



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Annunciation 2014

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy

Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council, Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Societies, Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools, Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved,

Today we not only celebrate Gabriel's announcement to the Theotokos that she is to bear a son whom we acknowledge as our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, but we celebrate the very initiation of our salvation. We are enabled to experience salvation through the pious obedience of the Theotokos when she willingly allowed herself to become the vessel which would contain the uncontainable. The selflessness she exhibited is something to emulate in our lives as we strive daily to "*commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God*". It is also by no sheer happenstance that this day coincides with another memorable day in our history as Orthodox Christians since today we also celebrate the independence of Greece from the yoke of the Ottoman Turks.

The Annunciation and the struggle for Greek independence are indelibly connected to one another as the former opened the door to freedom for humanity and the latter opened the door to freedom for a nation. Our Greek forefathers were guided by the divine hand of God to throw off the bondage of the oppressors and they were blessed by Bishop Germanos at Agia Lavra when they began their struggle for independence. They were guarded and guided by the Panagia who blessed them with protection as they declared independence on March 25th, 1821.

The door that the Theotokos opened for all humanity, however, is one that leads to eternal life should we choose to join her in the same level of commitment that she gave to God when she uttered the words, "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word*" (Luke 1:38). Here, we see that the Virgin Mary gives up her own will in order to accomplish the will of God. So too do we often find ourselves faced with decisions that give us the opportunity to put our own will to the side in favor of doing the will of God. To continuously do the will of God enables us to fulfill the command of the Lord when he says, "*Jesus told his*

disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me'"
(Matthew 16:24).

Thus, the Theotokos becomes for us a shining example of obedience, piety, and compassion. She accepted the responsibility of bringing the incarnate Word of God into the world, she opened to us the gates of Paradise through her childbearing, and she empathizes with us in our struggles as she herself endured the anguish of seeing her own son crucified for the life of the world. This enables us to not only see her as the Mother of God, but to call her our mother as well. It allows us to even say, "*Most Holy Theotokos, save us*" since as the Mother of God she extends the salvation of Christ to us through her childbearing.

May the Theotokos, who willingly contained the uncontainable in her womb for the salvation of the world interceded for us and guide us all to the ineffable glory of Christ.

LONG LIVE THE 25th OF MARCH 1821!

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Evaggelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M'.

† EVANGELOS
Metropolitan of New Jersey