



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Annunciation to the Theotokos 2017

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

My Beloved,

*“Commemorating our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady,
the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, with all the saints, let us commend
ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.”*

Based on the experience of the first Christian communities, the Orthodox Church celebrates the Mother of God as the image of the spiritual fulfillment of our holy vocation. As Saint Athanasius the Great wrote: *“The Word was made flesh in order that we might be made gods... Just as the Lord, putting on the body, became a man, so also we men are both deified through his flesh, and henceforth inherit everlasting life.”* The flesh to which he referred is the human nature that Christ received from the Theotokos on the day of the Annunciation. God, the Creator of all things, humbled Himself to the point of limiting His absolute love to the freedom of one person, who was prepared over the centuries, according to the divine plan that led to Christ’s incarnation.

The Virgin Mary offered our own nature to the Logos. When Archangel Gabriel announced that she would become a mother, but without carnal knowledge of a man, he proclaimed the mystical encounter of earth and heaven, of eternity and time, of the spiritual and the material. The power of the love shown by God was so extreme that it was subjected to the “yes” of one person, because love is identical to freedom. Saint Paul defined it beautifully: *“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.”* (1 Corinthians 13:1-2)

The Holy feast of the Annunciation speaks to us in a spiritual way, showing us how to receive Christ in ourselves like the *Theotokos*. Obviously we are not blessed by the same grace that touched the Virgin Mary, but she exemplifies the mystery and vocation of every Christian:

to become the receivers of the Holy Spirit. Christ Himself taught us that in His response to a woman who said to him: *"Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts which nursed thee. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it"* (Luke 11:27-28) The word of God is not only a teaching, it is an encounter with Christ revealed through our life in the Church. Therefore, today, we are called to reflect on the *Theotokos'* behavior, which Saint Athanasius defined as: simplicity, joy, humility, combining all the virtues that we should acquire during our spiritual journey toward Christ's resurrection. The hymnography of the Church points us in the same direction: *"Today creation all exults with greatest joy, for the Archangel came and said to you, 'Rejoice! Blessed are you, all-blameless Maid, and undefiled and dignified.' And today the insolence of the serpent is mortified. 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."*

Highlighting the relationship of love and freedom, every year the feast of the Annunciation coincides with the celebration of the Independence for which our heroic ancestors struggled. The rise of a Nation as ancient as ours from the oppression of the Ottoman Empire, required inspiration, courage, resilience and the hope which faith alone can grant to overcome the state of slavery imposed by political power. We remember the ultimate sacrifice and the historic legacy of the men and women who offered their lives for our freedom, and humbled by these rich examples, we continue to celebrate their memory and the memory of their struggle for the love of freedom.

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 with a large initial 'M'.

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