

# “The Feast of Christ’s Nativity in the Flesh”

## Why Orthodox Christians Refer to Christmas this Way

In Orthodox Theology there is what is known as “*The two births of Christ.*” What is meant by this is that our Lord was begotten of the Father, outside of time, without a mother. And He was born in time, from a mother, without a human father (to understand this terminology, note that males “beget” & females “give birth”). These are *the two births of Christ*, viz., (1) His being eternally begotten of His Father and (2) His human birth from His mother. These are touched on in numerous ways in Orthodox Theological Tradition. For example:



A. We recite every week in the **Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith** (what the Latin Church calls the “Creed”), that: (1) He was... “...*begotten of the Father before all ages...*” and (2) “...*came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man...*” These two affirmations refer to the two births of Christ.

B. Our Holy Father among the saints, **Basil the Great** (whose feast is Jan 1<sup>st</sup>), wrote these words concerning the two births of Christ:

*“The actual, first birth of Christ, his actual begetting from all eternity in the bosom of His Father, must be venerated in silence. We should never permit our mind to investigate this mystery. Since time and space did not exist, since no form of expressions had yet been created, since there is not a single eyewitness, nor anyone who can describe this eternal begetting, how can reason form any concept for reflection? How can the tongue give expression to thoughts that cannot be formulated? The Father was, and the Son was begotten! Do not say: ‘when?’ but rather leave that question unasked. Do not ask ‘how?’ for there is no answer! For the word ‘when’ suggests time,*

*and ‘how’ suggests birth in the flesh... [Through His incarnation] God is on earth, He is among men, not in the fire nor amid the sound of trumpets; not in the smoking mountain, or in the darkness, or in the terrible and roaring tempest giving the Law, but manifested in the flesh, the gentle and good One dwells with those He condescends to make his equals! God is in the flesh, not operating from a distance, as did the prophets, but through human nature, one with ours, He seeks to bring back the whole human race to Himself.”* (St. Basil the Great, *On the Incarnation*).

C. This teaching is summed up most profoundly and succinctly in the words we pray in our Orthodox Vespers Service where we sing to the Most Holy Theotokos:

*“O most honorable one, how can we not marvel at your giving birth to God and man? Most pure one, without knowing man, you gave birth in the flesh to the Son without a father, begotten before all ages of the Father without a mother. He underwent no mingling, no change, no division, but preserved the fullness of each nature. Entreat Him, O Lady and Virgin and Mother, to save the souls of those who, in the Orthodox manner, confess thee to be the Theotokos”* (Resurrection Dogmatikon in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tone).

