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Мир Божју! Христѿос се рогу!
Peace from God! Christ Is Born!

❖ M A X I M ❖ BY THE GRACE OF GOD ORTHODOX BISHOP OF WESTERN AMERICA ❖
GRACE, PEACE AND MERCY FROM THE GOD-CHILD CHRIST THE SAVIOR

"For He Himself is our Peace, Who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained inordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace" (Ephesians 2:14-15)

Dear Brothers and Sisters and Children in the Lord,

Wholeheartedly, we send you our warmest greetings on the occasion of the most joyous Feast of the Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, with a prayerful wish that you may celebrate it in good health and joy; and may the new year of the Lord's goodness in 2012 be a sign of Christmas blessing and extended gratefulness, but most especially an expression of the joy found in serving one's own neighbor selflessly.

On Christmas day, the Eternal Logos – the second Person of the Holy Trinity incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary – bestows upon us the unforeseen blessings of grace and incorruption through our awareness of Emanuel's presence, on earth. He brought about for both the world and ourselves a climate of eternal love – His Church.

The Nativity Feast heralds the grace of the Triune Divinity and the power of the Incarnation becomes the new law of existence, which annihilates the falsehood of treachery and forms an everlasting course of astonishment: revealing a dynamism hidden within the heart of man, and guiding it to the opposite shore of eschatological freedom. In this freedom, we can grow in love in a way that before was impossible.

In a humble cave in Bethlehem, an all-cosmic event unfolds, in which the Unlimited limits Himself, abolishing in His wake every boundary before us. The aching heart of man and the corrupted world is now comforted because with His Incarnation, separation and enmity have been destroyed and eliminated. In leaving the whole batter of our historical existence, He now makes it possible for us to live transfigured with Divine Eros.

Thus, in the Church, Christmas begets a Feast of joy and discovery, with wise men bringing forth incense and fragrance which give off the aroma of fulfillment, being drawn within a liturgical interior, the space of salvation, which is the Church. We are ready to rejoice in the life-giving cross, through which we receive an abundance of life in the unending day of the Church.

Peace, joy and freedom we wish to all these days, most especially to the suffering people in Kosovo and Metohija and to all suffering ones throughout the world. I salute you with this beautiful greeting that is our expression of the basic Gospel truth of the Logos becoming flesh:

PEACE FROM GOD – CHRIST IS BORN!

May the Crown of God's Goodness in the Year of our Lord 2012 Be Blessed!

St. Maxim
In the New Born Christ - Child, our Savior,
Bishop of Western America MAXIM

✦ МАКСИМ ✦ БЛАГОДАЋУ БОЖИЈОМ ПРАВОСЛАВНИ ЕПИСКОП ЗАПАДНОАМЕРИЧКИ ✦
БЛАГОДАТ, МИР И МИЛОСТ ОД БОГОМЛАДЕНЦА СПАСИТЕЉА ХРИСТА

„Јер Он је мир наш, који и једне и друге састави у једно и разруши преграду која је раскидвала, што јест њејријашљество, укинувши шилом својим закон са његовим зајовестима и пројисима да оба созда у самој себи у једнога новог човека, стварајући мир“ (Еф. 2, 14-15).

Драга браћо и сестре и децо у Господу,

Срдачно вам упућујем честитке за сверадосне Празнике Рождества по телу Господа и Бога и Спаса нашега Исуса Христа, уз молитвену жељу да их прославите у здрављу и у радосном празничном расположењу, а ново 2012. Лето благодати Господње да вам протекне у знаку Божињег благослова и продужене Божињег благодарности, а посебно у радости несебичног служења ближњима.

На дан Божића, Вечни Логос, друго лице Свете Тројице, оваплотио се од Духа Светог и Дјеве Марије да би нам даровао ненадане благослове благољепија и непропадљивости и да би, кроз свест о присуству Емануила, на земљу и међу нас унео климу трајне љубави – Цркву Његову.

Празник Божића нам благовести благодат Тројичног божанства и силу Оваплоћења као нови закон постојања који укида лаж обмане и успоставља незаустављиви низ изненађења: открива динамизам скривен у срцу човека и преводи на другу обалу есхатолошке слободе. У скромној витлејемској пећини одвија се свекосмички догађај у коме је Неограничени ограничио Себе укидајући све границе пред нама. Болно срце човека и света сада бива утешено, јер Његовим Оваплоћењем разрушена је преграда и укинута непријатељство. Заквасио је цело тесто нашег историјског постојања и сада чини да живимо преображавани божанским еросом.

Ето, у Цркви, Божињем започиње Празник радости и познања, а мудраци уносе миомирис и тамјан што одаје арому испуњења, којом одише литургијско унутарје простора спасења, које је Црква.

Ми постајемо спремни да се радујемо крсту животном и да кроз њега прелазимо у изобиље живота у Незалазни дан Цркве. Мир, радост и слободу желимо свима, а у ове дане посебно страдалном народу на Косову и Метохији и свим страдалницима свуда по свету.

Поздрављам вас дивним поздравом који сам по себи сачињава наш црквено-народни израз основне јеванђелске истине да Логос постаде тело, поздравом:

МИР БОЖЈИ – ХРИСТОС СЕ РОДИ!

Благословена Нова 2012. година венца добротe Господње!

Јеј Максим

У Богомладенцу Христу, Спаситељу нашем,
Епископ Западноамерички МАКСИМ



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Sunday, January 1, 2012
(Nativity Fast)

29TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST:
SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS; THE HOLY MARTYR
BONIFACE

RESURRECTIONAL TROPARION - TONE FOUR:

When the women disciples of the Lord learned from the angel the joyous message of Your Resurrection, they cast away the ancestral curse and elatedly told the apostles: Death is overthrown! Christ God is risen, granting the world great mercy!

TROPARION TO THE HOLY FATHERS - TONE TWO:

Great are the accomplishments of faith, for the three holy youths rejoiced in the fountain of flames as though in the waters of rest; and the Prophet Daniel appeared a shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep. Through their prayers, O Christ God, save our souls.

TROPARION TO SAINT BONIFACE - TONE FOUR:

You fervently followed the way of the martyrs, confessing Christ before unbelievers, O Boniface. You gave your body to modest Aglaida as an imperishable treasure. Healing and mercy flow from it for the world.

RESURRECTIONAL KONTAKION - TONE FOUR:

My Savior and my Redeemer as God rose from the tomb and delivered the earthborn from their chains. And He has shattered the gates of hell, and as Master, He has risen on the third day!

KONTAKION TO THE HOLY FOREFATHERS - TONE SIX:

You did not worship the graven image, O thrice-blessed ones, but armed with the immaterial essence of God, you were glorified in a trial by fire. From the midst of unbearable flames you called on God, crying out: 'Hasten, O compassionate One! Speedily come to our aid for You are merciful and able to do as You will!'

KONTAKION TO THE HOLY FATHERS - TONE ONE:

Rejoice, O Bethlehem! Prepare yourself, O Ephrata! The Lamb is on her way to give birth to the Chief Shepherd she carries in her womb. The God-bearing forefathers will rejoice, beholding Him, and together with the shepherds, they will glorify the Virgin nursing Him.

EPISTLE & COMMENTARY

THE PROKIMENON IN THE 4TH TONE:

Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our fathers; and praised and glorified is Your name forever.

SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS, HEBREWS 11: 9, 10, 17-23, 32-40

Brethren, by faith Abraham dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented - of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

THE ALLELUIA VERSES:

O God, with our ears we have heard, for our fathers have told us. For You have saved us from those who afflict us, and those who hate us You have put to shame.

COMMENTARY ON THE EPISTLE READING FROM HEBREWS

Faith is simple but how much it can provide in our lives! Abraham exercised obedience, patience, trust and confidence as he grew in his faith. The first sentence of this passage poetically shows how faith moves from the impermanence and discomfort of living in tents of man to the permanence and solace of the city built by God.

GOSPEL & COMMENTARY

SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS, MATTHEW 1: 1-25

A book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon and Nahshon begot Salmon. Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king. David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated: "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.

COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL READING FROM MATTHEW

Jesus became man as a Jew, from the lineage of Abraham and David. This genealogy reveals that the Son of God so identifies with the human condition that He takes it all on Himself, becoming part of it. His ancestry includes both righteous and wicked, Jew and Gentile, kings and peasants. The listing includes women, an unusual departure from the Jewish genealogical lists; God's graciousness is further demonstrated by the fact that the women listed were either Gentiles or sinners, prefiguring the universal calling of all humankind to salvation through Jesus Christ the Messiah.

SPIRITUAL ARTICLES

From The Prologue for December 19/January 1 by St. Nikolai Velimirovic:

The Holy Martyr Boniface

Martyrdom for Christ makes a saint out of a sinner. The example of St. Boniface shows this. At first, he was a servant in Rome to a wealthy and immoral woman, Aglaida, and had impure and unlawful relations with her. They were both pagans. Once, Aglaida desired to have the relics of a martyr in her house as an amulet to protect against evil, so she sent her servant to Asia to find and purchase what she desired. Boniface took several slaves with him and a large amount of money. Before parting with Aglaida, he said to her: "If I cannot find a martyr, but instead they bring you back my body martyred for Christ, will you receive it with honor, my lady?" Aglaida laughed and called him a drunkard and a sinner, and then they parted. Coming to the city of Tarsus, Boniface saw many Christians undergoing torture: some with their legs cut off, others with their hands severed, others with their eyes plucked out, still others on the gallows, and so forth. Boniface's heart was changed, and he repented of his sinful life and wept. He cried out among the Christian martyrs: "I too am a Christian!" The judge took him for interrogation and ordered that he be harshly flogged, then that boiling lead be poured into his mouth, and—since this did him no harm—that he be beheaded. The slaves then took his body and carried it to Rome. An angel of God appeared to Aglaida and said: "Receive the one who was once your slave but now is our brother and fellow servant; he is the guardian of your soul and the protector of your life." The awestruck Aglaida came out to meet them, received the body of Boniface, built a church for him, and placed the relics of the martyr in it. She then repented, gave away her goods to the poor, withdrew from the world, and lived for fifteen more years in bitter repentance. St. Boniface suffered in the year 290.

Saint Gregory (Grigentius), Bishop of Omir

At first, Gregory was a deacon in a church in Mediolanum [Milan] and had many visions. By God's providence he was taken to Alexandria. There Patriarch Proterius, according to a heavenly revelation, consecrated him bishop of the land of Omir in southern Arabia, which St. Elesbaan the King (October 24) had just freed from the tyranny of Dunaan the Jew. He was a good shepherd and great miracle-worker. He organized the Church in Omir with the help of the Christ-loving King Abramius, built many churches, and baptized many Jews. By his prayers he performed great and awesome miracles, even bringing about a revelation of Christ the Lord before the unbelieving Jews, which led to their baptism. He governed the Church for thirty years and entered peacefully into life eternal in the year 552.

Saint Boniface the Merciful, Bishop of Ferentino

From his childhood, Boniface was unusually kind, so much so that his mother scolded him for this. However, aided by prayer, Boniface received a hundredfold from the Lord. He died peacefully in Italy in the sixth century.

The Venerable Elias of Murom

Elias was a monk of the Monastery of the Kiev Caves. He died in the year 1188, and his incorrupt relics are miracle-working. Even until now, three fingers on his right hand remain placed together for prayer, showing that he died at prayer. This is a reproach to those who do not make the sign of the Cross with three fingers.

HYMN OF PRAISE: The Holy Martyr Boniface

A sinful soul was in Boniface,
A sinful soul oppressed by sin.
He repented and, through Christ, began to shine,
And a hundred times he sighed.

He beheld the suffering of the holy martyrs;
He beheld the sufferings, and melted like wax.
He wept, and by his tears he was sanctified,
Repenting for all his sins.

What is life? It is intended for sacrifice:
Either to the devil or to the Creator.
The first sacrifice stinks like a dead corpse,
The second ascends to the Savior.

Repentance means restoration to life,
And it was restoration for Boniface.
For the salvation of his soul, he sacrificed his body;
He purchased the Kingdom with a sack of bones.

The distance from a sinner to a penitent,
And from a penitent to a martyr,
Is no further than one finger is from another,
Is no further than the earth is from the Cross.

REFLECTION

Can faith move mountains? (Matthew 17:20). Without a doubt it can, and it can do even more than that: by faith, God Himself can be moved to mercy toward us sinners. In the Omirian town of Safar, the majority of the inhabitants were Jews. St. Gregory endeavored to convert them to Christianity. Then the Jews suggested to St. Gregory and to King Abramis that they should have a debate about faith with the assurance that if they [the Jews] were defeated then all of them would enter the Christian Faith. This debate lasted several days in the presence of several thousand people, both Jews and Christians. The Jews, seeing that they would be defeated by Gregory's irrefutable reasons and proofs, sought from Gregory that, in some way, he show them Christ alive so that they might see Him with their own eyes and then they would believe. Having great boldness before the Lord because of the purity of his heart, St. Gregory knelt facing east and, before everyone, began to pray to God. When he had finished his prayer, the earth quaked, thunder clapped, and the heavens opened in the east. A cloud, glowing with a flaming fire and shining rays, moved from the east and then slowly descended to the earth toward that

place where the assembly of people had gathered. In the midst of the cloud there stood a man of inexpressible beauty, with a face of extraordinary brightness and in a vesture that appeared to be woven of lightning. He moved upon the cloud until He came over Bishop Gregory himself. Everyone saw Him in unsurpassable glory and beauty, and in fear fell to the ground on their faces. Gregory cried out: "One is Holy, One is the Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen." At this, there came a voice to the Jews from the Lord's glory: "For the sake of the bishop's prayers, He Who was crucified by your fathers heals you." And the shining cloud moved away as slowly as it came. After that, the Jews were baptized.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the humility of Moses before God:

1. How Moses always emphasized God and never himself;
2. How he looked for all strength, for all good, and for all help from God only, and not from anyone else;
3. How, in all labor, he humbly turned to God for help and leadership.

HOMILY on Samuel

For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord (I Samuel 1:27–28).

Besought of God and dedicated to God, Samuel was a prophet and leader of the people of Israel. The blessed Hannah, his childless mother, besought him from God with tears and sacrifices. And she gave him, her one and only greatest blessing, to the service of the Lord from his infancy. A wise mother does not consider her children as her own, but rather as God's. They are God's both when God gives them and when He takes them, but they are mostly God's when a mother herself dedicates them to Him. God's gift is returned to Him as a reciprocal gift, for we have nothing of our own to give to Him but only that which we receive from Him. The young Samuel lived in the Temple among the iniquitous sons of Eli the high priest, and he did not become corrupt. The Lord would not reveal Himself to the sinful elders, but He appeared to this pure child: for Samuel did the will of God, and did let none of his words fall to the ground (I Samuel 3:19). Samuel was a judge of the people of Israel from his youth to old age and committed nothing wrong either before God or before the people. God gave him the power to prophesy and work miracles. He defeated all of God's enemies and the enemies of the people, and he anointed two kings, Saul and David. When he grew old, he called the people together and asked them if he had ever committed any violence against anyone or accepted a bribe from anyone. And the people replied with one voice: Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand (I Samuel 12:4). Behold, such a man was he, who was given by God and given to God as a reciprocal gift, and who grew up with the blessing of God and the blessing of his mother. Let mothers benefit from the example of the blessed Hannah; let judges and rulers of the people benefit from the example of the righteous Samuel. O Holy and Most-holy Lord, gracious and most gracious, open our souls to see Thy holiness and Thy goodness, that we may repent of our evils. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.
