

Prot. No. 977

Patriarchal Encyclical for Christmas

+ B A R T H O L O M E W

By God's Mercy Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and

Ecumenical Patriarch to All the Plenitude of the Church

Grace, Mercy and Peace from the Savior Christ Born in Bethlehem

Most honorable Brother Hierarchs,

Beloved children in the Lord,

Having once again been found worthy of reaching the great feast of the Nativity in the flesh of the Son and Word of God, we glorify the "inexpressible and incomprehensible condescension" of the Savior of the human race and Redeemer of all creation from corruption, even as we proclaim with the angels "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill to all people."¹

Christ was revealed as "Emmanuel,"² as "God with us" and "for us", as God beside each of us and "closer to us than ourselves."³ The pre-eternal Word of God, who is "consubstantial with the Father," as formulated in doctrine by the First Ecumenical Council, whose 1700th

¹ Lk 2.14.

² Mt. 1.23.

³ Nicholas Cabasilas, *On the Life in Christ*, VI, PG 150. 660.

anniversary was appropriately celebrated by the Christian world over this year, “becomes like His own creature,” being incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary “in order to render human beings into gods.”

The Apolytikion (Dismissal Hymn) for Christmas declares that the Nativity of Christ “has shone to the world the Light of knowledge” and revealed “the transcendent and universal meaning” of life and history, namely the truth that only the Christian faith can fully satisfy the deeper pursuit of the mind and thirst of the heart, that “salvation is found in no one else”⁴ but Christ. Thenceforth, the “knowledge” that “puffs up”⁵ is being judged by the words of the Lord, that “You will come to know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.”⁶

The suprarational event of the Incarnation is experienced and repeated spiritually in the life of the faithful, who love the epiphany of the Savior Christ. As St. Maximus the Confessor writes: “The Word of God was once born in the flesh, but desires always to be born in the spirit out of love for those who desire it.”⁷ In this sense, the Feast of the Nativity, of the divine Incarnation and the deification of humankind by grace, does not direct us to an event of the past, but guides us to the

⁴ Acts 4.12.

⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 8.1.

⁶ Jn 8.32.

⁷ *Various Texts on Theology and the Divine Economy* X, 8, PG 90.1181.

“future city,”⁸ to the heavenly kingdom of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In a world, where the echo of war and noise of weapons prevail, the angelic “peace in the world” is resounded and the Lord’s voice blesses “the peacemakers” while His Holy Church prays during the Divine Liturgy “for the peace from above” and “for the peace of the whole world.” Genuine faith in the living God strengthens our struggle for peace and righteousness, even when we are faced with humanly insurmountable impediments. As the Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church—whose tenth anniversary we shall celebrate next year—inspiringly states: “the oil of religious experience must be used to heal wounds and not to rekindle the fire of military conflicts.”⁹

The Gospel of peace especially concerns us Christians. We consider it impermissible to remain indifferent before the fragmentation of Christendom, particularly when this attitude is accompanied by fundamentalism and explicit rejection of inter-Christian dialogue that ultimately aims at transcending division and achieving unity. The obligation of striving for Christian unity is non-negotiable. The responsibility to continue the efforts of the pioneers of

⁸ Heb. 13.14.

⁹ Paragraph 4.

the Ecumenical Movement along with the justification of their vision and labor rest on the younger generation of Christians.

We belong to Christ, who is “our peace”¹⁰ and “the fulfilment of joy” in our life, the “goodwill” that springs from the conviction that “the truth has arrived” and “the shadow has passed,” that love is stronger than hatred and life stronger than death, that evil does not have the final word in the life of the world, which is directed by Christ, who is “the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.”¹¹ This faith must shine and be revealed in the way we honor Christmas and the other feasts of the Church. The joyous celebration of the faithful should bear witness to the transformative power of our faith in Christ. It should be a time of goodwill and spiritual delight, the experience of that ineffable “great joy”¹² that is “synonymous with the Gospel.”

Most honorable Brothers and beloved children,

In 2026, the Holy Great Church of Christ will honor the completion of 1400 years since August 7, 626, when the Akathist Hymn was chanted “upstanding” during the Sacred Vigil in the Church of Panagia Vlachernae, as an expression of gratitude to the All-Holy Mother of God, for the safeguarding of the City of Constantinople from

¹⁰ Eph. 2.14.

¹¹ Heb. 13.8.

¹² Cf. Lk 2.10.

the attack of hostile forces. On the occasion of this historic milestone, the 2026 Yearbook of the Ecumenical Patriarchate will be dedicated to the commemoration of this important event for our tradition and identity, which are inseparably and profoundly associated with the honor reserved for our ever-blessed and most pure Mother of God, the defender and protector of our people.

In this spirit, as we bow before Mary who holds the infant Jesus in her arms, and as we worship the Divine Word who assumed our form, we wish upon all of you a blessed Holy Twelvetide, and a fruitful in good deeds and filled with divine gifts new year of the Lord's favor, to Whom belong all glory, honor and worship, now and always, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Christmas 2025

+Bartholomew of Constantinople

Your fervent suppliant of all before God

To be read in churches after the Gospel Reading during the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of Christmas

ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΙΚΗ ΑΠΟΔΕΙΞΗ
ΓΙΑ ΤΑ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΓΕΝΝΑ

+ Β Α Ρ Θ Ο Λ Ο Μ Α Ι Ο Σ
ΕΛΕΩι ΘΕΟΥ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΟΣ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥΠΟΛΕΩΣ – ΝΕΑΣ
ΡΩΜΗΣ
ΚΑΙ ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΚΟΣ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΗΣ
ΣΕ ΟΛΟ ΤΟ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑ ΤΗΣ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣ
ΧΑΡΗ, ΕΛΕΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΙΡΗΝΗ
ΑΠΟ ΤΟΝ ΓΕΝΝΗΘΕΝΤΑ ΣΤΗ ΒΗΘΛΕΕΜ ΣΩΤΗΡΑ ΧΡΙΣΤΟ

Τιμιώτατοι ἄδελφοὶ Ἱεράρχες καὶ τέκνα ἐν Κυρίῳ εὐλογημένα,

Ἀφοῦ ἀξιωθήκαμε καὶ πάλι νὰ φθάσουμε στὴ μεγάλη ἐορτὴ τῆς κατὰ σάρκα Γέννησης τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ Λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ, δοξολογοῦμε τὴν «ἄφραστη καὶ ἀκατάληπτη συγκατάβαση» τοῦ Σωτῆρος τοῦ γένους τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ Λυτρωτῆ ἀπάσης τῆς κτίσεως ἀπὸ τὴ φθορᾶ, ἀναβοῶντας μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς Ἀγγέλους «Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις Θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνῃ, ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκία»¹.

Ὁ Χριστὸς ἀποκαλύφθηκε ὡς «Ἐμμανουήλ»², ὡς «Θεὸς μεθ' ἡμῶν» καὶ «ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν», ὡς Θεὸς πλησίον ἐνὸς ἐκάστου ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς, ὡς «καὶ πιὸ κοντὰ μας ἀκόμα καὶ ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς τοὺς ἰδίους»³. Ὁ «ὁμοούσιος» τῷ Θεῷ Πατρί προαιώνιος Λόγος, καθὼς δογματίσει ἡ Πρώτη Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδος στὴ Νίκαια, τῆς ὁποίας ἡ χιλιοστὴ ἐπτακοσιοστὴ ἐπέτειος ἀπὸ τῆς συγκλήσεως τιμήθηκε ὅπως ἔπρεπε ἀπὸ τὸν χριστιανικὸ κόσμον κατὰ τὸ παρελθὸν ἔτος, «ὁμοιώνεται μὲ τὸ ἴδιο τὸ δημιουργημά του», ἀφοῦ σαρκώθηκε ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς Παρθένου, «γιά νὰ κάνει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους θεούς».

Τὸ Ἀπολυτίκιον τῶν Χριστουγέννων διακηρύσσει ὅτι ἡ Γέννησις τοῦ Χριστοῦ «ἀνέτειλε τῷ κόσμῳ τὸ φῶς τὸ τῆς γνώσεως», ἀποκάλυψε τὸ «ὑπερβατικὸ καὶ καθολικὸ νόημα» τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τῆς ἱστορίας, τὴν ἀλήθεια, ὅτι μόνον ἡ χριστιανικὴ πίστις μπορεῖ νὰ ἱκανοποιήσῃ πλήρως τὶς βαθύτερες ἀναζητήσεις τοῦ νοῦ καὶ τὴ δίψα τῆς καρδίας, ὅτι «ἡ σωτηρία δὲν ὑπάρχει σὲ κανέναν ἄλλο»⁴ παρὰ μόνον στὸ

¹ Λουκ. β', 14.

² Ματθ. α', 23.

³ Νικολάου Καβάσιλα, *Περὶ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῆς*, ΣΤ', PG 150, 660.

⁴ Πράξ. δ', 12.

Χριστό. Ἐκτοτε, «ἡ γνῶσις», ἡ ὁποία «φέρει ὑπερηφάνεια»⁵, κρίνεται με βάση τὰ λόγια τοῦ Κυρίου «Γνωρίστε τὴν ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια θὰ σᾶς ἐλευθερώσει»⁶.

Τὸ ὑπέρολογο γεγονός τῆς Ἑνσαρκώσεως βιώνεται καὶ ἐπαναλαμβάνεται πνευματικὰ στὴ ζωὴ τῶν πιστῶν, ἐκείνων ποὺ ἀγαποῦν τὴν ἐμβάνιση τοῦ Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ. Ὅπως γράφει ὁ Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητής, «Ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ γεννήθηκε μία φορὰ κατὰ σάρκα, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ φιλανθρωπία γεννιέται πάντοτε κατὰ πνεῦμα μετὰ τὴ θέλησή του γιὰ χάρις ὅσων τὸ ἐπιθυμοῦν»⁷. Μετὰ τὴν ἔννοια αὐτή, ὁ ἐορτασμός τῶν Χριστουγέννων, τῆς Σαρκώσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆς κατὰ χάρις θέωσης τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, δὲν μᾶς στρέφει πρὸς ἓνα γεγονός τοῦ παρελθόντος, ἀλλὰ μᾶς κατευθύνει πρὸς τὴν «μέλλουσα πόλη»⁸, πρὸς τὴν αἰώνια Βασιλεία τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Σὲ ἓνα κόσμος, ὅπου ἡχοῦν οἱ πολεμικὲς ἰαχὲς καὶ ἡ κλαγγὴ τῶν ὅπλων, διασαλπίζεται τὸ ἀγγελικὸ μήνυμα «ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη», ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ Κυρίου μακαρίζει τοὺς «εἰρηνοποιούς» καὶ ἡ Ἁγία Ἐκκλησία του δέεται στὴ Θεία Λειτουργία «ὑπὲρ τῆς ἁνωθεν εἰρήνης» καὶ «ὑπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου». Ἡ γνήσια πίστις σὲ ζωντανὸ Θεὸ ἐνδυναμώνει τὸν ἀγῶνα γιὰ τὴν εἰρήνη καὶ τὴ δικαιοσύνη, ἀκόμη καὶ ὅταν αὐτὸς βρίσκεται ἐνώπιον ἀνυπερβλήτων, κατ' ἀνθρώπον, ἐμποδίων. Ὅπως μετὰ Θεία ἔμπνευση δηλώνεται στὸ Μήνυμα τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Μεγάλης Συνόδου τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας, τὴν πρώτη δεκαετηρίδα τῆς ὁποίας θὰ ἐορτάσουμε κατὰ τὸ ἐπερχόμενο ἔτος, «τὸ λάδι τοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ βιώματος πρέπει νὰ χρησιμοποιεῖται γιὰ νὰ ἐπουλῶναι πληγὲς καὶ ὄχι γιὰ νὰ ἀναζωπυρῶναι τὴ φωτιὰ τῶν πολεμικῶν συρράξεων»⁹.

Τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον τῆς εἰρήνης ἀφορᾷ ἐξόχως ἐμᾶς τοὺς Χριστιανούς. Θεωροῦμε ἀνεπίτρεπτη τὴν ἀδιαφορία γιὰ τὴ διάσπαση τῆς Χριστιανοσύνης, ἰδίως ὅταν αὐτὴ συνοδεύεται ἀπὸ φονταμενταλισμὸ καὶ ρητὴ ἀπόρριψη τῶν διαχριστιανικῶν διαλόγων, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔχουν τελικὸ σκοπὸ τὴν ὑπέρβαση τῆς διαιρέσεως καὶ τὴν ἐπίτευξη τῆς ἐνότητας. Τὸ χρέος τοῦ ἀγῶνα γιὰ τὴ χριστιανικὴ ἐνότητα εἶναι ἀδιαπραγμάτευτο. Στὴ νέα γενιὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀνήκει ἡ εὐθύνη τῆς συνεχίσεως τῶν προσπαθειῶν τῶν πρωτεργατῶν τῆς Οἰκουμενικῆς Κινήσεως καὶ τῆς δικαιώσεως τῶν ὁραμάτων καὶ τῶν μόχθων τους.

Ἀνήκουμε στὸ Χριστό, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι «ἡ εἰρήνη μας»¹⁰ καὶ ἡ «ὀλοκληρωμένη χαρὰ» στὴ ζωὴ μας, ἡ «εὐδοκία» ποὺ πηγάζει ἀπὸ τὴ βεβαιότητα ὅτι «ἦρθε ἡ ἀλήθεια» καὶ «πέρασε ἡ σκιά», ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη εἶναι πιὸ ἰσχυρὴ ἀπὸ τὸ μῖσος καὶ ἡ ζωὴ πιὸ ἰσχυρὴ ἀπὸ τὸ θάνατο, ὅτι τὸ κακὸ δὲν ἔχει τὸν τελευταῖο λόγον στὴ ζωὴ τοῦ

⁵ Πρβλ. Α΄ Κορ. η΄, 1.

⁶ Ἰωάν, η΄, 32.

⁷ Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητοῦ, *Κεφάλαια διάφορα θεολογικά τε καὶ οἰκονομικά*, Ι, η΄, PG 90, 1181.

⁸ Ἐβρ. ιγ΄, 14.

⁹ Μήνυμα τῆς Ἁγίας καὶ Μεγάλης Συνόδου τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας πρὸς τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο λαὸ καὶ κάθε ἄνθρωπο καλῆς θελήσεως, § 4.

¹⁰ Ἐφεσ. β΄, 14.

κόσμου, τὴ ὁποία κατευθύνει ὁ Χριστός, ὁ «χθὲς καὶ σήμερον ὁ ἴδιος καὶ τοὺς αἰῶνες»¹¹. Αὐτὴ ἡ πίστις πρέπει νὰ διαλάμπει καὶ νὰ ἀποκαλύπτεται στὸν τρόπο μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο τιμοῦμε τὰ Χριστούγεννα καὶ τὶς ἄλλες ἐκκλησιαστικὲς ἐορτές. Ὁ ἐορτασμός ἐκ μέρους τῶν πιστῶν ποὺ τέρπει τὸ Θεὸ ὀφείλει νὰ μαρτυρεῖ τὴ μεταμορφωτικὴ δύναμις τῆς πίστεως στὸ Χριστὸ γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ μας, νὰ εἶναι καιρὸς εὐδοκίας καὶ πνευματικῆς εὐφροσύνης, βιώσεως ἐκείνης τῆς ἀνεκκλήτη «μεγάλης χαρᾶς»¹², ἡ ὁποία εἶναι «συνώνυμος τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου».

Ἰερώτατοι καὶ Θεοφιλέστατοι ἀδελφοὶ καὶ ἀγαπητὰ τέκνα,

Κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 2026, ἡ Ἁγία τοῦ Χριστοῦ Μεγάλη Ἐκκλησία τιμᾷ τὴ συμπλήρωση 1400 ἐτῶν ἀπὸ τῆς 7^{ης} Αὐγούστου 626, ὅταν ἐψάλη «ὀρθοστάδην» ὁ Ἀκάθιστος Ὑμνος, κατὰ τὴν Ἱερὴ Ἀγρυπνία στὸν Ἱερὸ Ναὸ τῆς Παναγίας Βλαχερνῶν, σὲ ἔκφραση εὐγνωμοσύνης πρὸς τὴν Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο, γιὰ τὴ διάσωση τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιδρομὴ ἐχθρῶν δυσμενῶν. Μὲ τὴν ἱστορικὴ αὐτὴ ἐπέτειο, ἡ Ἐπετηρίδα τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριαρχείου τοῦ ἔτους 2026 ἀφιερώνεται στὴν ἀνάμνηση τοῦ σημαντικοῦ αὐτοῦ γεγονότος γιὰ τὴν παράδοσιν καὶ τὴν ταυτότητά μας, οἱ ὁποῖες εἶναι ἀδιάσπαστα καὶ βαθεῖα συνυφασμένες μὲ τὴν τιμὴ πρὸς τὴν ἀειμακάριστη καὶ παναμώμητη Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ μας καὶ Ὑπέρμαχο Στρατηγὸ τοῦ Γένους.

Στὸ πνεῦμα αὐτό, κλίνοντας τὸ γόνυ ἐνώπιον τῆς Βρεφοκρατούσας Μαριὰμ καὶ προσκυνώντας τὸν Θεὸ Λόγο ποὺ ἀνέλαβε τὴ δική μας μορφὴ, εὐχόμεστε σὲ ὅλους σας εὐλογημένο τὸ Ἅγιο Δωδεκαήμερο, καλλίκαρπο δὲ σὲ ἔργα ἀγαθὰ καὶ πλήρη θείων δωρημάτων τὸ νέο ἔτος τῆς χρηστότητας τοῦ Κυρίου, στὸν ὁποῖο πρέπει κάθε δόξα, τιμὴ καὶ προσκύνηση, νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ σὲ ὅλους τοὺς αἰῶνες. Ἀμήν!

Χριστούγεννα 2025

† ὁ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως
διάπυρος πρὸς Θεὸ εὐχέτης ὅλων
σας.

¹¹ Ἐβρ. ιγ', 8.

¹² Πρβλ. Λουκ. β', 10.