



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Nativity of Our Lord 2018

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

Christ is Born, Glorify Him!

My Beloved in the Lord,

In celebrating the birth of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ we are given an incredible gift. It is a gift that cannot be purchased, it cannot be reciprocated, it cannot be rejected, it cannot be returned, and value of which cannot be quantified. The greatest gift of the Nativity of our Lord, of Christmas, if you will, is the gift of the Incarnation. The birth of Christ marks a historical event never seen before in the history of the world. *"God became man so that man might become God"* says St. Athanasios (PG 25, 192B). By this he means that the incarnation of Christ gave us the opportunity to join ourselves to Him in unity and live as a part of the Body of Christ.

What is significant and telling about the Incarnation is not just the fact that we can ascend in unity with Christ, but that as a prerequisite, He had to first condescend to our level as humans. Here we have the God of all Creation by his own will and volition becoming like you and me *in all ways except sin*. He willingly took on human flesh with all of its deficiencies such as the unavoidability of aging, the reality of feeling pain, the susceptibility of getting sick, the capacity to cry, and the inevitability of dying. We see from the Gospel readings of today and tomorrow that immediately after Christ was born He was hunted by King Herod who had ordered the slaughter of all male children two years old and under. Such was His love for humanity that He became human while not compromising His divinity and while remaining in personal communion with the Father and the Spirit.

His Incarnation and birth demonstrate for us His self-sacrificial love. It is a love that has no borders, no limitations, and no end. It is this same love He expressed for us with the Father and the Spirit in unison that we too must emulate. It is a love that calls for each and every one

of us to offer of ourselves in self-sacrifice for others regardless of whether we like them or not, regardless of their social status, their race, their gender, their age, their nationality, or their beliefs. We are called to express self-sacrificial love unconditionally because anything less than that is not love at all.

My beloved children in the Lord, let us behold the mystery of our Lord's Incarnation and enshrine His love and the meaning of His condescension in our hearts. Furthermore, let us all open our hearts wider to every person so that we may follow our Lord's example in expressing self-sacrificial love. Let us, as individuals and as communities, endeavor to use the freedom God has given us to labor not for ourselves, but for each other so that we may confront the pressing problems of our times caused by the abuse of this very freedom; problems such as violence, war, moral laxity, the violation of human rights, the deprivation of religious freedom, disinformation, the uneven distribution of goods necessary for existence, hunger, economic disparity, the displacement of populations, the ecological crisis, and the other problems plaguing our weary world.

It is my sincerest hope and prayer that through your actions and through your prayers we will endeavor to give glory to God by taking care of our neighbors and the Creation with which we were blessed. May Christ who said, *"I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life"* (Jn. 8:12) show each of you the path of salvation which began for us on this very day over two thousand years ago with our Lord's birth. Praying that you and your families are granted all of the Lord's Heavenly blessings as we celebrate this Christmas day, I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

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

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