



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

The Feast of the Annunciation 2015

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,

Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women (Luke 1:28). St. Cyril of Alexandria said: A correct, sufficient, and irreproachable profession of faith is found in the assertion of the divine maternity of the Blessed Virgin. We hail you, O Mary Mother of God, venerable treasure of the entire world, inextinguishable lamp, crown of virginity, scepter of Orthodoxy, imperishable temple, container of him who cannot be contained, Mother and Virgin, through whom it is said in the Holy Gospels: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 21:9). The Annunciation event magnifies and seals the title of Theotokos as the exclusive prerogative of Panagia.

In the divine plan, Mary is prefigured in the story of Jacob's Ladder (Genesis 28:12) as the ladder spanning from earth to heaven – the means by which God chose to enter into the world physically. Her perpetual virginity is foretold by the Prophet Ezekiel (44:2): *And the Lord said unto me: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it; because the Lord God of Israel hath entered in by it, and it shall be shut.* The same is true of the burning bush seen by Moses: Mary contained in her womb the God-man, Jesus Christ, the God who is a consuming fire, and was not consumed. *It was through the Theotokos alone that the Lord came to us (St. Gregory Palamas). What shall we call you, O Lady? With what words shall we salute you? With what praises shall we crown your holy and glorious head, you who are the provider of all good things, the giver of riches, the ornament of the human race, the pride of all creation, through whom creation was made happy (St. John of Damascus)? The Mother of God is the ladder in the heavens by which God came down, the bridge leading men from earth to heaven, the sea which drowned the pharaoh, the rock which gushed forth water and quenched the spiritual thirst of the faithful, the pillar of fire leading those lost in the wilderness and the sign of the promised land which flows with milk and honey (St. Romanos the Melodos).*

The mystery of Mary is precisely the mystery of the Church. The Church invites the faithful and helps them to grow spiritually into these mysteries of faith which are as well the mysteries of their own existence and spiritual destiny. In the Church the faithful learn to contemplate and to adore the living Christ together with the whole assembly and Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven (Hebrews 12:23). And in this glorious assembly they discern the eminent person of the Virgin Mother of the Lord and Redeemer, full of grace and love, and of charity and compassion. *More honorable than the cherubim, more glorious than the seraphim, who without corruption did bear God the Word.*

The power of the Feast of the Annunciation was dramatically experienced and visualized in modern times with the declaration of independence of Greece from the Ottoman Turks. The Greek people called upon the Theotokos to intercede to her Son and our God for new-found freedom. *Let it be done according to your word* (Luke 1:38). The twenty-fifth of March is both a national and religious holiday. The Byzantine Empire fell to the Turks in 1453 and the Greeks remained under the Ottoman rule for nearly 400 years. During this time their language, their religion, and their sense of identity grew stronger and stronger day by day with the protection of the Theotokos. On March 25, 1821 Bishop Germanos of Patras raised the Greek flag at the Monastery of Agia Lavra in Peloponnese and one more revolution started against the Turks. The people of Greece shouted "Freedom or Death" and they fought the War of Independence for nine years (1821-1829) until liberation was achieved with the help of the Theotokos, the Invincible Champion General. *To you, Theotokos, invincible Champion, having been delivered from peril, I, your city, dedicate the victory festival as a thank offering. In your irresistible might, keep me safe from all trials, that I may call out to you: "Hail, O Bride unwedded!"*

He who is devout to the Mother of God will certainly never be lost (St. Ignatius of Antioch). With these thoughts in mind, let us glorify the Triune God of our Fathers, through the Ever-Virgin Mary and Mother of His Son according to the Flesh, and by the grace and love towards man of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory, power, honor, dominion and might, together with His Father and His All-Holy Good and Life-Giving Spirit, both now and always, and unto the ages of ages.

LONG LIVE THE 25th OF MARCH 1821 !

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M'.

† E V A N G E L O S
Metropolitan of New Jersey