



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!

*"Made flesh by the Holy Spirit,
Made man of the ever-virgin Mary,
You have filled all creation with joy!"
(Vesperal Verse of Christmas Eve)*

Greeting you, Beloved, in the incomparable joy of this Christmas Eve, wherein heaven and earth radiate alike as the brilliant Star of Bethlehem from above, imbuing this, the longest night of the year with awe-inspiring light. In anticipation of the joyous celebration of the glorious Incarnation of the Son of God, we join in the ever-resounding prayer of the ages, that by His Divine intervention in history, the true light of the knowledge of God will verily shine among us, renewing in us the integrity and unity of everyone and everything in Him, who tonight was "*made flesh by the Holy Spirit, made man of the ever-virgin Mary!*"

By His birth, the Word of God, who became one with us by taking on our flesh, liberates us from physical and spiritual suffering, which only serve to oppress humanity, keeping it in the lifeless grip of fear and indifference, under the guise of freedom. For as St. Isaac the Syrian rightfully affirms: "*If zeal had been appropriate for putting humanity aright, why did God the Word clothe Himself in the body, using gentleness and humility in order to bring the world back to His Father?*" Therefore, fear not, give yourself to Him, with firm faith and trust in the Creator and Fashioner of all things and humanity, whom He created in His image and likeness, in Him – *the Light and Life of the world!*

The Divine Christ Child is our only true Savior. His Kingdom, which reigns over all and in all, is the only one broad enough for the unlimited possibilities of every human soul, for it is not of this world and exceeds all imaginable limitations. As such, Herod focusing only on himself and his earthly kingdom, tried in vain to destroy the Newborn King. Where is that Herod today? Forgotten on the one hand, yet on the other omnipresent in those who offer death, instead of life; fragmentation, rather than wholeness; war, instead of peace; those who tear down, rather than build; and those who scatter, rather than gather! Shall we not rush, instead, to open the cave of our heart, to allow the warmth of Christ to rekindle within us His incarnate presence?

To that end, the great and holy Cyril of Jerusalem notes: "*Men abandoned God and fashioned images carved after the human form. Since an image of men was falsely worshipped as God, God became truly man, so that falsehood might be destroyed... The Lord took on our likeness,*

so that He might give us an even greater grace, such that sinful humanity might become a partaker of God.” It behooves us for this reason, Beloved, in all places and under all circumstances to discern incarnational love from idolatry, so that we are not held captive to the wiles of exploitation.

While respecting the rights of others, with decency and dignity, let us hasten to return to that secure harbor of a Christocentric life and to the Church, which is *"the pillar and fortress of the truth"* (1 Tim. 3:15). There, in that safe harbor, let us pause and listen to the resounding echo of our heart, and recenter our lives on the family, that very God-given nucleus of life itself and pillar of society! Only as such can we safeguard this world, which has been given unto us in stewardship and trust, and which we are obliged to return to our Creator, as it befits Christians: honorably and properly.

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 and love, the Newborn Savior, this night and always, appeals to us and invites us to overcome our doubts and conflicts. Then, and only then, will differences in the family, the community, in society and throughout the world dissipate in the gentle and humble brilliance of *the gladsome light* of the Incarnate Lord, who has *"filled all creation with joy!"*

We invoke upon all of you, our most beloved spiritual children, with sincere paternal love this Christmas, the mercy, grace, and blessings of the Christ Child, joyfully, from all our heart, exclaiming:

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

Given at Christmas in the year 2022.

Your contrite intercessor before the crib of the Divine Infant,

+IRINEJ

BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH