



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!

*"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace!
Today Bethlehem receives Him who reigns forever with the Father.
Today angels glorify the Newborn Babe in hymns worthy of God:
Glory to God in the highest!
And on earth, peace, good will to men!"
(Matinal Verse of Christmas)*

The Nativity of Christ in the flesh is, indeed, my beloved, a holiday of great joy. For every Christmas, as *"Bethlehem receives Him who reigns forever with the Father"*, we also discover anew Love Incarnate, as we receive Christ in our hearts. Through the integrity and unity of everyone and everything in Him, the true man within is revealed in each of us. This, therefore, is the very source of our boundless joy and festal celebration. We join the angels in hymns of praise, exclaiming from all our heart: *"Glory to God in the highest"*, as we earnestly pray for peace on earth, and good will to humankind.

Now we behold a Divine Child, who did not come as an intruder in our lives; rather as a loving God, who neither came to reign over us, nor to lord over us, rather to be one with us as a brother, as a friend, and as a constant companion to all of us – one who will lay down His life for us. As such, He came into this world, which He created, as the Prince of Peace, to identify with us and usher in a Reign of Peace. This Kingdom shall reign over all, allowing us, here and now, to be the extension of His love, as stewards of peace in this world, sealed with His declaratory beauty! Truly, *"blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance"* (Ps. 33:12).

The cold and darkness of winter, which can dominate our lives and our society, now radiate beneath the brilliant and warm glow of the illumining Star of Bethlehem. The chill and nightfall of winter dissipate before this heavenly hearth making a new home for Him, who tonight was *"made flesh by the Holy Spirit and made man of the ever-virgin Mary"*! That is why the Christmas Star is always a sign and symbol that guides us through so many obstacles and adversities, so that we can find, yet again, the right path. In so doing, we establish a system of values, are regenerated, and demystify all existing half-truths and untruths. In so doing, we discover those divine and eternal aspirations and dimensions within us and perceive the true meaning of our human existence.

Toward the close of the old year, and the beginning of the new year, Christmas affords us a renewed opportunity to hear Christ, saying: "*Behold, I make all things new!*" (Rev. 21:5). And, precisely in that newness, to turn over a new leaf in our lives and to begin looking at ourselves and others from a new perspective, devoid of bitterness and anger. The only way to change the world around us is to perceive the divine dimensions and aspirations within ourselves and others. Only then will we be able to comprehend the true joy and fullness of life. For Christ is born and hope has arrived – exceeding all our expectations, bringing restoration to families and communities! Only His hope can raise those stumbling and place us, once again, on the narrow path to salvation.

In the words of the ever-memorable Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann: "The Church, if it is to be the Church, must be the revelation of that divine love which God *poured out into our hearts*. Without this love nothing is *valid* in the Church because nothing is possible. The content of Christ's Eucharist is love, and only through love can we enter into it and be made its partakers" (*For the Life of the World*). As such, we must allow Christ Emmanuel to conquer our own hearts to offer clarity on the most elusive of human emotions – peace, forgiveness and humility, the very attributes of Incarnate Love.

Greeting you in the joy in which heaven and earth glow this Holy Night, in celebration of this divine intervention in history, praying that the true light of knowledge will truly shine among us, renewing in us the wholeness and unity of everyone and everything in praising the Newborn Babe, joyfully, from all our heart, exclaiming:

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

Given in New York at Christmas in the Year 2023.

Your prayerful intercessor before the crib of the Divine Infant,

+Irinej

BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH