

Churches to remain open for Divine Liturgy on the Epiphany despite govt edict; Archbishop will not officiate at Sanctification of the Waters service



The Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, His Beatitude Ieronymos, announced on Tuesday evening that he will not officiate at the annual Sanctification of the Waters service on Wednesday, the great feast of the Epiphany, the 12th day after Christmas known in Orthodoxy as the Theophany of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The development comes after the Holy Synod of the Autocephalous Church of Greece on Monday issued an encyclical essentially ignoring an abrupt government decision – issued on Friday – banning Church-going on the Epiphany, thus altering

the framework agreed to for the entire Holy 12-day period of Christmas.

Previously, the presence of worshipers was allowed for ecclesiastical services on the specific three days, with a ceiling placed on the number of worshipers allowed in cathedrals and with all public assembly precautions mandated, such as the wearing face masks.

The Church of Greece vehemently protested the fact that restrictions were made stricter for the Epiphany, i.e. no worshipers allowed, and without the prior consultation with the Church's leadership, namely, members of the Holy Synod and the Archbishop.

In a letter published on Tuesday evening, His Beatitude calls on hierarchs and clerics to comply with all the public assembly restrictions and public health precautions imposed during the Christmas Day and New Year Day services, provisions based on the previous ministerial decision.

At the same time, however, the Church will not back down in the face of the abrupt and unexpected decision taken on Friday, with churches and chapels remaining open to the faithful on Wednesday during the Divine Liturgy and the splendorous Sanctification of the Waters service, but in strict compliance with the ministerial decision taken on Dec. 15, 2020. That decree stipulates a specific number of worshipers within places of worship during services on Dec. 25 and Jan. 1, 2021, based on a building's floor space.

According to reports, Archbishop Ieronymos has advised parish priests in the central Athens area to conclude the Divine Liturgy service by 8:30 a.m. (06.30 GMT).

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