



ΙΕΡΑ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ ΘΥΑΤΕΙΡΩΝ & Μ. ΒΡΕΤΑΝΙΑΣ  
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Archbishop's Encyclical to the Clergy, the Officers and the Devout Flock of the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain and Ireland.

CHRISTMAS

Dearly Beloved in the Lord,

Christmas is here again with the New Year and Theophany to offer joy and meaning to our lives. These days are days of joy and praise to the Triune God who sent forth His Only Begotten Son to the World to bring Divine Peace and Love to man, the beasts and the whole Creation. At the holy night of Christmas men and beasts across the creation took part and 'experienced the Event', as the hymnographer characteristically chants *'The star accompanied the Sun of Glory Christ and the Astrologists in Bethlehem and the angels are now informing the shepherds; so let us all the faithful join them'*. This strange Mystery is placed by the Evangelist Matthew at the start of the race of Abraham, *"the Book of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham"* (Matt. 1) in the eternal plans of God for the reconciliation of Humankind with His Creator. Luke the Evangelist places it as part of the history of his own time to stress the existential relationship that man and his life has with Godman Christ: *'In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child'* (Luke 2:1-5).

We are celebrating Christmas together with all other Christians-along with everyone else who are on the fringes of Christianity-and respectfully celebrate, praise the Reason of Joy and honour the day as the Day of the Rejoining of Heavens and Earth, as Paul writes characteristically: *'For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility'* (Eph. 2:14).

It was God's peace that the angels were chanting during the holy night of Christ's Birth *'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to those on whom his favour rests'* (Luke, 2:14). It is this peace *'that supersedes every mind'* that divine Paul preaches: *'He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near; For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit'* (Eph. 2:17-18).

Two thousand years have passed ever since *'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us'* (John, 1:14) and Godman Christ entered the history of Humankind but unfortunately, peace and reconciliation of Man and God's Creation remains a dream and divine expectation. During our days we are living through strife and war among the children of God for whom Christ came to the world as a common mortal, to associate with people and preach *'peace be with you all'*.

We must, brethren in Christ, underline the fact that God's peace is lived, becomes an act of life, placing implicit trust in God *'and to Jesus Christ who He sent forth'* to bring the Gospels, peace, and the love and mercy of the heavens. We should not however miss the fact that there is also much humanness in society, much kindness and Christian love, there is charity, cooperation and a constant effort for enhancement and dominance of the Gospel of the Peace and Love of God. For this reason, we are grateful to the Lord of Peace Christ for His love towards His creatures.

Christians across the World shall celebrate Christmas respectfully and each one of us shall offer his presents to the Newborn Christ, his humility, his sincere repentance and place his trust to Him, Who bent the heavens and descended to ascend us to the heavens, to adopt us and make us partakers of His kingdom. Young and old, we must resort to the Church, to venerate Christ and like the Mages, offer the presents of our hearts to Christ's friends, the poor, the sick, the foreigners, the widows and the orphans, the homeless and to all those who are at the margin of society and whose only hope lies with Christ, who incarnated, descended to earth to sanctify and free us from sin, evilness and the work of the Devil. With respect and devotion we shall receive communion, the Body and Blood of Christ *'for the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life'*. Let us pray to the Holy Infant to visit our home and sanctify our soul and body and give us the joy of the Mages and of the Shepherds who were the first to uphold the Holy Infant together with Virgin Mary and Joseph in the historical cave of Bethlehem *'because there was no guest room available for them'* (Luke 2:7). It is to our Lord Jesus Christ who *'deigned to wear flesh for the sake of us humans and our salvation'* that the glory, the honour and the Kingdom belongs unto the ages of ages. Amen.

London, Christmas 2016

Archbishop Gregorios  
of Thyateira and Great Britain