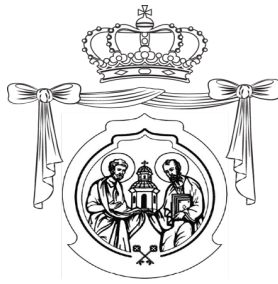


His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos - 2021

Beloved brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, God-fearing Monastics, and all my Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ our True God:

“He Who seals the abyss, and opens it again, Who takes up water into the clouds, and makes it rain, You are He, O Lord, Who made the root blossom from the fruitless Anna the holy one, bringing forth as spotless fruit the rod that is the Theotokos.” - Canon of Nativity of the Theotokos

As we begin the new year commemorating the nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, we closed the previous year in commemoration of her holy dormition. Just prior to the feast of the Dormition, we commemorated the Lord Christ’s Transfiguration. The coupling of these three feasts is not coincidental. If the holy fathers had been concerned with maintaining the church year by a strict chronology, the Transfiguration would be celebrated during Great Lent. However, the holy fathers sought to teach us a great lesson in presenting the beginning and end of the church year with commemorations of the Most Holy Theotokos. We are to imitate her life and dormition in all things. She was the model of fasting, prayer, and humility. She was free from passion because she had prepared her heart by ascetical struggle. In her holy Dormition, she was translated from death to life because she had been transformed during her lifetime.

We should imitate our most pure Mother by the manner in which she lived and thus be illumined and deified in the Holy Spirit. That is the purpose of life. What Christ is by nature we are to become by grace. If we have not begun this journey of theosis (deification) the feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos is a most appropriate time to begin.

Each life has a beginning and an ending, just as in the life of the Most Holy Theotokos. What truly matters is how we spend that life. We are instructed in the feast of the holy Transfiguration that our life’s work must be purification, illumination, and ultimately deification. We are reminded of this in the apolytikion for the feast:

“Your Nativity, O Virgin, has proclaimed joy to the whole universe! The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, has shone from You, O Theotokos! By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing. By destroying death, He has granted us eternal Life.”

May the Most Holy Theotokos assist us in our spiritual journey. May She save us and protect us from all dangers now and in the future.

Yours in Christ,

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)
Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)

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