



IRINEJ

BY THE GRACE OF GOD
BISHOP OF WASHINGTON-NEW YORK AND 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!

*“All angels in heaven make merry and dance today,
All creation leaps for joy,
The Lord and Savior is born in Bethlehem.
Every deception of idols is swept away,
And Christ reigns unto all ages!”*
(Great Compline Verse of Christmas)

Truly, Beloved, with the birth of Christ, *all angels in heaven make merry and dance today, as all creation leaps for joy.* For creation itself is renewed in Him, who comes to us as a little Babe – Love and Truth Incarnate! Our *Lord and Savior is born in Bethlehem*, as the rising *Sun of Righteousness* that has shown forth at the dawn of renewal, in Him *who makes all things new* (Rev. 21:5). *Christ is Born; Glorify Him! Christ is on earth; be exalted! Christ is Born; Sing to the Lord all the earth!* (cf., Matins Canon Ode 1).

Yet, the earth finds itself engulfed in the tragedies of war and strife, and here at home, personal, familial and societal values have been so radically compromised, impacting the existential and threatening to impede upon the ontological, by attempting to deny the very image and likeness of God in humankind. Gratefully, within our Orthodox Christian tradition, the celebration of Christmas is so deeply intertwined with the light of love, peace and profound joy, which ushers in hope, that comes from the radiance of Christ's Nativity.

Therefore, as we approach this joyous and hope-filled celebration of Christmas, do we not find our hearts filled with gratitude, as we reflect on the profound gift that this sacred season brings to us. It is, as such, an opportune time to reconnect with our families, nurture our relationships, restore fragmented humanity by extending our love and goodwill to the broader community, and to the world. For today, *every deception of idols is swept away, and Christ reigns unto all ages.*

Christmas is the celebration of the Birth of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh. The Word of God enters creation to renew light, life and hope. This salvific event, which changed the very course of history, calls us to embody the values He taught us — love, compassion, and service. In the words of St. John Chrysostom: *“Let us celebrate the birth of Christ, not only with eating and drinking, but also with acts of charity and love. Let us be joyful and give thanks for the gift of salvation.”*

As we gather with our families, relatives and friends, sharing meals, exchanging gifts, and participating in our festal Christmas traditions, let us remember that these moments are about more than just festivities. They are opportunities to foster common unity by strengthening the bonds that bring us all together. For, *“as many as received Him, to those who believe in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12-13). This new identity is not one based on personal achievements, possessions, challenges, or even trauma; but rather on God's love, grace and mercy for all and in all.

Moreover, as we come together in this season of hope and renewal, may our hearts be opened to allow the Christmas spirit to inspire our actions and our interactions within our families, communities, and even globally. May we always carry this spirit within us, not just during this wondrous season, but throughout the entire year, by fostering an enduring legacy of love and compassion. Let us demonstrate our faith by uplifting others in prayer and deed. In doing so, we reinforce the fact that we are all children of God, connected by His bond of love. For *“God is love!”* (1 John 4:8).

Earnestly praying that you, your families and all, will enjoy a blessed Feast of the Nativity of Christ, filled with the presence of Christ the Newborn Babe. May your homes be embraced with the warmth of peace, joy and hope, wherein faith is shared and nurtured, and wherein all family members and guests feel fully valued and appreciated. May the New Year bring you an abundance of grace, and fulfillment in the Divine Child's love for everyone and everything, jubilantly exclaiming from a joyful heart:

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

Given in New York at Christmas in the Year of our Lord, 2024.

Your prayerful intercessor before the crib of the Newborn Savior,

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THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH