



# GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

## ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Nativity Fast 2015

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,

My Beloved,

As we enter the Nativity Fast, a liturgical season of forty days of fasting and prayer leading us to the Holy Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I would like to begin this Encyclical with a call to vigilance (*nepsis*). Our society is one of intense stress and many different pressures, leading us to scatter our strength and our attention. In our frenetic age, the fast helps us to focus on what is truly important: acknowledging God's presence and His love for us. Acknowledgement requires vigilance. As you know, fasting is more than just abstaining from certain foods. We must engage our whole bodies in our search for God, offer Him our activities, humble through they are, and present to Him the little time that we spend in doing good. Vigilance is certainly one of the most important spiritual fruits we must acquire. Saint Paul himself connected vigilance and prayer "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving." (Col 4:2) It is not only a disposition of the soul, it is a path of virtue that places even our smallest actions and thoughts in the presence of God. The sign of the love of God should seal every one of our thoughts.

The Christian life is not limited to inside of our homes or the Church. At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the priest proclaims: "Let us depart in peace", and so we become the participants and the bearers of the peace of Christ. That means we must be vigilant wherever we go – at work, at school, or when spending time with family and friends. Saint Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia, a contemporary Saint of our Church, once wrote: "Work with vigilance, simply and naturally, without anxiety, with joy and happiness, with a good disposition. And the divine grace will come".

But vigilance is nothing if we forget to thank God for His many gifts. Without vigilance, we are like the Foolish Virgins of the Gospel, who had no oil to welcome Christ the Bridegroom. Without vigilance, we cannot recognize the signs of God's love, God's entrance into time, His work in our lives: the fact that the child that will soon be placed in a manger is the Son of God, although He takes the form of a small and vulnerable child. Without vigilance,

we would not welcome him with the joy of the shepherds, the respect of the Magi and the song of the angels: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Lk 2:14)

I wish you all a blessed Nativity fast, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." (1Pt 5:8-10)

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".

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