

NAIVITY SE

SUR LORD



## Center

We hear in Luke Chapter 2 that the child Jesus was laid in a manger, but that does not necessarily mean He was born in a barn. Ancient tradition dating back to the first and second centuries holds that Jesus was born in a cave-like structure used to hold livestock. His birth in a cave foreshadows the cave in which he would be buried and resurrect.



The child Jesus depicted here is also wrapped in traditional Jewish burial cloths. This is to represent the implications of the incarnation. God made Christ who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Cor 5:21). Christ condescended from his state of glory to become one of us, wrapping Himself in the mortal flesh's sin and death.

## Bottom Left

Unlike most icons that feature both Christ and the Virgin Mary, she is not looking at Him. Instead, she is looking at her betrothed, Joseph, interceding for Him.

Joseph is sitting on a rock looking confused and lost. During Advent we may sing "What Child is This?" but Joseph's question was "Whose child is this?!" since he knew he was certainly not the father. The old man Joseph is talking to is meant to represent the Devil, who is filling Joseph's head with all sorts of doubts. Yet, despite all this, Joseph has a halo, which indicates his sanctification from trusting in God.

Sometimes when God shows up in our lives, it raises questions and doubts. God bestows His grace upon us, but then He seems to withdraw a little bit, allowing difficulties to test and deepen our faith. We may wonder why things



## Top and Middle

At the top of the icon is what's called a mandorla. It signifies the presence and the glory of God. It's light streams down from Heaven and comes to rest on the Christ child, which shows His kenotic descendant from Heaven to the earth.

On the left, the three kings are traveling from afar, following the light from this northern star.

Angels appear in the heavens above to tell the good news to the



shepherds (on the right) in the field so that they can see this divine child born in the little town of Bethlehem.

Let the Magi, the Shepherds, and the Angels remind that Christ draws all people to Himself, no matter their station in life. This Advent, let us imitate the angels by helping to bring people to the Christ child, let us imitate the Magi by giving Christ the present of our presence, and let us imitate the shepherds by being open to the call of Christ in every moment of our lives.

## Bottom Right

The women at the bottom right are midwives who display that the Son of God was truly born as a human, and did not merely appear to be human as some early heretics claimed. There is a fountain that they are about to wash the Christ child in because He had, in some sense, an ordinary, messy birth.



## The Ox and the Ass

The ox and the ass are symbols traceable back to ancient nativity icons. Traditionally, the ox symbolized the Jews, for it was a clean, kosher animal that they could eat. It could also be easily trained to pull a plow and assist laborers in various ways.



The ass, on the other hand, is a stubborn and wilder animal. It is unclean and not fit for consumption according to the law of Moses, therefore, it represents the Gentiles who did not have the Law of Moses to guide them away from their pursuit of indecent and immoral behavior.

In Christ, these two seemingly opposed groups came together to form one people. As we read in Ephesians “for he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” (Eph. 2:14)

This Advent season, let us remember that the birth of the Christ child has brought joy to the world and not just to a select few. Let us imitate Christ this season by striving to include all people in the joy of the incarnation.

## The Cave and the Heart

Christ was the mystery hidden throughout all ages – just as his coming in the cave was hidden from most people. But the glory of this mystery is Christ in you. In this way, the cave became an icon of every heart that opens itself to Christ (cf. Col. 1:26-27).

Caves, with all of their mystery and places, are truly a reflection of the dark, us. But like the cave Christ entered become the dwelling place of His ass, we have the clean and unclean good and not so good. We have the things to us. But we also have the

All the distractions in our lives pull of that, we have terrible self- into our hearts, we find that Christ is Imagine Joseph getting up and walking tired of listening to you and your lies.” He and walks to the cave where Christ and the of descending into the heart. Of finding the within our hearts as He once dwelt in a cave near the little town of Bethlehem.



darkness, hidden chambers and secret mysterious heart within each one of on Christmas day, our hearts can majestic glory. Like the ox and in our hearts – the things that are devil whispering doubts or evil Theotokos praying for us.

us outside of our hearts. Because awareness. But when we enter there. But what does that mean? away from the devil, saying, “I’m prays to God to help him; he gets up Mother of God are. That is the beginning mystery hidden from all eternity, dwelling