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Archiepiscopal Encyclical on the Feast of Christmas

December 25, 2022

Behold, the virgin will conceive in the womb and bear a son, and they will call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted means "God is with us" (Gospel Reading of the Matins of Christmas).

Unto the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Pious Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, Presidents and Members of Parish Councils, Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Members of Leadership 100, the Day and Afternoon Schools, Philoptochos Societies, the Youth, Greek Orthodox Organizations, and the entirety of the Christ-named Plenitude of the Holy Archdiocese of America:

Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Truly, God is with us! This is the great truth of Christmas for the entire human family — namely, that God has entered our history, so as to share it with us and redeem it in order to reveal His purposes in us. The Nativity in the flesh of our Savior in Bethlehem is a universally recognized event among all the world's cultures, even if such recognition sometimes misses the point. The holy days of celebrating the Birth of the Savior have become overrun with consumerist agendas, and many feel that the sanctity of the Feast has been diminished. But the holiness of the Nativity can never wane, because the Sun of Righteousness, Who has arisen upon the world, will never set again. Therefore, if a spirit of generosity is animated in this season even among unbelievers, we must give thanks. For the infusion of faith that we bring to the Feast of Christmas is a necessary tonic to the wave of gift-giving that oftentimes forgets the greatest Gift of all, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed, my beloved Christians, it is from our faith in the One Who was Born in a Cave and Laid in a Manger for our salvation that the full meaning of Christmas is manifest. The Nativity in the little town of Bethlehem is perhaps the most generous act that has ever



happened in the history of the world. God humbled himself, as Saint Paul says in Philippians: “He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, born in the likeness of humankind. Being found in human configuration, He humbled Himself, became obedient unto death, even death by the cross” (Phil. 2:7-8).

God emptied Himself so that we might be filled, made complete and whole. God offers Himself to the exhaustive experience of humankind (save sin), even unto death, so that we might have a path to life and, indeed, to life eternal. The gift of our Lord to creation reveals a bounty that humankind is still trying to comprehend. In fact, it is the ministry of the Church to demonstrate this tremendous love of God for all His creation in everything we say and do.

Therefore, my beloved Christians, let us cry out: “Χριστὸς Γεννᾶται! Δοξάσατε! Christ is Born! Glorify Him!” with expectant hearts and open minds. Let us renew our generosity toward others in this season of giving, and accept the best that others can offer, inspired by their experience of the New-Born Babe of Bethlehem.

Χριστὸς Γεννᾶται! Δοξάσατε!

+ ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America