



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

The Nativity of our Lord 2017

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy

Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council, Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Sisterhood, Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools, Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved,

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

The joy of the incarnation of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ as the first steps towards the salvation of all humankind reverberates throughout the world today. With His incarnation, the words *“God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us”* take on a more profound meaning as we come face to face with He who condescended for our salvation voluntarily. This event had been foretold by the prophets such as Isaiah who said, *“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given”* (Isaiah 9:6). With the coming of Christ, we are given renewed hope in the salvation of all humanity since Christ came to unify humanity with Himself. This unity, however, can only come about through our free will.

From the first days when Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, they were given the gift of free will which is what separates all of humanity from the rest of creation. Although humanity was created in order to bring all of creation into union with God, humanity decided to exercise its freedom by saying “no” to God, thus causing the fall. Even though God wants us to be in union with Him, He respects our freedom to choose otherwise. As a result, humanity walked in darkness until the coming of the Lord as was prophesied by Isaiah when he said, *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light”* (Isaiah 9:2). Thus, God the Father sent His Son so that Christ could show us the way in which we may once again be reoriented towards the Father utilizing our own free will. Consequently, we celebrate today not just the birth of Christ who took on flesh, but we also recall that, through Christ’s birth, He has reoriented our path so that we may freely respond “yes” to God.

However joyful today’s celebration may be we must also recognize other aspects concerning the mystery of Christ’s incarnation. Namely, we must acknowledge that Christ taking on flesh and subsequently sacrificing Himself for the sake of humanity through His

crucifixion as well as the glory of His resurrection are events intimately related to His birth. His incarnation allowed Him to experience all of the painful elements of the human condition, therefore, He who willingly became man and became like us in every way except sin, had to experience these painful realities. The magnificence and yet the mystery of the incarnation necessitates that, to be fully human, one must condescend to experience human pain and frailty. This condescension begins in the cave in which Christ was born, and it is completed on Great Friday as Christ lay in the grave.

As we contemplate this complex mystery, let us also never forget the simplicity of Christ's birth, His life of humility, and His central message throughout His earthy ministry when He says, *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life"* (John 8:12). It is my sincerest hope and prayer that each one of us throws off the shadow of darkness by following the Light of Christ which has been given to us to illumine our path to Him. Praying that our Incarnate Lord blesses you and your families as we celebrate His Blessed Nativity today, I remain

With Paternal Love in the New-Born King and God,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The word "Metropolitan" is written in a larger, more prominent script, while "Evangelos" is written in a smaller, more delicate script. The signature is centered on the page.

† E V A N G E L O S
Metropolitan of New Jersey