

## **Encyclical by His Eminence Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden for the Nativity of Christ 2020**



Honorable Ambassadors and Consuls,

Very Reverend Archimandrites, Reverend Presbyters and Deacons,  
Members and friends of the Holy Metropolis of Sweden and All Scandinavia,

Dearly Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Nativity of Christ gives meaning to the novel good tidings ushered in by the Gospel. Christ is something absolutely new – “the beginning of a new movement, an ever-moving repose and a stationary eternal movement,” according to St. Maximus the Confessor.

When St. Cyril of Alexandria was asked why the Lord took on flesh during the final days, he replied: “Since he was going to intervene in human affairs to eradicate wickedness, he had to wait for wickedness, which was rooted in the deeds of the

enemy, to fully blossom, and that is when he struck the root with the ax, as the Gospel says.”

The embracing of the culture of the incarnation provides such a cure. It is a culture/vehicle that is woven from the yarn of kenosis (the act of self-emptying) and taking-on of flesh; i.e. the components of the incarnation.

Recently, we have all become witnesses to a peculiar attack that relies upon the force of might, the force of authority, the force of emotions and symbols, the instrumentalization of the sacrament of Holy Communion, bullying, and fake news.

These are conditions that restrict creativeness and in doing so oppose humanity; they reveal the “face of the beast,” as well as “the fear that we may become accustomed to it.” The composer Manos Hadjidakis notes that “ever since Frankenstein has begun to appear as a decoration in young people’s rooms, the world is heading toward its negation with mathematical certainty. Because it’s not that it has ceased to be afraid, but rather, that it has gotten used to being afraid.”

Hadjidakis goes on to say “let us stand up against the ugliness of our era.” The time to act is now! Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew notes in his encyclical that “Today, the proper Christian celebration of Christmas is an act of resistance to the secularization of life and to the dilution or demise of the sense of mystery.”

From this Christmas henceforth, let us stand up to those who view philanthropy, dialogue, the embrace of the downtrodden and marginalized people of this world, sociability, activeness, interaction with things and people different from ourselves as a novelty and sin. Let us experience the mystery that allows us the room – through the emptying of ourselves – to take on the other person.

Let us not forget that there is an entire world out there waiting for us. A world that wants to see the Orthodox Church give meaning to life and serve as the linchpin of love that will hold together societies that are being torn apart in a world that has grown tired of the powerful and the self-sufficient, a world that is wounded by the friendlessness and absence of communion between people and Churches.

Are we ready for this sort of togetherness today? Perhaps we must search for the answer in the truth of a God who is “without conceit,” as St. Symeon the New Theologian characterizes Him.

I kindly ask that we pray for all those who sacrificed of themselves throughout the duration of the pandemic on behalf of the health of our fellow men and women who were infected by this deadly disease, and thank them prayerfully for their inestimable service.

Let us also pray for the victims of the coronavirus and their families, and let us remember the lines from Constantine P. Cavafy’s poem “Voices,” which remains current on so many levels: “Voices, loved and idealized, of those who have died, or of those lost for us like the dead. Sometimes they speak to us in dreams; sometimes deep in thought the mind hears them. And with their sound for a

moment return sounds from our life's first poetry—like music at night, distant,  
fading away....”

With heartfelt paternal wishes for a blessed Christmas,  
+ Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and All Scandinavia