

Not long ago Fr Alexander reminded us of the idea that, '*we are what we eat.*' We, of course, bring our Nativity Fast to an end today. So it might be said that we, the Orthodox, are not so much what we eat but rather, we are *not* what we *do not* eat.

In the creation story, the first Adam was indeed what he ate. He ate fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and fell, becoming what he ate, a blended creature, both worthy and unworthy. Each of us was a child of the old Adam; sharing his nature, we have all eaten from the same tree.

But in keeping the fast these passed six weeks we have retraced our steps back to paradise, to begin all over again. Did you struggle well? Then give glory to the God of Grace. Did you stumble yet again under the burden? Then stand upright once again and repent.

But now we feast until the eve of Theophany. Why? Because the Second Adam has come today, lifting us up from our fall. For, as St Paul says, the second is not like the first. The first Adam, became what he ate, becoming Death when he chose his own way, rather than eating from the Tree of Life, that is, communion with God his creator. But the Second, the New Adam, offered on earth a life at one with the Father's will, and passing through the first Adam's death, rose again to restore our Life. As we sang earlier: '*Thy nativity of Christ our God hast shone upon the world the light of knowledge.*' [Troparion]

In the Aposticha hymns appointed for Vespers on the Forefeast, there is one that makes plain the meaning of our celebration this day.

*'Let us celebrate, O ye people, the Forefeast of the Nativity of Christ, and raising our minds on high let us go in spirit to Bethlehem. Let us look upon the great mystery in the cave.'* We are not in old Israel yet here, in the midst of the Church, we are of one mind, and in the Holy Spirit we have come to Bethlehem, peering into the cave and aware of a mystery that speaks of our salvation.

The hymn continues, *'For Eden is opened once again, when from a pure Virgin God comes forth, perfect in His divinity as in His manhood.'* Here, the cherubic angel with the fiery sword stands aside, and we can retell the story of Eden, starting our life over once again, when God Himself becomes a new Adam to rescue Adam. Here in the Nativity icon we see the union of heaven and earth, the reintegration of flesh and spirit, the hypostatic union, perfect God and perfect Man in the form of the newborn, the very definition of peace on earth!

Like the Magi in today's gospel, we might ask, *where is He who has been born King of the Jews?* The answer is, here, for the kingdom of God is among *us*, the Church of God. And, coming into this holy house, like them, having come to worship, we fall down likewise, and worship Him. As the Aposticha hymn says, *'Therefore, let us cry: Holy God, Thou Father without beginning: Holy and Mighty, Thou Son made flesh: Holy and Immortal, Thou Spirit the Comforter: Holy Trinity, glory to Thee.'*