To the Clergy, Monastics and Laity of the Western American Diocese!

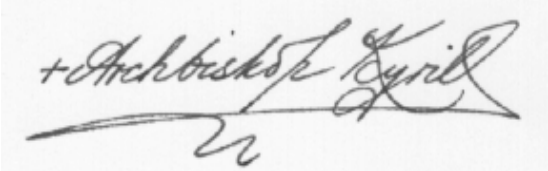
As we enter into the joyous season of Nativity, we must put aside the distractions of this world and remember that Jesus Christ came into the world to reconcile Divinity with creation. When the Heavenly Angelic Hosts revealed themselves in glory to the shepherds in the fields, the angels glorified God by proclaiming, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill towards man!" (Luke 2:14). Heaven itself confesses the reason God became man – the Divine and the celestial wish to reconcile with man. We see God's extreme humility in this reconciliation taking upon Himself the flesh, which He created, so that man can experience and know the Light of the Divine. However, our inclination towards sin does not allow us to value, or recognize, the Divine humility that occurred 2000 years ago. Therefore, we are mired in the "cares of this world" and repeat one and the same mistakes over and over again.

One hundred years ago, in 1925, the world was in turmoil and instability just as we are now. Political ideologies were rampantly fanning the fires of war and violence throughout the world. Extreme wealth and hedonism were coexisting with poverty and austerity, and yet, the Orthodox Faith remained steadfast with such saints as St. Tikhon of Moscow, St. Jonah of Hankou and the thousands of New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia who were both in the homeland and in the diaspora. That same Light that shone forth in Bethlehem lived, and proliferated, in the hearts of these countless, known and unknown, luminaries in those tumultuous dark years and was passed onto our own time.

Saint Tikhon, in 1903, wrote to his flock a timeless instruction: "Christ the Saviour has said that, having lit a candle, one does not place it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all (Matthew 5:15). The light of the Orthodox Faith was not kindled that it might shine only upon a small circle of people." As the Orthodox Faith continues to grow and spread, we behold now, as one hundred years ago, persecutions against the Church: in Ukraine, churches and monasteries are seized, the pastors of canonical Orthodoxy are persecuted; while here in America, our own Church Abroad is slandered and falsely accused. Yet, as a lamp shines more brightly in the darkness, so must we bear witness all the more to Christ amidst the darkness which surrounds us. Christ shall not forsake His Church, and the "gates of hell shall not prevail" against Holy Mother Church (Matthew 16:18).

In these holy days of the Nativity of Christ, let us be zealous in nurturing the light of Christ in our hearts. This year, as in the year of St. Tikhon's repose – 1925, the world attempts to snuff out the light of Orthodoxy first publicly and then in our hearts. Let us not be shaken by the mercurial distractions of this world, but hold fast to the fact that Christ shall not forsake His Church and His people. May the Lord, Who was born in the cave of Bethlehem, enlighten our hearts with His Divine Light and strengthen us so that we can say with true heartfelt conviction:

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!



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