

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

Fast & Feast of the Nativity of our Lord - 2021

*O our Lord that cometh, O Emmanuel, enlighten us by thy radiance, banishing our sorrow.
Strengthen us by thy love for us, making us stand upright and firm in hope:
O our Lord that cometh, O Emmanuel.*

Beloved brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, God-fearing Monastics, and all my Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ our True God:

As the beginning of the Nativity Fast draws near, we look with eager anticipation for the incarnation of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. We do so, however, not by hastening the festivities of the Feast, but by clearing our minds from the distractions of this life through fasting, prayer and almsgiving. As St. John of Kronstadt writes,

“It is necessary for a Christian to fast, in order to clear his mind, to rouse and develop his feelings, and to stimulate his will to useful activity.”

St. Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome in the mid-fifth century, in his sermons On the Fast of the Ten Month (referring to the Nativity Fast), writes,

“When the Savior would instruct His disciples about the Advent of God’s Kingdom and the end of the world’s times, and teach His whole Church, in the person of the Apostles, He said, “Take heed lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting [excess in eating] and drunkenness, and care of this life.” (Luke 21:34)”

Taking heed is quite a challenge during the holiday season of the secular culture that surrounds us. Following quickly upon the heels of the Thanksgiving feast, the world us dives head long into excessive parties, shopping, and festive decorations for the entire 40 days that leads up to Christmas Day. It is as if they are not aware that this is to be a season of preparation for the birth of Christ, and that the celebration of the Nativity Feast will come in due time. But not so with you, beloved! The Holy Fathers of the Church have warned us with great clarity of the spiritual dangers of prematurely feasting before fasting, of attempting to celebrate the incarnation of the King of kings when we have not taken the time to prepare ourselves for his coming with purity of heart.

The Nativity Fast, as with all the Great Fasts of the Orthodox Church, are a great gift for us to receive in humility and repentance. These regular seasons are given to us throughout the year to aid us in our salvation, and to prepare our souls to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit during the Great Feasts of the Church.

During the Nativity Fast we refrain from consuming all meat, meat products, dairy products, fish, olive oil and alcoholic beverages – under the direction of our parish priest – joined together with increased prayer and almsgiving. As we apply this healing medicine of the Church to our sin-sick

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

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souls and bodies, we realize that fasting that is exclusively of the body does not go far enough. St. John Chrysostom writes,

“For the value of fasting consists not in abstinence from food, but in withdrawing from sinful practices; since he who limits his fasting only to an abstinence from meats, is one who especially disparages it.”

Instead, St. Tikhon’s of Zadonsk instructs,

“Let thy mind fast from vain thoughts; let thy memory fast from remembering evil; let thy will fast from evil desire; let thine eyes fast from bad sights: turn away thine eyes that thou mayest not see vanity; let thine ears fast from vile songs and slanderous whispers; let thy tongue fast from slander, condemnation, blasphemy, falsehood, deception, foul language and every idle and rotten word; let thy hands fast from killing and from stealing another’s goods; let thy legs fast from going to evil deeds: Turn away from evil, and do good.”

In this way, we can join together with the Mother of God, who in purity of heart responded to the announcement by the angel Gabriel of the coming birth of the Savior of the world, “Let it be to me according to thy word.” And with the heavenly hosts cry aloud, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”

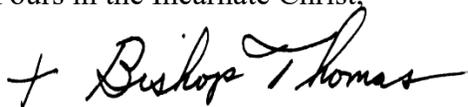
With these words from St. John Chrysostom’s Nativity Sermon, I pray for good strength for you and your family, and for all the faithful, for the Nativity Fast and Feast. That Christ would be born in us anew as we open ourselves to Him in purity of heart.

“Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been in planted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels.

Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle. He became Flesh. He did not become God. He was God. Wherefore He became flesh, so that He Whom heaven did not contain, a manger would this day receive. He was placed in a manger, so that He, by whom all things are nourished, may receive an infants food from His Virgin Mother. So, the Father of all ages, as an infant at the breast, nestles in the virginal arms, that the Magi may more easily see Him. Since this day the Magi too have come, and made a beginning of withstanding tyranny; and the heavens give glory, as the Lord is revealed by a star.

To Him, then, Who out of confusion has wrought a clear path, to Christ, to the Father, and to the Holy Spirit, we offer all praise, now and forever. Amen.

Yours in the Incarnate Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Thomas". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)

Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

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