

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA

The Nativity Fast
The Feast of the Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple
and The Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
2020

Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

In a brief space of time, we celebrate three important events in the life of the Church. On the 15th of November we enter the Nativity fast in preparation for the coming feast of the Incarnation. A little more than a week later, we commemorate the Most Holy Theotokos' entrance into the Temple. Finally, on December 25 we joyfully celebrate the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we are spiritually attentive during this period, we derive much spiritual benefit.

The feast of the Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple is a spiritual foreshadowing of our entrance into the heavenly kingdom. This foreshadowing provides us with our own preparation for entrance into the heavenly realm.

We must be adorned properly with a spirit cleansed by a life of repentance and asceticism. We must be willing to struggle just as the 3-year-old infant had to make an effort to ascend 15 high steps in order to enter the temple. So should we, in order to enter the Heavenly Realm, make the effort to ascend the ladder of virtues, to labor at fasting and prayer. The Holy Virgin went up the steps by herself, without any help from others, but with the miraculous help of God. Even so should we, in our attempt to attain the Heavenly Realm, make the effort ourselves, but constantly asking God for help along the way.

Both the Nativity Fast and the Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple prepare us for the dawning of the Light, the feast of the Incarnation. However, if we are to properly receive that Light into our lives, we must be prepared. In the words of Saint Gregory of Sinai:

True reason, such as man had in the beginning, cannot be had or acquired by any man who has not first been purified and become passionless. Of purity we are deprived by unreasoning tendencies of the senses, and of passionlessness - by the corrupted state of the flesh. True reason belongs only to those who have become saints through acquiring purity. None who are wise in words have ever had pure reason, because from birth they let their reasoning powers be corrupted by unseemly thoughts. The sensory and prolix spirit of the wisdom of this age, so rich in words which create the illusion of great knowledge but actually fill one with the wildest thoughts, has its stronghold in this prolixity, which deprives man of essential wisdom, true contemplation and the knowledge of the one and indivisible. By knowledge of truth, understand the direct apprehension of truth through grace.

At the conclusion of every Divine Liturgy, we proclaim "We have seen the true Light!" That true Light is Christ Himself Who entered human history in the Incarnation. Saint John writes of this in his Gospel:

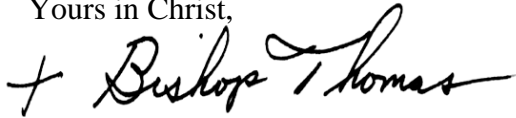
"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

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“In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (Jn 1:4-5). It is precisely this Light that is to illumine man so that he may participate in that divine life.

May we all eagerly anticipate the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ through spiritual preparation including prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and may the Most Holy Theotokos guide us and protect us as we journey toward the Light that is life.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)
Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

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