



# GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF CHICAGO

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## ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΣΙΚΑΓΟΥ

Prot. No.: 249/2025

### Christmas Encyclical 2025 On Divine Joy and the Mystery of the Incarnation

To the Reverend Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful Children of the Holy Metropolis of Chicago:  
Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

At the radiant feast of the Nativity of our Lord, we proclaim once again the mystery that has changed the course of human history: *“God is with us.”* The eternal Word enters time. The Uncreated Light shines in the darkness. Heaven bends low to embrace the earth. At the heart of this mystery stands a truth we too easily forget—**God created the world, and humanity in particular, not for misery or despair, but for joy: divine, enduring, and life-giving joy.**

From the beginning, creation itself is an act of generosity and delight. Scripture tells us that God looked upon all creation and declared it *“very good”* (Genesis 1:31), revealing that humanity is not an afterthought nor a mistake to be corrected, but the crowning gift of creation—fashioned in love and invited into communion. As the Psalmist proclaims, *“You have made known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy”* (Psalm 16:11). **We were made not merely to exist, but to live and rejoice in God, for joy flows from communion with the living God.**

Yet the world we inhabit is also marked by pain, suffering, loss, and death. Joy can appear fragile or distant in the face of illness, injustice, grief, and fear. The Christian faith neither denies these realities nor trivializes them. Instead, it reveals their deeper meaning. Even suffering—never willed by God as an end in itself—is permitted as a place of transformation, where the heart is refined and its capacity for love expanded. **The soul matures not by escaping what wounds it, but by allowing God to meet us within it, transfiguring our wounds into places of grace. Joy, therefore, is not the absence of the cross, but the fruit that quietly ripens upon it.**

It is precisely in this light that we must understand the Incarnation. Christmas is not merely a divine response to human brokenness, but the fullest revelation of God’s desire for humanity. The Son of God takes on human nature so that we might partake of His divine life—not symbolically or metaphorically, but truly and intimately. For this reason, the angel proclaims to the shepherds, *“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people”* (Luke 2:10). **The Gospel is announced first as joy—joy meant for all.**

Beloved faithful, to live the mystery of Christmas is to reclaim our original vocation to joy. It is to resist the lie that we were made for anxiety, scarcity, or despair, and to learn, day by day, to

find God not only in moments of light, but also in shadow. **True joy is spacious enough to hold both tears and thanksgiving, because it rests not on circumstance, but on communion.**

As we celebrate the Nativity of our Lord, may Christ be born anew in the manger of our hearts. May He teach us again that **joy is not something we manufacture, but Someone we receive.** And may our lives—transfigured by His presence—bear witness to a world longing for meaning, that God has indeed drawn near and that in Him joy is promised.

With paternal love in the newborn Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Metropolitan Nathanael". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

†NATHANAEL  
Metropolitan of Chicago