

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA

The Feasts of the Incarnation of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ
and Holy Theophany
2019

Beloved brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, God-fearing Monastics:

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

I greet you on the occasion of the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, a mystery of the divine economy for which prophets, patriarchs and kings longed and comes to fruition in the fullness of time. Maximus the Confessor reminds us:

The great mystery of the incarnation remains a mystery eternally. Not only is what is not yet seen of it greater than what has been revealed—for it is revealed merely to the extent that it can be grasped by those who are saved by it—but in addition, even what is revealed still remains entirely hidden and is by no means known as it really is. What I have said should not appear paradoxical. For God is beyond being and [even] transcends all beyond-beingness; and so, when He wished to come down to the level of being, He became being in a manner which transcends being. Thus, too, although transcending man, yet out of love for man He truly became man by taking on the substance of man; but the manner in which He became man always remains unrevealed, for He was made man in a way which transcends man.

Let us then contemplate with faith the mystery of the divine incarnation and in all simplicity let us simply praise Him who in His great generosity became man for us.

The Incarnation, like all the divine interventions in human history, requires a response from each of us. The thrice holy God invites us to participate in His divine life. The Incarnation is our invitation to become by grace what He is by nature.

As the Nativity revealed Almighty God's condescension and humility in becoming incarnate, so the Theophany reveals the glory and power of the triune God. Saint John Maximovitch relates,

Today the nature of the waters is sanctified. Today the Son of God is baptized in the waters of the Jordan, having no need Himself of cleansing, but in order to cleanse the sinful human race from defilement. The waters of the Jordan are sanctified, and together with them all the waters of creation, the very nature of water. Water is given power to cleanse not only the body, but also man's whole soul, and to regenerate the whole man unto a new life through Baptism. Through water all of nature is cleansed, for out of water the world was made, and moisture penetrates everywhere, giving life to everything else in nature. Without moisture neither animals nor plants can live; moisture penetrates into rocks, into every place in the

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

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world. The waters are sanctified and through them the whole world, in preparation for renewal and regeneration for God's eternal Kingdom which is to come.

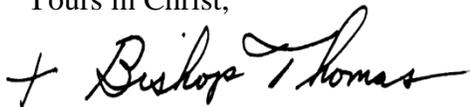
Today, a miraculous and wonderful event in the history of salvation has occurred. As the Lord Christ transformed the waters of the Jordan by plunging into them, so too we are transformed in the holy waters of baptism.

Saint Isaac the Syrian describes the effects of this wondrous transformation,

When someone acquires a will corresponding to the fear of God and to the right way of thinking, then he will soon receive the revelation of what is hidden. Spiritual knowledge is the perception of what is hidden, and in its perception contemplative faith is born, which begins to shine in the soul from the light of grace and which by the testimony of the mind fortifies the heart, lest it waver in the doubtlessness of hope far from every doubt. And this faith is revealed not through increased hearing of the ears, but through spiritual eyes, which see the mysteries hidden in the soul, the invisible and divine wealth, hidden from the eyes of the sons of the flesh and revealed by the Spirit to those who are nourished from Christ's table, in the study of Christ's laws, as the Lord said: "If ye keep my commandments (John 15:10) ... I will send unto you a Comforter (cf. John 15:26) ... the Spirit of Truth; whom the world cannot receive (John 14:17) ... and He shall teach you all truth" (cf. John 14:26, 16:13).

May your lives and your ministries be empowered and transformed by the transformative power of these holy feasts of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, and may He grant you many blessed years!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross-like mark at the beginning.

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)
Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

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