



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS ^{OF} NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Nativity of Our Lord 2019

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy

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 Communities of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

At this very hour throughout the world, multitudes of Christians are celebrating the feast of the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ. The birth of our Lord is not something at which we look merely through the lens of history. His birth is not just a fact to be stated neither is the recounting of his birth just a story to be memorized. Above all this, His birth constitutes a love to be felt in our hearts, an inexplicable emotion to fill our entire being, and a Gospel to be shared with every person with whom we come in contact.

Even in the midst of the peace, love, and hope we experience in the feast of the Nativity, the story of Christ's birth entails many trials and sorrows as well. A young virgin mother, pregnant with child, must travel a long distance with her betrothed in order to partake in a census. When they arrive, the mother and her husband have no place to stay and resort to residing in a cave at the time she must give birth. Immediately after the birth of our Lord, they are forced to flee to Egypt in order to escape the clutches of King Herod who sought to kill Christ. Thousands of infant boys are slaughtered by Herod in an attempt to exterminate Christ. Christ and his parents endured a prolonged exile in Egypt, living as refugees away from their home in fear for their lives.

The story of Christmas is a story of how our Lord, in his humility, endured trials and dangers even as a baby. Yet he condescended to endure these trials along with His mother, Mary, and His earthly father, Joseph, so that He might grant us eternal life. *What God is so great as our God* that He would endure such sacrifices for us even from His birth? *What God is so great as our God* that He would take on flesh not to revel in glory on earth, but to show us the way of humility and the path to His Kingdom? *What God is so great as our God* that He would endure an entire earthly ministry knowing that He must ultimately die at the hands of His servants? To this there is only one answer, *"God is the Lord and has revealed Himself to us."* The very Christ who

we witness being born today in utter humility is our God. Instead of a palace, there was a cave. Instead of a throng of adoring people heralding His birth, there were three wise men from the east and a multitude of animals. Instead of servants attending His every whim, there were heavenly hosts surrounding Him. Instead of being welcomed in His own land, He fled with His family into a strange place.

My Beloved in the Lord, let us learn from the humility of our Lord. As the world gathers today and customarily opens gifts, let us never forget the reason we give gifts; so that we may celebrate the greatest gift which Christ has granted us – eternal life. Let us put into action the teachings Christ Himself taught us and thereby feed the poor, clothe the hungry, and defend the marginalized. In this manner and by reflecting on the humility of our Lord’s Nativity story, we can truly celebrate His birth. Praying that God grants each of you and your families a blessed feast of the Nativity of our Lord, I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings in Our New-Born King,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written over a background of a grid of small, faint text that reads "Signature.doc" and "2/18/18".

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