



IRINEJ

BY THE GRACE OF GOD
BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA

GOD'S PEACE — CHRIST IS BORN!

Most beloved clergy and monastics, sons and daughters, faithful children
of the Eastern American Diocese of our Most Holy Serbian Orthodox Church,

*Today the Virgin comes to the cave,
to give unspoken birth to the Eternal Word:
hear this and rejoice, O universe!
With the angels and shepherds glorify Him,
Who desires to reveal Himself
as a **little Child, the Eternal God!**
(Kontakion of the Nativity Forefeast)*

Hear the glad tidings, indeed, O universe, and rejoice, most beloved faithful! Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, as this holy and wondrous night is the beginning of our salvation, for *Christ is born!* The Eternal Word of God takes flesh from the Most Holy Virgin and reveals Himself as a little Child! God before the ages has now entered into time and history in order to save suffering humanity. Rejoice and be glad: "*For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His Name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*" (Is. 9:6). Rejoice, for God is born in the flesh! Be glad, for this little Child is our Savior!

With His Birth, eternity enters into time, and time is elevated into eternity. Everything in creation has changed and nothing and no one can ever remain the same: "*For the Son of God became man so that we might become god,*" according to St. Athanasius the Great. "*What Child is this?*" beg the words of an old English Christmas carol, echoing the cry of the great prophet Isaiah. Answering in refrain, we sing with all our heart: "*This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and Angels sing, haste, haste, to bring Him laud, the Babe, the Son of Mary*" (William Chatterton Dix, 1865). "*Just as the Lord, putting on the body, became a man, so also we men are both deified through His flesh, and henceforth inherit everlasting life,*" observed St. Athanasius the Great.

Celebrating today the Birth of the Divine Infant, we enter into the essence of the Feast of the Incarnation of Christ. He Who is the Creator of the ages is now born in a cave in Bethlehem and the very church in which we worship has become precisely that transfigured cave. The Child who lay in a manger, in a small wooden feeding trough, invites us to Bethlehem, that is to say, the *House of Bread*, and gives us Himself as *our daily Bread*. Therefore, as those who once walked in the way of His footsteps, we also fervently pray: "*Lord, give us this bread always*". Christ will answer us through the ages, as He had said to them: "*I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst*" (Jn. 6:34-35).

We may ask, why then do we still hunger before the Bread of Life and thirst in the presence of the Word of God? Have we not truly come before Him at His manger? Do we not believe in Him and in His words? If we have, my beloved, do we not hear Him inviting us at every Liturgy, without exception, saying: *“Take, eat, this is My Body, which is broken for you for the remission of sins”*. Christ the new-born King summons us to partake of Him, so that He, the uncontainable God, may enter into us and in so doing, desiring to make of us the new Bethlehem – the new *House of Bread!* Have we not been called forth with His words: *“Drink of this, all of you; for this is My Blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins”*. In so doing, He desires that we become one with Him, as He becomes one with us: today, forever and unto eternity?

As such, most beloved, did not our Lord also tell us this: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself”* (Lk. 10:27). As we are summoned to be communicants in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Child, so also we are summoned to be one with each other in the community of love. Can we claim to love God and yet, despise our neighbor? Our old Serbian Christian tradition teaches us, that before we can exclaim, *Christ is Born*, we must first state, *God’s Peace!* For truly, the Peace of God cannot be had without peace among ourselves, as proclaimed to the shepherds by the angels who heralded the Christ Child’s birth: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men”* (Lk. 2:14).

In light of the same, our much beloved Serbian Patriarch Pavle of thrice blessed memory, often reiterated how: *“A certain man said: when you were born, everyone rejoiced, yet you cried. Make every effort to live your life such that when your end comes, you may rejoice and everyone will cry. To cry, for such a man is departing...”* In this Silent Night, let us hush the whisper of our words and astutely listen to the angels triumphantly singing to the Divine Infant. Tonight, let us find a place in our hearts for the New-born Christ! Let us ourselves become the cave where He, Who was born in a cave in Bethlehem, will be able enter and abide, so that on the night of His Birth we all may exclaim: *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”* (Gal. 2:20).

With paternal love, we invoke upon all of you, Our dear and beloved spiritual children, the mercy, grace and blessing of this Holy Night of Christ’s Birth, joyfully exclaiming from all Our heart:

**GOD'S PEACE – CHRIST IS BORN!
INDEED, HE IS BORN!**

Given in New York, at Christmas in the year 2019.

Your humble intercessor before the crib of
a little Child, the Eternal God,

+IRINEJ

BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH