



IRINEJ

BY THE GRACE OF GOD
BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA

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

GOD'S PEACE — CHRIST IS BORN!

*Christ is born – glorify Him!
Christ is from Heaven – receive Him!
Christ is on earth – be exalted!
Sing to the Lord all the earth!
(St Gregory the Theologian)*

In the depth of this mystical eve in Bethlehem of Judea, anticipating the birth of her Son, the Most Holy Virgin and the Righteous Joseph seek shelter in a cold cave, as dark and forlorn as the world into which the Divine Child was to be born. That night, as the “Sun of righteousness” is born in the flesh, the chill from the cave walls was dispersed by the welcoming warmth of the domestic animals, which the shepherds sheltered from the eyes of darkness. And behold, by the birth of Him, Who alone “makes all things new” (Rev. 21:5), our earthly world becomes a “new creation” (II Cor. 5:17). Its darkness dissipates in the magnificent radiance of the guiding Star of Bethlehem, which in a marvelous manner gathered the Wise Men from the East around the cradle of the newborn infant Christ. Before Him, Whom the heavenly hosts glorify, the choirs of angels intoned a heralding song, hearkening with their doxology the curious shepherds to the manger, in which lay “a small Child, the pre-eternal God”.

Christ is born – glorify Him! Christ is from Heaven – receive Him! Truly, most beloved, this Christmas night, as we celebrate the Incarnation of the Godman, with these divinely inspired words of Saint Gregory the Theologian, the Church invites all creation to encounter Him, Who descends from on high into our humble earthly abode. Precisely, those all-joyous words now knock at the doors of the hearts of all who desire to welcome Him, as the angels and shepherds before us, with glorifying hymns of thanksgiving, love and peace. Christ is born – rejoice, O Universe! Christ is born – glorify Him all nations!

The Incarnate Word of God this night desires to enter every aspect of our lives: in our families and communities, in cities and towns, and in all the land and on every continent. The Divine Child waits for all His creation to open its doors to Him, Who by His Nativity liberates from enslavement and spiritual suffering which burden all humanity, keeping it in a lifeless spasm of fear and indifference, all under a deceptively construed guise of freedom and equality. Therefore, give yourself to Him with firm faith, and trust in Him! For “God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because

you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, *Abba! Father!* So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal. 4:4-7).

Therefore, we cannot lose faith painfully observing radical changes in traditional societal and family values. In our own generation, the contemporary Athonite Elder Vasilios from his rich spiritual treasury provides us with profound guidance, noting: "Creation seeks neither worship nor contempt from us; creation seeks but one thing—for us to be truly human. And this is not a matter of 'returning to nature,' but of returning to a life lived according to our God-given nature. And to live according to our nature is to become gods by grace. It is then that we shall honor God, worship Him, love our brethren, and perceive that we are of one substance with them." As such, we can become vehicles of change in this world, that was given in trust unto our stewardship, and which we must return to God in faith.

So that we may achieve such trust in our own lives and communities and convey the same to the world, in a bond of faith, the Divine Child this night and constantly, appeals to us and invites us to overcome our inner conflicts. Then, and only then, will conflicts in the family, the community, in society and throughout the world dissipate in the joy and radiance of the Incarnate Lord, as we exclaim in confirmation of the same, *Christ is on earth – be exalted! Sing to the Lord all the earth!*

With heartfelt paternal love, We invoke upon all of you, our most beloved spiritual children, the mercy, grace and blessing of the Cave in Bethlehem of Judea, 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 2021.

Your humble intercessor before the crib of the Divine Infant,

+IRINEJ

BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH