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Encyclical on the Feast of Christmas

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Τί σοι προσενέγκομεν Χριστέ, ὅτι ὤφθης ἐπὶ γῆς ὡς ἄνθρωπος δι' ἡμᾶς; (Στιχηρόν Ἰδιόμελον)

What shall we offer You, O Christ, You Who have appeared on earth as human for our sake? (Special Sticheron)

To the Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America,

Beloved Brethren in the Lord,

In this darkest time of the year, we have arrived at the turn of time, when the brightest Star that ever shone arises in our hearts to guide us to the Cave in the City of David. We have all faced so very much this past year, and the little Child of Bethlehem calls to each of us to come unto Him and witness His vulnerability for our sake. He descended from Heaven to be incarnate within the womb of a young Virgin, and entrusted Himself to an old man whose mind was full of doubts. We too, have our innocence and our doubts, just like Mary and Joseph. But as they were faithful to the words of the Angel, God still speaks to us and tells us that He is our God, and His mercy endures forever.



This Christmas, one that is full of challenges and difficulties, of despair and even loss, let us remember Mary and Joseph and their journey to Bethlehem of Judea. They went to be obedient to the law of Caesar, but they witnessed the birth of Grace and Truth (John 1:14). They were deprived of shelter, but they made a home with the creatures of the earth and entertained the Magi of the East. They saw wonder in the eyes of the Shepherds and heard the echoes of the songs of Angels. There was a time of gifts in the midst of humble paucity.

As we arrive at the Cave and behold the One Who condescended to be laid in a Manger, let us contemplate our own journey of faith, and this time of the gifts that we may bring. The hymn above continues: "Each of Your creations that You fashioned offers thanks to You: the Angels, their hymn; the heavens, a Star; the Shepherds, their wonder; the Magi, their gifts; the earth, the Cave; the desert, the Manger; and we offer the Virgin Mother. O God before all ages, have mercy upon us!"

My Beloved Christians, even in the midst of this pandemic, we can offer ourselves to God with the same love and devotion that the Ever-Virgin Mary offered herself. When we offer Her in praise, we are in fact offering ourselves, because we are of the same flesh and bone as she, full human beings that are called to bring forth God in the world. As you celebrate this Christmas of 2020, I pray the Lord will shine in your hearts as did the Star in the sky, and guide you to a blessed and prosperous New Year.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

† ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America