



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΦΡΑΓΚΙΣΚΟΥ

Encyclical for the Feast of the Annunciation 2019

Dearly Beloved,

“Today there come glad tidings of joy; it is the Feast of the Virgin. Things below are joined to things above. Adam is renewed, and Eve set free from her ancient sorrow.”

These are the beginning phrases of one of the hymns for the great Feast of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos. In these few words, we receive the significance of the Feast. Heaven and Earth are united in the good news proclaimed by Gabriel to the Virgin Mary: she will give birth to the Savior, the Son of God. In this proclamation, Adam and Eve, on behalf of us all, can rejoice because through Jesus Christ, death is overturned. The effects of their sin – death and decay – are defeated in Mary’s acceptance of the Angel’s announcement to her. The story of salvation takes a new turn because of the proclamation that the Savior will be born of Mary. The Feast of the Annunciation is so important to our salvation that we interrupt our Lenten disciplines with a joyful celebration. This Feast is the embodiment of the Gospel, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have life eternal. For God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”* (John 3:16-17)

The incomprehensible mystery of the incarnation is presented to us in this Feast. As another hymn proclaims, *“God is come among men; He who cannot be contained is contained in a womb; the Timeless enters time...For God empties Himself, takes flesh, and is fashioned as a creature, when the angel tells the pure Virgin of her conception.”*

The Feast of the Annunciation is a herald of freedom and liberty from the tyranny of death and its oppression. It is no wonder that our Hellenic forebears chose this day to begin their struggle in 1821 against their Ottoman overlords. This Feast promises that the Messiah will proclaim liberty for all people. The Greek nation longed for that liberty and the Feast of the Annunciation

inspired them to action. In the many Greek Independence Day celebrations that our parishes will hold to commemorate the events of 1821, we must remember that we are celebrating the universal causes of freedom, liberty and human dignity, and contrasting them to slavery, discrimination and repression. Yes, this will be a celebration of the most important day in Greek national history, but when the celebration is infused with our Orthodox understanding of human dignity, the celebration becomes one that all people, not just Hellenes, can appreciate and rejoice in.

The messages of liberty and human dignity still resonate and inspire us. Especially now when oppression and death still have their grip on our world. We are reminded of the violence, intolerance, and extremism occurring around us, whether in the horrendous events in New Zealand last week, the Middle East, or even in our own cities and land. The message of God's love for humanity, ultimately expressed in Jesus Christ, is a message of hope that we must strive to proclaim to all.

And so, we must sing to the world the words of the Apolytikion of the Feast of the Annunciation: "***Today is the crown of our salvation and the manifestation of the mystery that is from eternity.***"

To those that celebrate their Feast Day, I wish all the blessings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on this glorious Feast!

With Love in Christ,

Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco
✠ G E R A S I M O S
Metropolitan of San Francisco