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Archiepiscopal Encyclical on the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord

Christmas, December 25, 2021

Unto the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Pious Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, Presidents and Members of Parish Councils, Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Members of Leadership 100, the Day and Afternoon Schools, Philoptochos Societies, the Youth, Greek Orthodox Organizations, and the entirety of the Christ-named Plenitude of the Holy Archdiocese of America.

*You were born secretly in the cave, but Heaven proclaimed You to all, O Savior, using the star as its mouth,
and led the magi to You, who worshipped You with faith. Have mercy upon them and upon us!
(Troparion from the Vespers of the Feast of Christmas)*

My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we gather across our Nation to celebrate Christmas — the quintessential and most sentimental religious holiday of the American People — we Orthodox Christians are called to an experiential participation with the Nativity of our Savior in Bethlehem of Judea. Through the divine services, and most importantly, the Divine Liturgy, we are called to become the Cave where the Child was born in a secret, hidden manner. For each of us possesses a heart-cave in which God yearns to be born, and which He desires to fill with His presence. And each of us can become the place where Divinity takes shape through our actions.



Much like how an infant grows by absorbing its world and interacting with it, our growth in Christ is symbolized most profoundly by the worship experiences we share in the Church services. But the actual growth takes place everywhere and at every time in our lives. As we practice the virtues of patience and forbearance, humility and generosity, forgiveness and compassion, mercy and love, the Divine Life of the Holy Trinity takes hold in our hearts and grows, as the Apostle Paul says, “in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect person, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13)

My beloved Christians, Christ the Lord condescended to be born in the humble cave of Bethlehem. We are also caves where He desires to be born, but we must humble ourselves before Him. Let us become like the Shepherds and Magi who journeyed to meet Him. For He descended through the very ranks of the Angels to become like us in order to show us the way to a beautiful life on earth and eternal life in Heaven.

As we cry out: “Χριστὸς Γεννᾶται! Δοξάσατε! Christ is Born! Glorify Him!” – let us also welcome Him to be born anew in our hearts and minds. As we practice what we preach, we will experience a transformation in our lives that is the greatest Christmas gift of all – Emmanuel, God with us.

With paternal love in the Newborn King,

† ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America