

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 Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ 2018

Chris is born! Glorify Him!

Beloved in Christ,

I greet you in this season of the Nativity Fast, in anticipation of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord.

As the Lord Christ assumes our human nature in order to redeem it, we rejoice in His divine condescension and His munificent love. Saint Gregory Palamas notes, "Without being separated from the Father's bosom He who is in the world and by whom the world was made (John 1:10), came out and entered the world. He who fills heaven and earth came down from heaven to earth. Consequently, the coming forth of the only-begotten son of God, and His descent from heaven, represent nothing other than His manifestation in the flesh and His self-emptying, from the unutterable exaltation of divinity down to human nature at the other extreme" (Homily 47 On the Parable of the Sower).

The Son manifests Himself to us so that we may become like Him through grace. How is this accomplished? According to Saint Gregory Palamas, it is through the preaching of the Word. "He came out in this way 'to sow his seed.' What seed is this? The word of instruction, the words of eternal life, the commandments of immortality. The promise of restoration to life, and the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. These all belong to Him, for He said of Himself, 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life'" (John 6:63; Homily 47)

The saintly ascetic goes further and explains that the Incarnation requires preparation, for "the Lord did not say that He went out to plough the human fields, or to break up the ground two or three times, dig up the roots of the weeds and smooth out the clods of earth, that is to say, to prepare our hearts for cultivation, but that He went out immediately to sow. Why? Because this preliminary work on our souls prior to sowing ought to be done by us. That is why the Forerunner of the gospel of grace, anticipating this fact, says with a loud voice, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight' and 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt. 3:2). Our preparation and the starting point of repentance is blaming ourselves, confession, and abstention from evil" (Homily 47).

In the feast of the Incarnation of the Son of God we see the pattern of our whole spiritual life--God acts and we must respond. This synergy between divinity and humanity is an indispensable expression of the providential mercy of God. This is why we fast and intensify our ascetical efforts prior to every major feast of the Church. It is our responsibility to make sure the seed sowed by the Sower lands on good soil.

May the Lord Christ bless you and your families during this joyous feast of the Incarnation!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Thomas".

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

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

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