22/12/2025

Patriarchal Encyclical for Christmas 2025



+ B A R T H O L O M E W

By God’s Mercy Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

to All the Plenitude of the Church

Grace, Mercy and Peace from the Savior Christ Born in Bethlehem

Most honorable Brother Hierarchs,

Beloved children in the Lord,

Having once again been found worthy of reaching the great feast of the Nativity in the flesh of the Son and Word of God, we glorify the “inexpressible and incomprehensible condescension” of the Savior of the human race and Redeemer of all creation from corruption, even as we proclaim with the angels “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill to all people.” [1]

Christ was revealed as “Emmanuel,”[2] as “God with us” and “for us”, as God

beside each of us and “closer to us than ourselves.”[3] The pre-eternal Word of God, who is “consubstantial with the Father,” as formulated in doctrine by the First Ecumenical Council, whose 1700th anniversary was appropriately celebrated by the Christian world over this year, “becomes like His own creature,” being incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary “in order to render human beings into gods.”

The Apolytikion (Dismissal Hymn) for Christmas declares that the Nativity of Christ “has shone to the world the Light of knowledge” and revealed “the transcendent and universal meaning” of life and history, namely the truth that only the Christian faith can fully satisfy the deeper pursuit of the mind and thirst of the heart, that “salvation is found in no one else” but Christ. Thenceforth, the “knowledge” that “puffs up”[5] is being judged by the words of the Lord, that “You will come to know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.”[6]

The suprarational event of the Incarnation is experienced and repeated spiritually in the life of the faithful, who love the epiphany of the Savior Christ. As St. Maximus the Confessor writes: “The Word of God was once born in the flesh, but desires always to be born in the spirit out of love for those who desire it.”[7] In this sense, the Feast of the Nativity, of the divine Incarnation and the deification of humankind by grace, does not direct us to an event of the past, but guides us to the “future city,”[8] to the heavenly kingdom of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In a world, where the echo of war and noise of weapons prevail, the angelic “peace in the world” is resounded and the Lord’s voice blesses “the peacemakers” while His Holy Church prays during the Divine Liturgy “for the peace from above” and “for the peace of the whole world.” Genuine faith in the living God strengthens our struggle for peace and righteousness, even when we are faced with humanly insurmountable impediments. As the Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church—whose tenth anniversary we shall celebrate next year—inspiringly states: “the oil of religious experience must be used to heal wounds and not to rekindle the fire of military conflicts.”[9]

The Gospel of peace especially concerns us Christians. We consider it impermissible to remain indifferent before the fragmentation of Christendom, particularly when this attitude is accompanied by fundamentalism and explicit rejection of inter-Christian dialogue that ultimately aims at transcending division and achieving unity. The obligation of striving for Christian unity is non-negotiable. The responsibility to continue the efforts of the pioneers of the Ecumenical Movement along with the justification of their vision and labor rest on the younger generation of Christians.

We belong to Christ, who is “our peace”[10] and “the fulfilment of joy” in our life, the “goodwill” that springs from the conviction that “the truth has arrived” and “the shadow has passed,” that love is stronger than hatred and life stronger than death, that evil does not have the final word in the life of the world, which is directed by Christ, who is “the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.”[11] This faith must shine and be revealed in the way we honor Christmas and the other feasts of the Church. The joyous celebration of the faithful should bear witness to the transformative power of our faith in Christ. It should be a time of goodwill and spiritual delight, the experience of that ineffable “great joy”[12] that is “synonymous with the Gospel.”

Most honorable Brothers and beloved children,

In 2026, the Holy Great Church of Christ will honor the completion of 1400 years since August 7, 626, when the Akathist Hymn was chanted “upstanding” during the Sacred Vigil in the Church of Panagia Vlachernae, as an expression of gratitude to the All-Holy Mother of God, for the safeguarding of the City of Constantinople from the attack of hostile forces. On the occasion of this historic milestone, the 2026 Yearbook of the Ecumenical Patriarchate will be dedicated to the commemoration of this important event for our tradition and identity, which are inseparably and profoundly associated with the honor reserved for our ever-blessed and most pure Mother of God, the defender and protector of our people.

In this spirit, as we bow before Mary who holds the infant Jesus in her arms, and as we worship the Divine Word who assumed our form, we wish upon all of you a blessed Holy Twelvetide, and a fruitful in good deeds and filled with divine gifts new year of the Lord’s favor, to Whom belong all glory, honor and worship, now and always, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Christmas 2025

+Bartholomew of Constantinople

Your fervent supplicant of all before God

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1. Lk 2.14.

2. Mt. 1.23.

3. Nicholas Cabasilas, On the Life in Christ, VI, PG 150. 660.

4. Acts 4.12.

5. Cf. 1 Cor. 8.1.

6. Jn 8.32.

7. Various Texts on Theology and the Divine Economy X, 8, PG 90.1181.

8. Heb. 13.14.

9. Paragraph 4.

10. Eph. 2.14.

11. Heb. 13.8.

12. Cf. Lk 2.10.

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