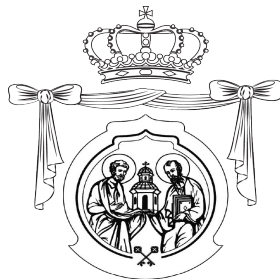


His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ 2020

Beloved Hierarchs, Clergy, Brothers and Sisters,

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

I greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who was incarnate for our salvation.

This year has been like no other in our lifetime as even now the whole world is suffering under the effects of the COVID-19 coronavirus. Our daily schedules, work and school routines, and parish traditions have been altered causing no shortage of angst, even as we seek to remain faithful as Orthodox Christians in this time of uncertainty. Of course, we are not the first generation to encounter the destabilizing effects of plague, famine, economic hardship or war. At the time of the birth of Christ, the Jewish people endured the presence of the occupying forces of Rome, attempted revolutions, self-serving and wicked Kings, like Herod the Great, and the uncertainty of what the future would bring for the next generations. In fact, shortly after the Nativity of our Lord, we remember the 14,000 infants (Holy Innocents) slain by Herod in Bethlehem (Dec. 29). What a grief for those families and the Jewish people as a whole. While not the same in severity, we too grieve the death of those who have died because of this coronavirus pandemic, and the diminished health of those who have suffered greatly with it. Many in our parishes, among the clergy and even Orthodox hierarchs have been afflicted and some have fallen asleep due to the coronavirus. May their memory be eternal!

How then do we find joy in a year of travail and darkness? The Holy Prophet Esaias (Isaiah) answers, *“A people who walk in darkness, behold a great light; and you who dwell in the country of the shadow of death, upon you a light will shine.”* (Isaiah 9:1) This Light is none other than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ whose Nativity we celebrate! *“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. His name will be called the Angel of Great Counsel, for I shall bring peace upon the rulers, peace and health by Him. Great shall be His government, and of His peace there is no end. His peace shall be upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order and establish it with righteousness and judgment, from that time forward and unto ages of ages. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this.”* (Isaiah 9:5-6)

St. Cyril of Alexandria, in his commentary on Isaiah writes, “The only-begotten Word of God became man for us not for his own sake but that he might renew human nature to what it was at the beginning.” This year of travail has highlighted our own need of this divine renewal, not simply for the sake of improved physical health, but for the renewal of our souls to become like the True Man, the incarnate Son of God.

“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)

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St. John of Kronstadt, in his Sermon on the Nativity of Jesus Christ, writes, “Human nature is deified for the sake of the boundless compassion of the Son of God; and its sins are purified; the defiled are sanctified. The ailing are healed. Upon those in dishonor are boundless honor and glory bestowed. Those in darkness are enlightened by the Divine light of grace and reason.” This is our hope, this is our joy!

Let me conclude with St. John’s own conclusion from his homily,

“What, then, O, brethren, is required of us in order that we might avail ourselves of all the grace brought unto us from on high by the coming to earth of the Son of God? What is necessary, first of all, is faith in the Son of God, in the Gospel as the salvation-bestowing heavenly teaching; a true repentance of sins and the correction of life and of heart; communion in prayer and in the mysteries [sacraments]; the knowledge and fulfillment of Christ’s commandments. Also necessary are the virtues: Christian humility, almsgiving, continence, purity and chastity, simplicity and goodness of heart.

Let us, then, O brothers and sisters, bring these virtues as a gift to the One Who was born for the sake of our salvation – let us bring them in place of the gold, frankincense and myrrh which the Magi brought Him, as to One Who is King, God, and Man, come to die for us. This, from us, shall be the most-pleasing form of sacrifice to God and to the Infant Jesus Christ.”

May our lives increasingly overflow with joy as we receive, he who was born in a cave and lay in a manger for our salvation, Christ our true God.

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath given rise to the light of knowledge in the world; for they that worshipped the stars did learn therefrom to worship Thee, O Sun of Justice, and to know that from the east of the Highest Thou didst come. O Lord, glory to Thee.

Apolytikion of the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Thomas".

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)
Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

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