



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Nativity Fast 2019

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy

Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council, Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Sisterhood, Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools, Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Communities of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved,

As we prepare for the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, we are given the opportunity to reflect upon the meaning of His birth. This contemplation should not just take place through the course of our everyday lives, but we must endeavor to do so by preparing ourselves both spiritually and physically. In the Kathismata of the Sunday prior to the Nativity we hear in our Orthodox hymnology a hymn which commands us saying, *“Prepare yourself, O Bethlehem, for Eden is opened unto all.”* Since we are partakers in the events at Bethlehem, we too are being called to prepare ourselves. Thus, we prepare ourselves by ensuring that we attend divine services, by putting an even greater emphasis on personal prayer, by fasting as a means help us focus on the feast of the Nativity, and by recognizing the person in Christ is each other.

There is no feast without fasting and there is no fasting without a feast. But in order to properly partake in the Nativity feast, we must first focus on this fast. The form of fasting, however, is not merely just what we eat, but also includes fasting from negative thoughts. Fasting includes not just that which goes into our mouths, but that which comes forth from our mouths, in other words, being more attentive to our words. Fasting includes almsgiving and being more generous to those less fortunate than ourselves. This is one of the most important aspects of fasting because in doing so we are encouraged to look at each person as the image of Christ.

This point is of great significance because Christ became man so that all of the human person might be saved, both soul and body. Though the body may one day die, it is reunited with the soul at the end of time and experiences eternity in this unified state. Thus, the birth of Christ constitutes for us both the beginning of our salvation, since Christ came to save us through His earthly life, His ministry, His crucifixion, and His resurrection, and also the confirmation that the body has worth. It is not just a shell or the receptacle for our soul. It is an

inherent part of our Orthodox Christian theology that the body together with the soul has value since it is the locus of our prayer.

My beloved in the Lord, even if you cannot attend every Divine Service or follow every fasting rule, I ask that you simply push yourselves to do a little more. Attend more services than you normally do. Try to abstain from certain foods in an effort to fast. Endeavor to pray more and to guard your thoughts and words more carefully. Make a greater effort in helping your neighbor who is in need. If you do these things, you will have successfully participated in the Nativity Fast and you will all the more be able to rejoice in the coming of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ whose incarnation sanctifies our souls and bodies. Praying that you all have a fruitful and blessed Nativity Fast, I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The word "Metropolitan" is written in a smaller, more compact script, while "Evangelos" is written in a larger, more prominent script. The signature is centered on the page.

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