

To the Reverend Clergy, Monastics & Deacons, Parish Council Members, Philoptochos Members & Archons, our beloved youth, and all the faithful of the Metropolis of Atlanta:

My beloved in our Incarnate Lord,

We are blessed to celebrate once more that great feast of the Nativity, when the Son of God demonstrated His love for humankind by taking on our flesh, consenting to be born in a manger.

This Nativity, because of the fear and uncertainty that surrounds the COVID-19 pandemic, not all of us will gather in church, and neither will we see, in person, the expressions of our loved ones when gifts are opened. However, I ask you not to dwell in sadness, but to meditate on the truth of the Nativity. Though we remember the bright star that guided the Magi, we also know that our Lord was born into a stable meant for animals, because there was no other room in Bethlehem. Though the angels sing, *“Δόξα ἐν ὑψίστοις θεῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς εἰρήνη ἐν ἀνθρώποις εὐδοκίας! Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, good will toward men!”* (Luke 2:14), Herod does not hear the heavenly message, as he seeks to kill the Messiah.



Our society would prefer to focus only on the happy parts of what it knows as Christmas, and while this happiness is real, it does not mean that we should feel despair at the changes to this festive day. Foretelling Christ’s coming, the Prophet Isaiah wrote, *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.”* (Isaiah 9:2) While this Christmas will be different, perhaps our current struggle gives us the perfect means to experience it as it was in the beginning: the light of a child coming into the world, to lift sadness and hopelessness.

Therefore, I urge us to pray unceasingly; for it is by opening our hearts to God that we will experience, in this somber year, the grace that greeted the poor shepherds of Bethlehem. May we pray for all, young and old; may we pray for those who are poor, and for those who are helpless; may we pray for those who are hungry, and for those who are cold; may we pray for those who are oppressed, and for those who are exploited & abused; may we pray for those who are sick, whether in body or in mind, and for those who are isolated; may we pray for those who are unloved, and for those who are lonely; may we pray for those who mourn, as well as for those souls who have fallen asleep in the Lord, in the expectation of eternal life with Him.

My wish, wherever you may be, and with whomever you celebrate this Nativity season, is that you hold the gifts of shelter, safety, and love closer than ever before. In counting our blessings instead of what we miss, may we offer even more fervent Thanksgiving to our Creator for all His blessings, but especially for sending us His Son, so that we may be reconciled with Him for all eternity.

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year, Καλά Χριστούγεννα και Καλή χρονιά, I remain,

Yours with paternal love and blessings in the Incarnate Christ,

+ **ALEXIOS**
Metropolitan of Atlanta