

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA**

Pastoral Letter of His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH

Nativity Fast of 2017

*I behold a strange and wonderful mystery: the cave a heaven, the Virgin a cherubic throne, and the manger a noble place in which
bath laid Christ the uncontained God. Let us, therefore, praise and magnify Him.*

Hiermos of the 9th Ode of the First Canon of Christ's Nativity

Beloved Brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, and Christ-loving Faithful of our God-protected Archdiocese, I greet you with love and joy as we begin this season of preparation for the Nativity in the Flesh of Our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Today, the Holy Church calls us to prepare for the feast by fasting, prayer, and repentance. The surrounding culture calls us to prepare as well – but by decorating, shopping, and hosting parties. One of the most common questions our clergy receive during this time of year is: Why are we in a period of repentance when the rest of the world is celebrating?

For a response to that often asked question, let us look to our divine services. During the Nativity Fast, the Church gives us the triumphant First Canon of Christ's Nativity to strengthen us and urge us on in our journey. In the hiermos of the ninth ode, we are struck by the contrasting images of the cave as a heaven, the Virgin as a cherubic throne, and the manger as a noble place. In the Incarnation of Our Lord, we see all of the *normal* categories of our fallen world turned upside down. His birth reveals power in humility, wealth in poverty, kingship in servitude, and divinity in lowliness.

To fully enter into the mystery of this great act of God, we also must put aside the *normal* of this world. Our society now offers us the fleeting worldly happiness that comes from overindulging at holiday parties and overspending on consumer goods. The Church now offers us the eternal heavenly joy that comes from freeing ourselves from our passions and turning our focus to the love of God and neighbor. In other words, the *normal* way of celebrating according to the world is through satiety, but the true way of celebrating according to the new creation ushered in by Christ's incarnation is through sobriety.

Beloved in Christ, let us strive during this sacred season to truly experience the *new normal* where there is actually *no contrast at all* in a cave truly becoming heaven, a Virgin truly becoming a cherubic throne, and a manger truly becoming noble. This paradoxical experience only comes through our finding joy in repenting, fulfillment in abstaining, and love for God and neighbor through self-emptying.

Praying for all of you to be granted a holy, pure, and grace-filled fast, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,

+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

358 Mountain Road, P.O. Box 5238, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
(201) 871-1355 T Archdiocese@antiochian.org (201) 871-7954 F