



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF SWEDEN AND ALL SCANDINAVIA

Christmas 2014

Dearly beloved Stewards & Friends of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Sweden,

*Christ is born glorify Him now, Christ comes from heaven let us meet Him now.
Christ is on the earth, be you exalted. O all the earth sing unto the Lord, and sing
praises in gladness, O you people, for He has been glorified.*

I greet you with these beautiful words from St. Gregory the Theologian's Christmas homily - converted to hymns by Cosmas the melodist – which are chanted in Orthodox Churches across the world, in praise of the Incarnate Logos, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Truly, the Nativity of our Lord according to the Flesh stands as a source of doxology and a point of reference for all humanity. It stands as the historical moment that changed the course of human history. Through the historically documented birth of Jesus Christ, mankind and the entire earth received God in the flesh walking among them, and through His divine dispensation, everyone and everything has been sanctified through the divine grace of our Lord, who deigned to become an organic part of the human race.

The sentiments of the Christmas holiday are tangible in every aspect of our life. The cosmos¹ becomes truly adorned from the beautiful sounds of our hymns to the Savior, which are true masterpieces of Greek poetry. Our eyes delight in the festive decorations that adorn our homes, as families gather together in celebration. For a few peaceful hours, time stops and our mind travels to the small cave in Bethlehem, where God chose to display His good will to the human race. Despite the prevalence of materialism over spirituality evident throughout much of modern society, the meaning of Christmas continues to radiate brilliantly, as the *“intelligible sun of Righteousness”*² continues to shine the light of knowledge upon all those seeking truth.

Our Church prepares the faithful for the great mystery of Christ's Nativity, through the beauty of its hymns. The hymn *“Today, the Virgin comes to the cave, to give birth in secret to the pre-eternal Logos...”* is exuberantly chanted by all those seeking to accept into their hearts, *“the pre-eternal God, who desired to be seen as a small child.”*

The **“Dawn of Dawns”** appears again to shine light upon mankind. St. John Chrysostom declares *“look how the earth has mimicked the heavens. It competes and sends forth the sun who is before the day star. This illumination shines radiantly throughout the universe and is*

¹ Cosmos = from the Greek word “to adorn, or beautify.” The Greeks considered the world to be an expression of divine beauty.

² Church reference to Jesus Christ.

without night; it is a radiant dawn.” With the birth of Jesus Christ - God and Man in one - a new day dawns for humanity, which passes from the darkness of individual survival to the light of the knowledge of God. Our existence ceases to be determined by our corruptible biological existence and is henceforth tied to our personal relationship with the pre-eternal Logos of the Father.

The pursuit of Reason (Logic < Logos) was (and continues to be for all those uninitiated) the sole purpose of man. Always and everywhere, man seeks to place the irrationality of life inside a logical framework; to explain life logically. The futility of such a pursuit is a foregone conclusion, and can only hold tragedy for all those who seek freedom from the chains of worldly existence through man-made Reason. This much desired freedom and disassociation of man from the demands of Nature is brought about solely through the Logos of God³. The personal relations that the son of the Virgin call us to form with Him, and His promise to accompany us in our journey through life, allows us to see God. Christ the Incarnate Logos become our source of Logic – the purpose and reason for Life. We truly live and commune with each other and in God, when Christ is the center of our Reason.

The beginning of man’s conversion from an individual by nature to a person with the capacity to exist eternally is found in our Lord’s Nativity. Thanks to Him, who partakes of Divine and Human nature, we have the capacity to surpass the boundaries of our nature, through our relationship with Him, the source of Life.

The *metropolis of feasts*, as St. John Chrysostom calls Christmas, took place in a quiet cave in Bethlehem, far from rustling and bustling, unknown to almost everyone at the time⁴. For this reason, we should not be drawn away by lesser things. Presents, food and vacations are not at the heart of the essence of Christmas. Christ is our light in darkness, which is why we chant to Him ... *to worship you the sun of Righteousness*. St. John Chrysostom leaves us the following thought: “Now the seed is sown in the land of grace and a fruitful ear of wheat has sprouted bearing the knowledge of God ... The Lord has descended to renew the universe and make the unseemly world seemly once again from above. I wish this orderly beauty upon you; a beauty that the Lord who beautifies all and makes them orderly grants to each of us who opens our heart to Him to illuminate and fill with grace.”

Let us consider the meaning of the feast of the Nativity and give precedence to our relationship with Christ the Savior. “The Son is without mother from above, and without father as a child. It is not man who reached God, but God who took on man ... in the yarn of the womb, Christ has woven the garment of divinity, and dressed the world in the raiment of incorruptibility,” St. John Chrysostom teaches us in “fear and awe,” but in “surprise and boundless joy” as well. For this reason, the golden-tongued Church Father stands before the mystery bedazzled saying “the only thing I find myself able to say is ‘Oh depth of God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge.’” Let us gather all together to celebrate His entry into the world... ***“We worship your Birth, Christ. Show us your Epiphany as well!”***

I wish you and your families a blessed Christmas and a happy and healthy new year!

+ Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden

³ “Wherever God wills, the order of nature is defeated.” Christmas Matins.

⁴ “It is worthy to honor in silence that which is above nature – not as something that is fleeting but as something that is secret,” explains St. John Chrysostom, adding that “I have learned to honor in silence the way of the Nativity.” These are weighty words from Orthodoxy’s greatest orator.