merry making enough to see that the Gospel, the announcement of our salvation in the Birth of the Savior, was heard in their families and in their own lives within the Church.

I know that there are many people who still celebrate the joy of this sacred feast, but more and more it seems to me as I get older, that the tension between the sacred and secular celebrations has disappeared entirely. Now, in place of the sacred, there is only the secular. In my neighborhood, for

example, I see most of the lawns displaying childish images of snowmen, Santa's, and even dragons. Gone is any remembrance of why we celebrate Christmas in the first place. In its stead are merely reminders of self-indulgence. We are simply using the time to teach our children how to be greedy. This is a great shame, especially in light of the many examples of self-giving that God has provided for us in His Church. On Sunday, for example, we will commemorate one of the great early saints of our Church, St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra. Over the years the image of this wondrous third century bishop has been turned into that of a fat, jolly elf. But Saint Nicholas was very different indeed. The stories passed on through many generations tell of a kind and self-giving bishop, who sought to care for his flock in such a way as to show, demonstrate and live the compassion of our Lord Himself. The reason we hang stockings up on Christmas Eve, for example, comes from his action: To save a man's daughters from being sold into a life of dissolution, he tossed a bag of coins into the man's house so he could provide a dowry for his daughters. The coins were said to have landed in some of the stockings that were being dried by a fire, and thus began the legend of hanging stockings on Christmas Eve.

We are living in a time in which the vast population around us has little understanding of the profound message of the approaching feast. We can help by setting simple examples at home. Let each of us teach our children, our entire families with examples of simplicity. Let us emulate the example of our Father Among the Saints, Nicholas, by giving simple gifts with a clear explanation to those to whom we give them. We give to one another in the spirit of the saint, the spirit of compassion, so clearly demonstrated to all of us by the One Who is born in Bethlehem. More importantly, let us unbind our purses and our wallets and give for the sake of people in genuine need: To the victims of the terrible tornadoes in Kentucky, to *Zoe*, to help mothers who have become pregnant outside of marriage, to the sick or the hungry or the dying, to help genuine need in the spirit of Christ. By doing these things, our examples will shine forth in the spirit of the great Saint Nicholas, and we will be teaching our families something much more precious than that of self-indulgence. We will be teaching by example how to emulate the self-giving sacrifice of the One born in Bethlehem Who *gave* and continues to *give* Himself eternally for the Life of the World.

Fr. Elias

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