



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

*And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold,
I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people;
for to you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord...
And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts
praising God and singing, "Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased!"*
(Lk. 2:9-11, 13-14).

This year, as we celebrate the glorious and joy-filled Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, it seems that the entirety of humankind, in verity – earth itself, is so troubled and anxiety ridden, wrought by fear of the unprecedented Coronavirus pandemic. Yet, in the very midst of our fear and uncertainty, we are summoned by the angelic hosts who now sing to us, *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased!"* We must, therefore, cast aside our doubt and be emboldened by the good news, heralding the birth of Christ Emmanuel!

Though our numbers will be limited at our Christmas services, with a humbled heart, most beloved, let us bow before the limitless grandeur of the Word of God. Let us receive the all-embracing breadth of God the Logos, who even now does not shy away from us and from our fragile human nature. For He, Himself, was born as a helpless child when the world of His time was in turmoil. He became fully incarnate, precisely in that world, in order to overcome the world.

Many of our festal gatherings this year will be far more intimate than in years past. So many family traditions and even gifts will have been set aside this year. However, as we celebrate, we must turn our collective gaze to the One who sits on the Cherubic Throne. For today He is laid in a simple manger by His Virgin Mother, among animals, and guarded by His foster father Joseph. Together they offer him shelter and protection, comfort and love. As our troubled earth continues to offer its gift of a cave to receive the New-born Prince of Peace, our own gift must become one of gratitude for all that we have, instead of that which we do not have, so that our hearts can receive the Christ Child, the greatest gift of all.

For us, who are members of the Serbian Orthodox Church, our hearts are even heavier due to the recent loss of our Patriarch and father Irinej, as well as Metropolitan Amfilohije. These

repose of these two beloved hierarchs, who have always shown us how to walk in the light, has impacted all Orthodox Christianity. Yet, we are consoled by the resounding words of the angel, who appeared to the shepherds – *“do not be afraid”*. Do not allow the depth of darkness to overwhelm you. For the great Prophet Isaiah wrote in foretelling the coming of the Messiah, *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined”* (Is. 9:2).

My personal prayer for all of you is, without exception, that Christ, Who remains the only True Light of this world, Who dispels our grief with the glowing warmth of His embodied love, will unite us all around Himself on this hallowed Christmas night. May He become our shelter and protector, comfort and joy in these times of uncertainty, as He opens wide the doors to a brighter and more radiant future!

With paternal love, we invoke upon all of you, our dear and beloved spiritual children, the mercy, grace and blessing of the City of David, 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 2020.

Your humble intercessor before the crib of the Divine Infant,

+IRINEJ

BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH