



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Annunciation to the Theotokos 2016

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 of the Youth Organizations, and all devout
Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our
Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

"From all kinds of perils free me so that unto you I may cry aloud: Rejoice, O unwedded Bride."
(Kontakion of the Feast)

My Beloved,

Mary, the Holy Virgin and Theotokos, is one of the best-known people in the Bible. She is the model of all Christians. She said yes to God and His entrance into time and History. She said yes to the vocation of her Son. She said yes to the extreme pain of watching her Son being arrested, questioned, tortured, accused, judged, crucified, put to death, and according to Saint Gregory Palamas, was the first to witness His glorious resurrection. She saw His ascension. She was among the disciples on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was sent to the Apostles. The Holy Gospel tells us her words: *"Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."* (Lk 1:38) She agreed to accept her unprecedented vocation, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies. *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Immanuel."* (Is 7:14) She stands at the crossroads of two eras.

Like her life, her death, too, was extraordinary. She was the first person to experience the reality of resurrection after Christ's Resurrection. Death is no longer an end or the beginning of eternal suffering. Death has become a true Pascha, a Passover between temporary life and eternal life. According to Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, the Theotokos recapitulated our sinful humanity – she is the new Eve, the new Ark of the Covenant, the new humanity, resurrected mankind in which faith in Christ transforms all things in the Kingdom which is to come. *"For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith."* (Adv. Haer., III, 22)

Today we celebrate the Holy and Glorious feast of the Annunciation, the beginning of the maternal calling of this mother-to-be, the Theotokos. The title of Theotokos, instituted by the Holy Fathers during the 3rd Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431), refers both to the mystery that links Christ, as God, and Mary, His Mother, in a profound spiritual way through the incarnation, but it also refers to a more personal destiny. In the whole history of humanity, no other individual can claim the unique vocation of the Mother of God. Not only does she share everything that we are by nature, but her glory also extends beyond the simple Jewish woman of her time that she was.

The faith of the Theotokos makes her our closest ally in life, sharing our pains, knowing our doubts, seeing our struggles. The Greek poet Kavafis once wrote: *"The sea has drawn a sailor into its abyss. His mother, unaware, but lest aught chance amiss, goes forth and lights a taper at the candle-stand of the Holy Mother, praying that soon he comes to land (...) the icon listens gravely and grieves to hear her yearn, knowing she yearns for one that shall no more return."* (Supplication) We pray to Her because we believe that Her proximity with Her Son, Jesus Christ, may help us to take part in God's grace and may protect us from *"wrath, danger and distress."*

This is also why the Theotokos is so closely linked to the History of our Greek Nation as its protector. The Greek heroes of the early 19th century followed the sense of freedom they inherited from their faith. For the first time in Southeastern Europe the word *"independence"* meant something. For the first time after 400 years, the Greek people fought for their freedom, initiating all movements of liberation within the Ottoman Empire, which would quickly become the *"sick man of Europe."* For, as Saint Paul wrote: *"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."* (2 Co 3:17) Today, let us pray for the Hellenic Republic and its people as a way of expressing our sincere solidarity and love, as they face a terrible humanitarian and financial crisis.

Praying that this Holy and Great Feast of the Annunciation to the Theotokos will bring all of you, my beloved, the blessings of Our Most Holy Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary, and exclaiming *MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS SAVE US*, 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 larger, more prominent script, and "Evangelos" is written below it in a similar style.

† EVANGELOS
Metropolitan of New Jersey