

Archiepiscopal Christmas 2019 Encyclical



December 25, 2019

The Nativity of Christ

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 brothers and sisters in Christ,

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

We rejoice in the Lord on this blessed Feast of the Nativity, for we proclaim in the hymns of the feast, "Heaven and earth are united today, for Christ is born!" (Great Compline) In a divine and wondrous act of His abundant grace, God has bowed the heavens until they touched the earth. All creation rejoices, for the love of the Creator has been revealed. The gates of Paradise have been reopened, and God's plan for our salvation is made known. The manger has become the throne of the Cherubim, for our God has clothed Himself in created flesh.

Throughout all the world, Orthodox Christians proclaim this truth through our worship. We continue to share that through the Holy Nativity, the Word is made manifest and dwells among us. God has spoken to us through a Son, whom He

appointed the heir of all things, through whom He also created the world. (Hebrews 1:2) Today, He has come for our salvation. Christ has entered our humanity. The glorious Light of heaven now shines upon the earth, illuminating the hearts and minds of all who receive Him.

As we gather to offer our praise and thanksgiving to God, heaven and earth continue to be united. They are united just as the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds with the good news of the birth of Christ. The heavens were opened, and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:13-14) Today, heaven and earth are united, just as the wise men from the East saw His star as a sign of the birth of the King of the Jews and came to worship Him.

Today, our world needs the light of the birth of Christ to shine in the darkness. Our world needs to see that in Christ heaven and earth are united, offering to all the grace of God, salvation, and the true nature of our being and purpose. His glorious birth unites heaven and earth by restoring our communion with God, overcoming the alienation caused by sin; and this divine revelation shows us the way to be transformed in the image and likeness of God. By being born in the flesh, Christ reveals the path to holiness, to the unification of heaven and earth within each one of us.

On this blessed and sacred day, may we rejoice together in the presence of Christ our Lord, who through His love for us was born of the Virgin Mary and is now crowned with glory and honor. I also ask that on this day and those that follow into a new year, that each of you commit to offering through your lives a witness of the unification of heaven and earth. Christ is born! We are called to glorify Him in all that we do. We must be like the shepherds who, after seeing Christ, returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen. (Luke 2:20) On this glorious Feast may we be inspired in seeing that heaven and earth are united, and may we go out and give Glory to God in the Highest and share the wondrous news of His birth for our salvation!

With paternal love in Christ,

† Ὁ Ἀμερικῆς Ἐπιτοποφορος

† ELPIDOPHOROS

Archbishop of America