15/12/2021

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Greetings at the Archdiocese Annual Christmas Tree Lighting



Beloved Fathers and Co-workers in the Lord,

This is, indeed, a very special moment – to light the Christmas Tree and rejoice together – because God has graced us to celebrate once again the Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Over the past year, we have made tremendous sacrifices here at our Archdiocesan Headquarters – as the pandemic has challenged all of us in diverse ways. And we have had to take measures and make adjustments so that we could keep our ministries going strong, too.

But through all of this, we have been successful, as well as blessed by God to have fulfilled our Ecumenical Patriarch’s will to visit his beloved Eparchy of America.

God has blessed us to send tangible support to Greece after all of those devastating fires.

He has blessed us to inaugurate the completion of the Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church & National Shrine – even in this time of COVID-19.

He has blessed us all throughout the pandemic, so that we may effectively serve His people – the faithful Metropolises, parishes and institutions of our Sacred Archdiocese – and not to lose a single ministry!

And He has blessed us as well to arrive at the threshold of the centennial of our Church in America, which we will celebrate next July, right here in New York City, during the national Clergy-Laity Congress.

The lighting of this Christmas Tree, then, symbolizes so much of what we have been through in this last year.

You all know that we commemorate Christmas at the time of the Winter Solstice, because – even though it doesn't appear so – it is the moment when the light begins to return to the world. Each day after the Solstice, the days get just a little bit longer, if only by minutes.

And that is how the Lord came into the world in that Cave in Bethlehem. Little by little. First, as a vulnerable infant. Next, as a growing Child. And then, as the Rabbi from Galilee with a handful of disciples.

But He was always the Light of the world! And just like the light that will increase day by day in the coming weeks and months, the Lord grows in us and in the world by the same way that He was born – ἱεροκρυφίως, "in a hidden sacred manner," as the hymns say.[*]

And so it is with us, too, my dear friends. Christ grows within the cave of our hearts mystically, even secretly. We may not yet perceive it, but every day, the Light within us grows stronger and brighter, until we at last shine with love, joy and compassion on all who cross our path.

Therefore, let us light this Tree with faith and with hope, knowing that the Lord, Who hung from a Tree, will enlighten our hearts and minds.

He was born in a Cave – to foretell His Resurrection. And he was laid in a Manger – to foreshadow His nurturing and feeding of the entire world by the Holy Eucharist.

Let us embrace His Risen Glory and Presence in our souls.

Christ is truly coming to be born within us.

Let us glorify Him!

Merry Christmas!

[*] Anavathmoi of the Fourth Tone.

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