



**IRINEJ**

BY THE GRACE OF GOD  
BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA  
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

**GOD'S PEACE — CHRIST IS BORN!**

Most beloved clergy and monastics, sons and daughters, faithful children of the  
Diocese of Eastern America of our Most Holy Church,

*You will follow the only true and reliable Teacher,  
The Word of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
Who, because of His great love, became what we are –  
so that He might bring us to be what He is Himself.*

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

Greeting you on the eve of this great and most joyous Christian Feast for the first time as your Archpastor and Spiritual Father, from a paternal heart and with sincere love for you, our most beloved faithful, we earnestly pray this evening before Christ the Divine Child that He will, by the grace of His salvific and wonderous Nativity, enlighten the soul of each of you, your families and brighten your homes, and the homes of all those who desire to taste the fruits of boundless Divine joy that are gifted to us by the One who is born in Bethlehem's manger. He bestows the same upon us so that we can follow Him, *the only true and reliable Teacher, the Word of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord* (St. Irenaeus of Lyons).

Let us hasten, therefore, to meet Him, who is love (cf. 1 Jn. 4:8); *and who, because of His great love, became what we are – so that He might bring us to be what He is Himself* (St. Irenaeus of Lyons). Let us hasten, therefore, where Divine love and grace have met and healed human love and freedom, true Christmas gifts from the King of Kings. Let us hasten, also to that community ruled by Christian and fraternal relations which are shared with each other, and where you can truly sense with the mind and heart that the Kingdom of God is within and among us (cf. Lk.17:21).

The newborn Christ is the only King that truly forgives and wipes away all our iniquity and our human transgressions, as only His Kingdom is wide enough to embrace the limitless possibilities of every human soul. That is precisely why Herod and all the dark and selfish forces of this world sought, and still seek to destroy to His Kingdom – the Church of God, which is not of this world. Where is that Herod today? Forgotten, yet recalled only by evil deeds! Who desires to build such a memorial to himself? Such a sad and tragic fate awaits all those that destroy – instead of building, that scatter – instead of gathering! Let us take care, therefore, dear brothers and sisters,

of ourselves and our loved ones. Let us prepare the cave of our heart so that it could accommodate and receive the Divine Child. Let us remain steadfast in faith and filially faithful to His Church, the only safe harbor, which is in verity "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1Tim. 3:15).

Thereby, Orthodoxy in its eschatological consciousness reminds us that our lives are not just what we currently are or what we currently do, but above all what we can become and what we will be when the Lord comes again. Only then, in the future Kingdom of God, will we become perfect, without blemish or error. But the journey of persons as Christlike beings toward that future Kingdom of God begins not at death, but at conception, wherein Emmanuel, which translated means *God is with us*, already seeks His abode. Consequently, our faith is not an individual search for truth, but rather the question of community and acceptance of the newborn Savior in our personal lives and the world in which we live.

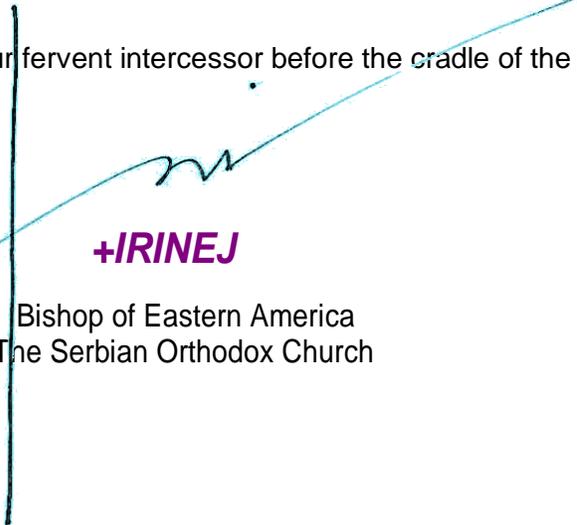
Earnestly entreating the Lord to continually enlighten our spiritual and all other sight with the radiance of the Star of Bethlehem in this coming New Year, so as to ever reveal anew and understand, with sober mind and heart, the meaning of His salvific Incarnation, kindly allow us to greet you, most beloved, sincerely praying that on this All-joyous Feast we may recognize our path to salvation, that by the words with which the heavens greeted the earth and the voices of the angels proclaimed the arrival of the world's long-awaited Messiah, who is verily the Way, the Life, the Truth and our Redeemer, we may joyfully exclaim with one heart:

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

May the forthcoming 2017<sup>th</sup> New Year from the Nativity of our Savior be joyous and filled in equal measure with His grace and sacred mercy!

Given in New York, at Christmas in the year 2016.

Your fervent intercessor before the cradle of the Divine Infant Christ,



**+IRINEJ**

Bishop of Eastern America  
The Serbian Orthodox Church