

The following is an excerpt of a letter from St. Nikolai Velimirovic in response to a letter he received from a worker named Mitar F. It provides an excellent reflection on the meekness of Christ and why He chose to be born in a cave. Our modern day society has become so materialistic that often the spiritual significance of Christ's Nativity is lost in the midst of all the dazzling lighted Christmas displays, the endless shopping, rich foods and the emphasis upon a humanistic, sentimental parody of what was originally and has always been one of the Twelve Great Spiritual Feasts that the Christian faith celebrates each year.

Why the Savior Was Born in a Cave *By St. Nikolai Velimirovic*

Meekness is the first virtue which Christ recommended to people in His Sermon on the Mount. And by His example, that was the first virtue that He showed, by being born not in a royal palace but in a cave for sheep.

The next very important practical lesson, which the Lord showed the world with his birth in the cave is this: to remove oneself in order to make room for others; to be content only with the most necessary things. As God's Apostle teaches, "And when we have food and clothing, let us be content with this." Is this not a good lesson for today's world in crisis?

The important lesson is also in that a place does not give meaning to a man, but a man to a place. A man is more valuable than anything on earth. Neither do riches and outward glitter increase the value of a man, nor does poverty decrease it. You know what He said about John the Baptist, a man without a home – "What did

you come out to see? A man dressed in fine raiment? Behold, those who wear expensive robes live in pleasures and dwell in royal palaces." King Herod lived in a royal palace and in soft robes but he was not a man, but a fox. Pilate also did, but he was not a man but a Roman wolf. So did the Pharisees, but they were not men but a generation of vipers. And the homeless John was greater than all those in the palaces – no one born of woman was greater than John the Baptist.

Here is one more lesson. The Kingdom of Heaven is more important for a man than anything in the world. One can obtain that kingdom regardless of where he is born and where he lives; in a city, or in the village, or in the desert, or in the cave. The Lord wanted to give a lesson to the world which sought the light only in big cities by showing them that the true light can appear from a lowly cave. This was later proved also by countless cave dwellers, the great spiritual figures and true beacons of light.

In my opinion there is another, not small reason, that Christ was born in a cave. In the Holy Land, four important caves stand until this day. They stand as they were at that time of Christ's coming into the world. One is the stone cave in Bethlehem where He was born. Another is a cave on the mountain of the temptation, where He was tried by Satan. The third is the cave at Golgotha, where He was crucified, where He was buried, and where He resurrected. And the fourth is the cave on the Mount of Olives from which He ascended into the heavens. So, the four most important events from the life of the Savior are connected to four immovable caves. The house where He lived in Nazareth does not exist, nor does the one in Capernaum. Of all the buildings that He visited, not one stands today—the court of Herod, or Pilate's house, or even the Temple of Solomon. Everything

that was built by human hands has been ruined by time. But those four caves, made by God, stand now as they did then, so that no one could doubt that He really was born, that He was tried as a man, that He was crucified for people's sins but that He also resurrected, and that he ascended into the heavens in glory into His eternal motherland where He awaits His righteous ones. The Omniscient One knew the stone heart of man and the doubting reason of man, and this is why He in His wisdom tied those great events to four immovable caves. Had Christ been born in a house in some city or village would that house still be standing and witnessing? Not only the house but the whole city in which Alexander the Great was born does not exist anymore. The city and even the state in which the great Homer was born is unknown. But Christ's holy cave in Bethlehem stands. It stands and testifies.

Know this also: as His body, the home of His soul was not of man but of God the Holy Spirit, so also was the home of His body, the cave of Bethlehem, not made by human hands but by God the Creator and Providence. He created it before He created people on earth and when He created it He pre-determined it for His temporary stay when He would come down to visit the offspring of Adam and Eve. And He also made it to be the permanent witness of his coming to earth.

Do not marvel because God has chosen such poor habitation for himself. What is exalted by man is an abomination before God. The King's palace in Rome was an abomination before God because it truly was a cave of thieves and criminals and of debauchery. But that which is despised and insignificant in the eyes of man, is what God often chooses and exults. This is the method of the all wise one. According to that method He chose the fishermen to be Apostles and the cave to be his cradle.