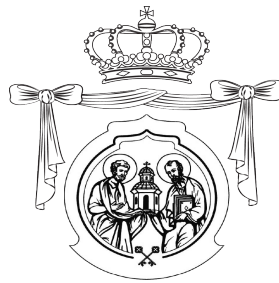


His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH

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

**Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos – 2022**  
**Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross – 2022**

Beloved brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, God-fearing Monastics, and all my Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ our True God:

*Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.  
God is in the midst of her; she shall not be shaken;  
God shall help her right early in the morning.*

As we begin the new ecclesiastical year, the first two Great Feasts approach us quickly. On September 8<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate the birth of the Mother of God (Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos), and on September 14<sup>th</sup> we celebrate the finding of the true Cross on which Jesus was crucified by St. Helen in Jerusalem in 326 AD, as well as its recovery in 627 AD (Exaltation of the Holy Cross).

St. Photios the Great, in his *Homily on the Nativity of our Most-Holy Lady, the Mother of God*, writes,

“The present feast honoring the birth of the Virgin Mother of God easily carries off the glittering prize of seniority against every competitor...for without the Virgin's feast none of those that sprang out would appear...The Virgin's feast, in fulfilling the function of the root, the source, the foundation...takes on with good reason the ornament of all those other feasts, and it is conspicuous with many great boons, and is recognized as the day of universal salvation.”

Indeed, without the birth of the Virgin Mary to Sts. Joachim and Anna, there would be no incarnation, no redemption, no resurrection, no ascension, no salvation. She is as integral to the work of God in the world, as the venerable and life-giving Cross. For it was only of her that we can rightly hymn, “Here will I dwell, for I have chosen her. The Most High hath hallowed His tabernacle. Holy is Thy temple, wonderful in righteousness” (Third Antiphon for the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos).

St. Photios continues, “The Lord's throne (Mary) is being prepared on earth, earthly things are sanctified, the heavenly hosts are mingled with us, and the wicked one, who first deceived us, has his power crushed, as his wiles and devices rot away.” In the megalynarion of the Feast of the Holy Cross, we hymn,

“O Theotokos, thou art a mystical paradise, which being untilled hath blossomed forth Christ, by Whom the life-bringing Tree of the Cross was planted in the earth. In worshipping Him now through its elevation, thee do we magnify.”

*“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)*

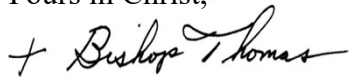
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The image of the 'life-giving Tree of the Cross' draws our minds back to the Tree of Life which was planted in the middle of Garden of Eden, and forward, in the vision of the New Jerusalem, in which we once again find the Tree of Life bearing twelve fruits, one each month, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:1-2). The Holy Fathers remind us that the Tree of Life is our great God and Savior Jesus Christ who gives everlasting life, and who brings healing to the curse of sin and freedom from the bonds of death and the devil through His precious and life-giving cross. Therefore, "we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

As we celebrate the Feasts of the Nativity of the Theotokos and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, let us embrace the purity of the Virgin and the power of the Cross as our vision for life and godliness. Let us lay down the carnal and temporal pleasures of this life, which fade so quickly, to embrace the One who is our salvation through the triumph of the Holy Cross.

May you find great joy in this new ecclesiastical year as you orient your life more fully in the feasts and fasts of the Church, and through them, to draw near to Christ and His Saints. Blessed Feasts!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Thomas".

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)

Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

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