21/12/2021

# Patriarchal Encyclical for Christmas 2021



+ B A R T H O L O M E W

BY GOD’S MERCY ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE-NEW ROME

AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH

TO ALL THE PLENITUDE OF THE CHURCH

GRACE, MERCY AND PEACE

FROM THE SAVIOR CHRIST BORN IN BETHLEHEM

* * *

Brother concelebrants and blessed children,

Having once again arrived at the splendid feast of the Nativity in the flesh of our Savior Christ , who visited us from the heights, we glorify with psalms and hymns His all-heavenly name. The Incarnation of the pre-eternal Word of God is “the crowning of our salvation,” the “eternal mystery” of divine-human communion that transcends all reason. As St. Maximus the Confessor says so eloquently, “as a loving God, He truly became human assuming the essence of humankind, although the manner in which He became human will always remain ineffable; He became human in a manner that transcends humanity.”[1]

The divine Incarnation, along with the manifestation of the truth about God also reveals the truth and ultimate destination of man, our deification by grace. St. Nicholas Cabasilas proclaims so theologically that Christ “is the first and only One to show us the true and perfect man.”[2] Since that time, anyone who honors God must also honor man, and whoever undermines man also dishonors God, who assumed our nature. In Christ, speaking theologically about God we speak at the same time about man. The incarnate Divine Economy definitively abolishes the image of God as tyrannical, punitive, and adversary to man. Christ is everywhere, always and in all things the denial of the denial of man and the defender of human freedom. The life of the Church, as the flesh assumed by the incarnate Son and Word of God,[3] represents, expresses and serves this all-saving mystery of divine-humanity.

With this “other fashioning” of man and renewal of all creation in Christ as its banner, the Church today offers the good witness before every development that threatens the sacredness of the human person and the integrity of creation. It lives and preaches the truth of authentic spiritual life and the culture of love and solidarity. Offering testimony “about the hope that lies within us” (1 Pet 3.15), the Church does not in any way regard contemporary civilization as another sinful Nineveh by invoking like Jonah the divine wrath on it and its abolition, but rather the Church struggles for the culture’s transformation in Christ. In our age we need pastoral imagination, dialogue and not argumentation, participation and not abstention, specific deeds and not abstract theory, creative reception and not general rejection. All these do not function at the expense of our spirituality and liturgical life, but reveal the inviolable unity of what we call the “vertical” and “horizontal” dimensions of the Church’s presence and witness. Faithfulness to the tradition of the Church is not entrapment to the past, but employment of the experience of the past in a creative way for the present.

In this past year, too, the pandemic of the Covid-19 coronavirus has troubled humankind. We give glory to the God of mercy, who strengthened the specialists

and scientists to develop effective vaccines and other medications in order to confront this crisis, and we encourage all faithful who have yet to be vaccinated to do so and everyone to adhere to the protective measures by the health authorities. Science, to the extent that operates as a minister of man, is a priceless gift by God. We must gratefully accept this gift and not be misled by irresponsible voices of ignorant and self-proclaimed as representatives of God and of the authentic faith "spiritual advisors," who, nevertheless, lamentably invalidate themselves through the absence of love for their brethren, whose lives they expose to grave danger.

Most honorable brothers and dearly beloved children,

With unshakable conviction that the life of each of us and the journey of all humanity is directed by the God of wisdom and love, we look forward to a happy 2022, which despite external factors and developments will be for everyone a year of salvation, inasmuch as during its course as well, the movement of history is guided by Christ, who loves mankind and cares for all things, "who desires that all people will be saved and come to the knowledge of truth." (1 Tm 2.4)

With God's will, during the upcoming Holy and Great Week, we shall hold the service of the Blessing of the Holy Chrism in our venerable Center. We regard it as a uniquely divine gift to our Modesty that we shall be deemed worthy to preside over this festive and moving rite for the fourth time in our humble Patriarchal ministry. Glory to God for all things!

With these sentiments, respectfully worshiping the child Jesus born in Bethlehem, we orient our thought to our Christian brothers there and we pray for the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of all those residing in the Holy Land.

In this spirit, we wish to all of you, those near and afar, a blessed Twelvetide, as well as a healthy, fruitful in good deeds and filled with divine gifts new year in the Lord's favor, to Whom belong the glory and might to the endless ages. Amen.

Christmas 2021

+Bartholomew of Constantinople

Fervent supplicant of all before God

[1] Maximus the Confessor, *Varia, On Virtue and Evil, Century I*, 12. PG 90. 1184.

[2] Nicholas Cabassilas, *On the Life in Christ*. PG 150. 680–681.

[3] See John Chrysostom, *Homily before Exile*. PG 52. 429.