



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Feast of the Annunciation 2018

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy

Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 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 Greek Orthodox Communities of our Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

“The fetters of the curse once laid on our forefather now are loosed. And so with all the world we cry out to you, ‘Rejoice, O Maiden full of grace’”

My Beloved in the Lord,

Today we are granted the continual gift of salvation as we experience the unsurpassing love of God for His creation as His eternal Divine Plan for humanity finds its initial revelation in the person of the Virgin Mary who answers an unequivocal “Yes” to God when she said to the Archangel Gabriel, *“Behold the handmaiden of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word”* (Luke 1:38). With these words, this young woman full of devote faith became the Theotokos, the one who bears God.

As with all blessings, the blessings of her eternal reward would not come without struggle. She would find herself making a journey with her betrothed, Joseph, while she was still yet pregnant. She would have to give birth to Christ in a cave due to there not being any place for her elsewhere. Her Son would be hunted by a maniacal king thus driving her family into exile. She would experience the joy of seeing her Son *“increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men”* (Luke 2:52). She would see her Son begin His ministry and eventually enter the city of Jerusalem with throngs of people exclaiming “Hosanna!” She would witness her Son and her Lord be delivered to Pontius Pilate before being crucified in a horrific manner and dying before her very eyes. The extraordinary blessing of bearing the Savior would mean that she would have an equally extraordinary struggle. In the end, however, she would also see her Son resurrected and ascend to heaven in glory.

Likewise, though God grants us bountiful blessings every day, we must also be prepared to struggle. This struggle helps to fortify our Orthodox Christian character and prepares us to worthily receive Christ Himself. The free-will choice of the Theotokos initiated the Divine Plan which would see humanity released from the bonds of slavery to death and have the

opportunity to enter into the Lord's Kingdom. Therefore, by exercising our free will and choosing to have a personal relationship with God, we follow the example of the Theotokos and, thus, move further away from the "sickness unto death" and closer to eternal life.

Finally, today also marks the 197th anniversary of Greek Independence Day. We celebrate the Greek people rising up against the Ottoman powers and declaring that we no longer would be subject to their tyrannical reign, cruel oppression, and religious persecution. The struggle of our forefathers to gain freedom was successful, however, it would be almost another century of struggle before the rest of Greece would become free and even to this day we still struggle for religious freedom for our Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. And in their enduring sacrifice, what began at the monastery of Agia Lavra as an alliance of clergy and laity, of fathers and sons, of mothers and daughters, of tradesmen and paupers, of farmers and sailors, of statesmen and students, of Greeks and Philhellenes, lives today two centuries later as the nation of Greece.

It is my fervent prayer that as we celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation, that we endeavor to learn the true meaning of Christian struggle as a means to overcome evil and come closer to God thus mirroring the example of the Theotokos. Furthermore, on this Greek Independence Day, it is my sincerest hope that we remember the struggle of our forefathers and the struggle of all persecuted people throughout the world as they pursue freedom and liberty.

ΖΗΤΩ Η ΕΛΛΑΣ! ΖΗΤΩ Η ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ!

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 larger, more prominent script than "Evangelos". The signature is centered on the page.

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