

God's Yes Christmas Day 2022

Merry Christmas everyone! Many in the Orthodox church greet each other on their Christmas morning with the salutation "Christ is born" and the response "Glorify Him!" I'm glad we can gather on this Christmas morning to Glorify Him. Aren't you thankful that into this sinful world a Savior was born? Hallelujah! Glorify Him!

We have spent this Advent talking about Mary's Yes and Joseph's Yes to God. This morning I want to spend a few minutes talking about what prompted their Yes. The reason Mary and Joseph needed to say Yes to God is because God said Yes to us and to our need for a Savior. Think about that. Faced with a yes or no, God said yes!

We can go all the way back to the garden of Eden, to the very beginning. God's Yes is seen in creation as he brings this world into existence, fills it with light and sky and earth and vegetation and living creatures in the air and in the sea and on the land and then he creates man and woman in his image, male and female he created them and he blessed them and told them to be fruitful and increase in number and steward this earth and then he looked at all he had created and he declared it was very good. God looked at it all and said "Yes! This is good." He said Yes to his creation. Yes to all the potential for fellowship and life and growth and knowledge. I just want to tell you God didn't start out angry at you. He looked at you, his creation, and he said "Yes! This is good. Very good!"

We didn't get too far into the story in the garden until sinned presented itself and messed everything up. God told them they could eat from every tree in the garden except for this one particular tree. He warned them that eating from that tree, disobedience to God, would bring death in paradise. Eve gave into temptation, ate fruit from the forbidden tree and gave Adam fruit to eat as well. As a result, sin and death came into our world. Adam and Eve ran and hid when God called to them because sin brings shame. It makes us want to hide, to run to the darkness rather than step into the light. They failed and sinned, but even in their sin, God still had a "yes" for them. He said Yes to their need for salvation. He provided covering for them to hide their shame and nakedness. Although they were banned from the garden, he provided for them and spoke of a future time when the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head and bring victory over sin. God was still choosing to say yes to his creation, in spite of the mess they made.

Time went on and the population increased but the bible says, **"The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of**

his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth.” Genesis 6:5 Society had become so corrupt, so wicked, that God was grieved he had made man. God never entered their thoughts, only evil, all the time. In a drastic response, God said, **“I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth...” Genesis 6:7** It looks like God’s “Yes” has finally turned to a “No” to the whole world, but then we read, **“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” Genesis 6:8** God still had a Yes for Noah and his family. He still had a Yes for those who would walk in obedience to Him. Why didn’t he destroy everyone? I think Peter gives us the reason for God’s “yes” in his epistle. **“God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9**

We see God’s yes when he made a covenant with Abraham. He chose a man and chose a people. God said, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.” Genesis 15:1 God told Abraham, **“I will make a covenant with you and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Genesis 12:3.** God was saying Yes to Abraham. God planned that through Abraham’s offspring the Messiah would be born. Through Jesus, Son of God and son of Mary, all the people on earth could be saved. God didn’t give up on Abraham, nor did he give up on his descendants. He was still saying Yes to salvation, making a way to bring redemption to this world, not willing that any should perish.

We see God’s yes when he gave his people the law through Moses. “This is how you can have your sins forgiven. This is how you can come into my presence and have relationship with me. Keep my law, my commandments. I want you to be with me.” God said Yes to his people, but they refused to obey. He provided for them in the wilderness but they grumbled and complained. God kept saying yes, keeping his promises, but they kept saying “No.”

Abraham’s descendants, the children of Israel, certainly didn’t make it easy for God to keep saying Yes to redemption’s plan, yes to saving them and rescuing them. Over and over they sinned and rebelled. Over and over God judged them, disciplined them, removed his hand of protection and allowed them to be conquered, carried off into exile, scattered among the nations, trying to wake them up and bring them to repentance. In spite of their stubbornness, their idolatry and spiritual adultery, God told them he would not reject them forever. God still chose to have mercy. Still he would say Yes to his people and bring them back to himself and back to the land of Israel. God’s yes to the people was in the form of a promised Redeemer, a Savior, one to rule on the throne of David forever. **“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his**

roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him...” Isaiah 11:1 A branch will grow from what appeared to be a dead, forgotten stump. God’s promise of redemption, God’s promise of a Redeemer and Savior, the One on whom the Spirit will rest, the Anointed One, we hear God’s yes in every promise, in every prophecy. He will not reject his people, he will not forsake us, he is not willing that any should perish.

We hear his yes again in the words of Isaiah, **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”** Isaiah 7:14 **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.”** Isaiah 9:6

God didn’t give up on his people, in spite of rebellion and sin. God kept on saying “Yes!” and we hear him say it again as he sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth to Mary. It’s as though he says, “It’s time to send the Redeemer to the world. We’ve been moving toward this moment, this day, since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden and now it’s time to put redemption’s plan into full swing. Gabriel, I’m saying Yes. Now we need Mary and Joseph’s yes.”

We hear God’s yes in the words of Jesus. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.”** John 3:16-17

God said Yes and gave his one and only Son to save the world through him. What a price was included in that Yes! “Yes, I will provide salvation for this rebellious and sinful world and yes, in order to do that, I will give my one and only Son as a sacrifice to atone for their sins.” What a sacrifice, what love and what a price.

But there is another yes in all this. Jesus also said yes. I don’t know how it all works, how the interaction occurs within the eternal union of the three in one Godhead, but I know Father, Son and Spirit were together involved and in agreement as they said yes to redemption’s plan. Jesus said yes to becoming flesh and making his dwelling among us. Jesus said yes to emptying himself, laying aside his rights and privileges as God the Son to become a fetus in the womb of the virgin Mary. The apostle Paul explained it like this. **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with**

God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!” Philippians 2:5-8

It wasn't like Jesus failed to read the fine print. He knew what he was agreeing to, laying aside his might and power to become in very nature a servant. Brother McQueen used to say “Jesus left the ivory palaces of heaven and came to this sin cursed and benighted world” for us. Theologians use the word *kenosis*. It means emptying oneself. Jesus said yes to emptying himself and becoming one of us, dwelling among us as a servant. Jesus said yes to submitting himself to his parents, to Mary and Joseph as an obedient child, to learn and grow in wisdom and stature.

Jesus said yes to being the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus said yes to being the spiritual guide who came to seek and to save the lost and show us the way home, the way back to God. He came seeking, saying yes to being the shepherd who leaves the 99 and goes off to find the one lost lamb.

Jesus said yes to being the physician who came to the sick and broken and hopeless in order to touch us, heal us, to make us whole. He said it was the sick who needed a physician, so he didn't hesitate to come to all who needed him. His yes was universal, regardless of race or creed or color, whether they had the means or resource to pay. The prophet spoke for Jesus when he said, **“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!” Isaiah 55:1** Jesus said “Yes” to redemption's plan and he came to us, to the thirsty, hungry, those without money and resources, he came to us!

Jesus said yes to being the kinsman redeemer who would willingly offer the full price to ransom all who were held captive and in bondage to Satan and sin. He said yes to paying the price of redemption with his own life, with his own blood. He became the sacrifice that atoned for our sins. He said yes to becoming the substitute that took our place. He bore the consequences of our sin for us, taking our place on the cross, the innocent dying for the guilty. That's what Jesus' “Yes” meant.

Jesus said yes to the will of the father. We see him crying out in the Garden of Gethsemane, **“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done.” Luke 22:42** It was Jesus saying yes to the father, yes to redemption's plan, yes to us being given a way home through his sacrifice, a means to forgiveness and salvation for all of us. Jesus said yes as he committed his spirit into the hands of his father and God said a loud and

resounding Yes as he raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at his right hand in glory and power. The Apostle Paul prays for us that we can comprehend the power of God's yes and Jesus' yes on our behalf. **"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."** Ephesians 1:18-21

Jesus said Yes to the Father's will, came to this world as a baby and we celebrate his birth on this Christmas day. He said Yes and kept saying yes and we have hope and life. Because he said yes, and because Mary and Joseph said yes, we know Jesus as Savior and lord and we are no longer facing judgment but instead, we have found mercy. Paul continues, **"Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."** Ephesians 2:3-10

We are saved by grace, saved because God said Yes and gave his only son, saved because Jesus said yes and became the substitute for us and bore our sins on the cross. Saved by grace! And guess what? God is still saying yes concerning us. **"If God is for us, we can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things."** Romans 8:31-32

I'm thankful for God's "Yes!" Thankful for the greatest gift of all, Jesus. Grateful that God has good things in store for his people. Christmas is about gifts and God's yes is the greatest gift of all! The only appropriate response to his gift of love and life to us is our own Yes to him.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come and we say yes to Him. **(Begin Whitney Houston's Joy to the world.)**

“Lord, we give ourselves to you, completely, without reservation. We withhold nothing from you, no part of our life. We say yes to you, to anything and everything you ask of us. On this Christmas morning, 2022, what else could we say but yes, yes, yes.”

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.