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His Eminence Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey issues his Encyclical on the Feast of the Annunciation 2020



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Feast of the Annunciation 2020

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council, Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Sisterhood, Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools, Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Communities of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

Today we celebrate not only Gabriel's announcement to the Theotokos that she is to bear a son, but we celebrate the very initiation of our salvation since she is to bear our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ. God did not force the Theotokos to do this, but He asked her and she willingly accepted to be the mother of our Lord. The selflessness she exhibited is something we should emulate in our lives as we strive daily to "commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God". When she said the words, "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord, be it unto me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), she was freely offering her entire being to God. As Orthodox Christians, we are also called upon to utilize our freedom in order to fulfill the teachings our Lord has taught us. We are called upon not to suppress our free will, but to transform our free will for the better by choosing to not only preach the Gospel, but to live the Gospel.

It is also by no sheer happenstance that this day coincides with another memorable day in our history as Orthodox Christians. Today we also celebrate the independence of Greece from the yoke of the Ottoman Turks. The Annunciation and the struggle for Greek independence are indelibly connected to one another as the former initiated freedom for humanity and the latter initiated freedom for a nation. Our Greek forefathers were guided by the Hand of God to throw off the bondage of the oppressors when they began their struggle for independence by receiving the blessings of Bishop Germanos at Agia Lavra. They were guarded and guided by the Panagia who blessed them with protection as they declared independence almost two-hundred years ago on March

25th, 1821.

Thus, the Theotokos becomes for us a shining example of obedience, piety, and compassion. She accepted the responsibility of bringing the incarnate Word of God into the world, she opened to us the gates of Paradise through her childbearing, and she empathizes with us in our struggles as she herself endured the anguish of seeing her own son crucified for the life of the world. This enables us to not only see her as the Mother of God, but to call her our mother as well. It allows us to even say, “Most Holy Theotokos, save us” since, as the Mother of God, she extends the salvation of Christ to us through her childbearing.

As we reflect on the feast of the Annunciation and praise God for the spiritual freedom it offers us, let us not forgot those who are still spiritually and politically oppressed. Let us not forget our Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, which continues to have its religious freedoms denied. Let us not forget about the countless people worldwide especially in the Middle East who are being martyred daily for believing in Christ. Let us not forget the personal freedoms of the Cypriot people who are still seeking justice for the atrocities committed against them since the 1970’s. May our own freedom, spiritual and otherwise, serve to embolden them in their struggles and may we utilize our own freedom to advocate on their behalf and on behalf of all the oppressed throughout the world.

Praying that the Theotokos, who willingly contained the uncontainable in her womb and who was the initiator of our freedom, intercede before her Son and her God for our salvation, I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

† E V A N G E L O S

Metropolitan of New Jersey