

To the Reverend Priests and Deacons, Honourable Chairmen and the Members of the Ecclesiastical Committees, of the Ladies' Auxiliary Associations, School Committees, the Trustees and the Faithful of the Sacred Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain and Ireland.

Dearly Beloved in the Lord,

With our entrance into this sacred and at the same time, joyous and festive Christian period, we extend heartfelt wishes to all for health and spiritual progress blessed by Christ.

From Sunday, November 15, we will enter the sacred Christmas period. From the feast of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple, we shall be chanting the doxological hymns of Christmas that glorify God 'Christ is born, let us glorify Him! Christ comes from Heaven, let us meet Him! Christ is on earth, be exalted' (Christmas katavasia).

Forty days before Christmas, our Church reminds us of this hypercosmic Event and calls upon us to prepare ourselves both psychologically and physically, as individuals as members of families and as a Christian society to welcome Christ. Businessmen and those in the market have already displayed their merchandise for the Christmas period and Christians around the world - according to their tradition - have opened their souls to express their innermost feelings to the both God and Man Christ, who opened the heavens and descended to earth 'born of a woman, born under the law' (Gal. 4:4), as the divine Paul characteristically writes. It goes without saying, brothers and sisters, that Christmas is the feast of the whole of Humanity, because it refers to the family, the divine Love descends to bring the eternal Message of divine Philanthropy to Humankind. This period reminds us of the love towards others, the sick, the destitute, the elderly, the orphans, the widows, the prisoners and the scorned, those affected by war and all those who are in need of our active and genuine love and above all, of the mercy and philanthropy of God.

This month we have had the sacred privilege of having amongst us, our Ecumenical Patriarch Vartholomaeos, who had been officially invited by His Grace Justin Welby Archbishop of Canterbury. His presence in London gave the Faithful of this Biblical Eparchy the opportunity to welcome him, extend their hospitality and ask for his blessings. The meeting of our Ecumenical Patriarch with the Leader of the Anglican Communion reinforced the ties of friendship between the two Churches, which, following the example of our Lord Jesus - the Leader of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church throughout the world - stressed the solidarity, the cooperation but also joint prayer for the sake of those who become victims of cruel and inhuman exploitation by their fellow human beings.

These days should be dedicated to prayer and to the care of others, and in particular to the effort to renew the great values of Christianity, that aims at restoring 'likeness and image' of man, and edify us according to God '*until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*' (Ephes. 4:13). Let us remind ourselves of intense prayer, regular churchgoing, the receipt of Holy Communion, spiritual and physical fasting, which is directly linked to philanthropy and the sharing of our goods with others, all those who are in need and waiting for the positive expression of our love and solidarity.

Let us not forget that our love for others is a 'chink into Eternity'. That is why we repeat in our prayer '*Glory be to God*'. And as St. Tychon, the spiritual guide of St. Paisios, characteristically said, '*(the prayer) Lord have mercy, is worth 100 pounds, Glory be to God is worth 1000 pounds*'. So, you should repeat this prayer.

I wish all of you every good thing that comes from the Lord and the faith of the Holy Prophets who envisioned the joy of the birth of Christ, that we, the Christians and the whole of the Humanity may rejoice and celebrate to this day.

I pray that our Lord Jesus Christ will bless us with health to arrive at Christmas and for all Humanity to celebrate this Holy Event that changed the customs, Civilisation and the life of countless millions upon millions of people on our planet in peace and concord, and I remain with warm wishes and love in the Lord and honour.

London, November 2015

Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain