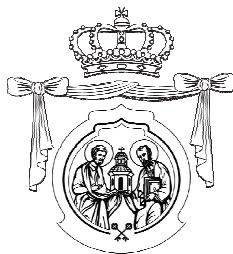


His Eminence  
**The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH**

**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**

November 21, 2017

Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple

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

May God be with you all!

I greet you on this most joyous occasion, one of the twelve major church feasts numbered among those that affect our salvation. The Most Holy Theotokos' entry into the temple mirrors our own entrance into the heavenly kingdom. As the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna, prepared the holy Virgin, so too we must prepare for our entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Upon arriving at the temple, the 3-year-old infant Mary had to make an effort to ascend 15 high steps in order to enter the temple. So should we, in order to enter the Heavenly Realm, make the effort to ascend the ladder of virtues, to labor at fasting and prayer. The Holy Virgin went up the steps by herself, without any help from others, but with the miraculous help of God. So should we, in our attempt to attain the Heavenly Realm, make the effort ourselves, but constantly asking God for help along the journey.

Saint Germanus reminds us concerning this feast, *"Today she who will receive the Holy of Holies, that is the Christ, through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit is, through an even greater sanctification, placed in the Holy of Holies with holiness and majesty."*

Today we magnify the Most Holy Theotokos and cry out to her, "Rejoice, O Fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation." Most Holy Theotokos save us!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bishop Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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)*

4407 Kanawha Ave. SE, Charleston, WV 25304-1734  
(724) 787-9832 Phone    Bpthomasjoseph@gmail.com