

By the mercy of God Almighty

John X

the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East

To

My brethren, the pastors of the Holy Church of Antioch

And my sons and daughters, wherever they are across this Apostolic See:

"O heavens, rejoice and be glad, O mountains, at the birth of Christ."

By these words, borrowing from the hymnographer, the Church touches each of our hearts and invites us to contemplate the birth of that Child Who chose a cave, although the whole world is His. By these words, the hymnographer addresses not only human beings but even lifeless creation, asking it to break its silence, to rejoice with the angels, to exult with the shepherds, and to bow before the manger of Bethlehem. As if the joy of humanity alone is not enough to describe the encounter of mankind with Christ, the hymnographer calls upon creation itself to cast off its stillness and to be clothed with the joy of the Nativity—the joy of meeting that Child whose eyes ignite all our hope and whose serenity inspires ours.

Here is a call for each of us to cast off the burdens of the world and lay them before the manger of Bethlehem. Here is a call for each of us to rejoice despite the trials that surround us. Here is a call for man to rejoice even in the depths of distress. A call not to surrender to despair despite everything. The Nativity of Christ is a call to wipe away the dust that has gathered over the spark of our hope, so that His hope may shine within us as hope, and His light as light.

Each year, humanity awakens from the slumber of its pride to behold this Child, humble and radiant in the darkness of His cave. He came silently, yet His silence spoke more eloquently than orators. He came in weakness, yet within Him was a strength that strips weakness off the weak. He came resting in the womb of the Virgin, though He rides upon the shoulders of the cherubim. He came as a Child lying upon the straw of a manger, though He is the eternal God

resting upon the glory of His heights. He went into a cave to dig into the cave of the human heart and place within it something of the sweetness of His Gospel and the fragrance of His humility, while it suffers from the bitterness of its pride.

His Nativity evokes the memory of hope that is born in our hearts. It reminds us of every poor and needy person—not a memory in words, but using the language of action. We recall the Nativity today while being aware, in the Church of Antioch, that we are the cradle of His Gospel, just as Bethlehem and Jerusalem are the place of His Nativity, His Crucifixion, and His Tomb. We contemplate the light of His countenance within the cave and pray that this light may be incarnate in our lives, in the life of His Church, and all over His world.

During these days, we remember our departed brothers, who have preceded us and met with the bright countenance of that Child. We ask Him, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, to embrace them and cover them with His mercy.

May God grant many happy returns of these blessed days to all of you—our children in the homeland and overseas, and to all peoples. May He fill you with goodness, prosperity, and blessings from the Father of lights and the Source of gifts, the Child of the cave, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the Lord of mercies and the God of all consolation. Amen.

Damascus, December 20, 2025