

Archpastoral Nativity Message of His Grace Bishop Irinej of Eastern America



BY THE GRACE OF GOD
BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA

Most beloved clergy and monastics, sons and daughters, faithful children
of the Eastern American Diocese of our Most Holy Serbian Orthodox Church:

GOD’S PEACE — CHRIST IS BORN!

And the angel said to them, “Be not afraid; for behold,
I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people;
for to you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord”...
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts
praising God and singing, “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among men of good will!”
(Lk. 2:10-11, 13-14)

This year, as we celebrate the glorious and joy-filled Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, it seems that the entirety of humankind and, in verity, Earth itself is passing through a labyrinth of anxiety and fear of the unprecedented Coronavirus pandemic. Yet, the angelic hosts on this Christmas Eve with their sweet song to the

new-born Divine Child, dispel every semblance of darkness and hopelessness, singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will!" And the Holy Nicholai of Zhicha and Ochrid, a saint of Christian origin and God-wise Serbian bishop, as though himself singing with them, noted: "In a word, we who traverse the earth are not alone in our travels. God is with us and all the heavenly hosts! Emmanuel! God with us!" (Emmanuel, Belgrade, 2000).

Though we, most beloved, on the eve and day of the Feast of the Nativity at the liturgical services of our Holy Church will be in significantly limited numbers, we cannot forget even then, with a humbled heart and with grateful songs of Christmas joy, to kneel before the cradle of the Divine Christ Child and bow to the limitless grandeur of the Word of God. Let us receive the all-embracing breadth of God the Logos, Who even now does not shy away from us and from our fragile human nature. For He, Himself, was born as a helpless child at a time when the entire world was in turmoil. He became incarnate in that world, in order to overcome the world!

Many of our festal gatherings this year, most beloved, will be more intimate than in years past. So many traditional, family get-togethers and customs, gifts and presents will have been set aside this year. However, even at this Christmas time, though we will be without our beloved Christmas family traditions, as we celebrate, we must never turn away our collective gaze from the One who sits on the Cherubic Throne. For today the Virgin, in a cave, on straw, among animals, gives birth and lays in a manger Him above Whom the Righteous Joseph keeps watch. Together they offer him shelter and protection, comfort and love. And as our troubled planet offers the King of Peace its gift of a cave, the gift of humanity must be our gratitude for all that we have, such that our hearts can receive the Christ Child, Who is the greatest gift of all.

The hearts of all of us, who are faithful members of the Serbian Orthodox Church, still grieve at the loss of our Serbian Patriarch and father Irinej, as well as Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro and the Littoral. The recent repose of these two hierarchs, who have always shown us how to walk in the light, has greatly shaken all Orthodox Christianity. Let us pray, therefore, to the Divine Christ Child, that the angelic words to the shepherds in Bethlehem "do not be afraid", will dispel all sorrow and sighing.

In foretelling the coming of the Messiah, the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah wrote: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined" (Is. 9:2). Our sincere prayer is for all of you without exception, most beloved, that Christ, Who is the only True Light

of this world, and the One Who with the glowing warmth of His embodied love dispels and scatters all our weakness, this hallowed Christmas night will gather around His manger love, unity and peace. May He, Who is mystically born this evening in a cave, become our shelter and protector, comfort and joy in these times of uncertainty, as He opens wide the doors to a brighter and more radiant future!

With paternal love in our heart, we invoke upon all of you, our dear and beloved spiritual children, the mercy, grace and blessing of the City of David, joyfully exclaiming from all Our heart:

GOD'S PEACE – CHRIST IS BORN!

INDEED, HE IS BORN!

Given in New York, at Christmas in the year 2020.

Your humble intercessor before the crib of the Divine Infant,

+IRINEJ

BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA

THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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