

CHRISTMAS ENCYCLICAL 2014

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' Luke 2:15

Dearly Beloved,

Two millennia have passed since the day when simple shepherds encountered the newborn Jesus in Bethlehem. In this season of hope, we too have been invited to go to Bethlehem and find the Christ in a manger. Amid the decorations and celebrations, the opportunity to encounter the living God is before us once again.

We encounter Christ in the Holy Scripture. We read the story of His Nativity in the Gospels of Saint Matthew and Saint Luke. We read the prophecies of His arrival in the Old Testament where we encounter the hopes of a people for a Savior, and their fulfillment in the birth of Jesus. In the scriptures, we see how God Himself appears on earth so that humanity may have fellowship with the Most High God. And we read His name is Emmanuel, which means, **"God with us"** Matthew 1:23.

We meet the newborn Christ in our churches, joining with our fellow parishioners and community in the liturgical services of this Festival. The story of Nativity will be repeated in the hymns and the readings. But more than tell us a familiar story, we will hear the meaning of the Feast: Christ is born and heaven and earth are united. As Saint Athanasios the Great said, "God became human so that humans could become God." In the Liturgy, we meet Christ most directly and personally in the Holy Eucharist, receiving Him for the salvation of our souls and bodies. We encounter the newborn Christ when we extend ourselves beyond ourselves and reach out to those in need through our service and philanthropy. Who among us has not been moved by the ongoing suffering of Christians in the Middle East, Africa and Asia? Who among us has not been troubled by the injustice and inequality in our society? These are opportunities for each of us to search our souls and extend our assistance to the voiceless, the powerless, and the oppressed. We encounter Christ in our families and loved ones, especially the encounter of the young and the old. As we prepare for the Feast in our homes, use these moments to share experiences and memories, and listen to one another's hopes and joys. The greatest gift we can give to others in these days is the gift of our time and presence.

One of the most beautiful of Christmas carols is "O Come, All Ye Faithful". The lyrics invite us to be like the shepherds and go to the place where Christ is encountered so that we may adore Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Bethlehem is always before us, in our homes, in our neighborhoods, and in our churches. In these joyous days of Christmas, seek Bethlehem and encounter the newborn King.

May the Love and Grace of our Savior, be with you and your loved ones this Holy Season of Nativity.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

With Love in Our Incarnate Lord,
+ **GERASIMOS**, Metropolitan of San Francisco

December 25, 2014



HOLY CROSS GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH



METROPOLIS OF
SAN FRANCISCO

THE NATIVITY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. December 25, 2014

WELCOME VISITORS!

We are pleased that you have joined us today. **In order to receive Holy Communion in the Greek Orthodox Church, one must be Baptized and/or Chrismated in the Christian Orthodox Faith.** The Orthodox Church understands Holy Communion as a sign of unity. If you are interested in learning more about Christian Orthodoxy, please contact our Parish Priest, Father Andreas. Communicants should prepare themselves through fasting, prayer and confession. All Christians are invited to come forward at the dismissal of the Divine Liturgy to receive the holy bread, called *Antidoron*, which is offered to everyone as a blessing when they leave.

Rev. Presbyter Andreas MacLean, *Ieratikos Proistamenos* (Parish Priest)

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Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church is a parish of the Holy Metropolis of San Francisco, in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, an eparchy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. Our hierarch is His Eminence the Most Reverend GERASIMOS, Metropolitan of San Francisco.

TROPARIA AND READINGS

VESPERAL DIVINE LITURGY

Apostolic Reading: St. Paul's Letter to Hebrews 1:1-12

IN MANY AND VARIOUS WAYS God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs. For to what angel did God ever say, "Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." Of the angels he says, "Who makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire." But of the Son he says, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades." And, "Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment, like a mantle thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years will never end."

Holy Gospel Reading: Gospel according to St. Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

December 25, 2014

TROPARIA AND READINGS

CHRISTMAS DAY DIVINE LITURGY

Apolytikion for the Nativity 4th Mode

Your nativity, O Christ our God, has caused the light of knowledge to rise upon the world. For therein the worshippers of the stars were by a star instructed to worship You, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know You as Orient from on high. Glory to You, O Lord.

Kontakion of the Nativity 3rd Mode

On this day the Virgin gives * birth to the Super-essential. * To the Unapproachable, * earth is providing the grotto. * Angels sing and with the shepherds offer up glory. * Following a star the Magi are still proceeding. * He was born for our salvation, a newborn Child, the pre-eternal God.

Prokeimenon: Plagal 4th Mode. Psalm 55.

Let all the earth worship You and sing to You; let them sing to Your name.

Στιχ: *Shout to God, all the earth.*

Apostolic Reading: St. Paul's Letter to Galatians 4:4-7

BRETHREN, when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then also an heir of God through Christ.

Alleluarion: 1st Mode. Psalms 18.

Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

Στιχ 1: The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament shows the creation of His hands.

Στιχ 2: Day to day utters speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.

Holy Gospel Reading: Gospel according to St. Matthew 2:1-12

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'" Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.