

# Archepiscopal Encyclical on the Feast of Christmas



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Unto the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Pious Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils, Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Members of Leadership 100, the Day and Afternoon Schools, Philoptochos Societies, Youth, Greek Orthodox Organizations, and entirety of the Christ-loving Plenitude of the Sacred Archdiocese of America:

And the [star] led the Magi to You, who worshipped You in faith; have mercy upon them and upon us.

(Troparion, Plagal of the Second Mode)

Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ,

This Christmas, let us manifest a special joy and appreciation that even secular society acknowledges the Birth of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is often difficult to keep the Feast of the Nativity as pure as we would like to, with the seemingly endless commercialization that surrounds it. Nevertheless, even with all the tinsel and sparkle, the Name of the Lord is spread abroad by the world's imperfect regard for Christmas. We can agree with Saint Paul who says: Christ is preached! More in every way, whether by pretext or by truth. And at this, I rejoice! And I shall rejoice more! (Philippians 1:18). We should also share in the same joy, because as inadequate as secular and commercial observances of Christmas may be, at least people are exposed to the name and narrative of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Magi (from whence the word “magician comes), who were led to worship the Newborn Babe of Bethlehem by a Star, were astrologers watching the heavens for signs and wonders. They were not Jewish, but rather Persian, likely Zoroastrians, an ancient religion founded by Zoroaster (Greek: Ζωροάστρης), six centuries before the Birth of our Savior. They found their way to Bethlehem by following an exceptional Star that had arisen in the western night sky — a Star that had been prophesied in ways we do not fully understand. Their path to Christ may not have followed the Hebrew Prophets, but it still led them to Him.

There are so many in this world — Christian and non-Christian alike — whose connection to the Lord comes only through the Nativity and the many cultural traditions that have arisen around it. And perhaps, one day, like the Magi, a spiritual Star will arise in their hearts and lead them to the continuing Bethlehem, (which means the House of Bread), that is our Holy Orthodox Church.

This Christmas Season let us take joy and not begrudge the journey of others. Let us be willing to find an understanding and even an admiration for all those who — like the Magi — observe with some degree of faith and recognition the Birth of our Savior. For He was born in a cave and laid in a manger for the sake of every human being, and indeed, for all creation.

Χριστὸς Γεννᾶται! Δοξάσατε! Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

A handwritten signature in Greek script, reading "Το Ἀμερικῆς Ἐπισκοπος" (The Archbishop of America).

† ELPIDOPHOROS

Archbishop of America

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Video: Fr. Soterios Michalatos/Orthodox Observer.

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