

*The Lord's Nativity 2020 A.D*

## **FESTAL MESSAGE**

**BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF ATHENS & ALL GREECE**

**kyr. STEPHANOS**

**TO THE ENTIRE FLOCK OF CHRIST OF  
THE GENUINE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF GREECE**

*"Great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh"*

(1 Tim.3:16)

Dear children in Christ.

The ineffable mercy and the unfathomable philanthropy of the almighty God, allows us to celebrate also this year the metropolis of the ecclesial feasts, that is, the holy Nativity of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The world-saving Birth of the Theanthropos/God-man is: unique and extraordinary but also immense and amazing. It is, as St. John of Damascus wisely notes, the *"one new thing under the sun"*. (Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith Bk. 3.1)

It is the revelation of the *"the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations"* (cf. Col.1:26). It is the fulfilment of the so-called "protoevangelium/first gospel," which is the prediction made by God Himself after the fall of the first-created humans, in which the One would come from *"the seed of the woman"* (cf. Gen.3:15) who will crush the head of the serpent - devil.

It is the realization of all the prophesies, particularly the memorable one by the emphatic Prophet Isaiah: *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Immanuel"* (Is.7:14).

It is the supernatural condescension of the most-high God and His communion with the nature of estranged man in order that the lost and deadened man can be resurrected and come to the knowledge of God and become a participant of Divine Glory and the eternal kingdom.

St. John Chrysostom, being awestruck before the ineffable mystery of the birth of Christ, observes: *"What can I say? What can I utter? For the wonder stuns me: the Ancient of Days became a child. He who is seated upon a high throne and carried aloft is placed in a manger And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infants bands, as He desires it to be"* (2nd Homily on the Nativity, EPE, vol. 35, p. 472.)

Indeed, every Christian soul is astonished and admires the inexpressible self-emptying of our great God; His inexplicable love for mankind; His indescribable gift toward the human race.

That is why The Church celebrates with jubilant chanting: *"Be glad o Jerusalem and celebrate all ye who love Zion. Today Adam's ancient bond of condemnation has been loosened. Paradise has been opened to us, the serpent has been destroyed"* (Doxastikon of the aposticha chanted during Nativity vespers)

Truly, the celebration of the globally joyful event of our Lord's Nativity is an occasion for happiness and delight.

No matter what the difficulties in the current global situation, nor the uncertainty which the future may hold as a consequence of the general global apostasy from God; The Church celebrates the world-saving Birth of the Theanthropos/God-man, the only Savior, and will continue to do so until the end of the ages. No one or anything will succeed to erase The Church or put an end to the festal commemoration of the Lord! The *"little flock"* (Lk. 12:32) of Christ will always endure!

Let the various imitators of Herod be uneasy, just like back then, when he first persecuted the Lord during His enhumaned [ἐνσάρκου] presence as a little baby.

Every kind of intrigue and rationalized excuse may be targeted against The Church from those who do *"not receive the things of the Spirit of God"* (cf. 1 Cor.2:14). In fact, they *"kick against the goads"* (cf. Acts 26:14). They are ignorant of the fact that the Lord Jesus is the One who was seen in former times as the stone which was *"cut out of the mountain without hands, that ground to powder the clay, the iron, the copper, the silver, and the gold"* (cf.

Dan.2:45). He is the One who defeated and abolished all the super-powers throughout history, meanwhile, His Kingdom *"has no end"*.

Therefore, dear children in Christ, let us be brave before every difficulty and temptation, trusting in the omnipotence, providence and wisdom of the Lord.

Let us keep our spirit of faith on high, being *"always ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you"* (1 Pe.3:15), in other words, concerning our Orthodoxy and Sacred Tradition in its entirety-particularly its liturgical life which is our priceless treasure. A treasure that our Lord bequeathed us and designated as His stewards.

Hence, dear children in Christ, let us celebrate the great feast of Christmas with every subjugation to the Divine Will, with humility of heart and jubilation of our spirit.

The current circumstances afford us (the Christians of the latter times) with the opportunity to imitate to the best of our abilities, those blessed faithful of the early Christian era. Even though they were persecuted by the powerful pagans and were outcast by society, however they did not cease worshiping the Lord in Ecclesial gatherings, that is, in congregations, with commonality -wherever they could- by celebrating the divine liturgy and partaking of the Lord's flesh and blood *"in every place of the Lord's dominion"* (cf. Ps.102:22)

Therefore, O children of light of The Church, be brave and persevere!

*"O God is with us. Know this, O peoples, and be defeated. Give ear, all you to the very ends of the earth. Be defeated although you are strong, for even if you should be strong again, you will be defeated again. Then too, whatever counsel you take, the Lord will scatter it abroad"* (Is.8:8-10)

May the Grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is born, and the blessings of my lowliness be always with you.

Your fervent intercessor to the Lord.

†THE ARCHBISHOP  
OF ATHENS  
STEPHANOS