

His Eminence  
The Most Reverend  
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend  
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and  
Metropolitan of  
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,  
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE  
OF NORTH AMERICA

January 2019

Dearly beloved in Christ,

I greet you in anticipation of the great feasts of the Lord Jesus Christ - the Circumcision of our Lord and the Holy Theophany. While the Circumcision is situated eight days after the Nativity and Holy Theophany concludes the festive 12 days of Nativity, both of these feasts are related to each other, and contain within them certain spiritual elements of the great feast of the Lord's Nativity.

The feasts reveal the mysteries of the divine condescension. The Lord Christ, by taking on human flesh, redeemed our nature by assuming it for Himself. The feasts fulfill the law of God as Saint Epiphanius teaches: that the circumcision of the flesh prepared and served man until Baptism, which is the great circumcision of the heart, because through His Baptism we are released from sins and are sealed with the name of God. The sealing with the name of God is a recognition that we belong to Christ.

While the circumcision of the flesh set the Israelites apart from the Gentiles as the chosen people of God according to the Old Law, holy baptism separates believers from unbelievers and makes the believer a member of the risen Body of Christ. In this way, spiritual death is abolished and there is assurance of the resurrection of the dead.

The holy fathers relate that the Old Testament circumcision is internal and spiritual - a communion of man with God and an effort to maintain this communion. On this subject Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos teaches that in circumcision men become God's chosen people, and through holy baptism, men become children of God, sons by grace, and vanquish death.

The descent of the Only-begotten Son seen in the condescension of Christ in His Circumcision, and His Baptism, becomes our ascent. It is through His lowering that we rise above our sins, above our passions, and above death. For to Him, Christ our God, belong honor and glory and worship, together with unoriginate Father, and the all-holy and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and to the endless ages. Amen.

May God grant you blessed feasts of the Circumcision of our Lord, and His Holy Theophany. I pray that the new year is a happy and healthy one for you and your family.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)  
Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

*"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)*

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