



EN/05/September-October/2023

## **BELIEVERS EASTERN CHURCH**

Office of the Metropolitan, Synod Secretariat, St. Thomas Community, Thiruvalla, Kerala, India.

### **SHEPHERD'S LETTER**

November-December 2023

**Blessings and greetings to all the Archbishops and Bishops, Priests and Deacon Fathers, Evangelists, and Order of Sisters, and all the Faithful of Believers Eastern Church world-wide, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen! ✠**

**Dearly beloved in Christ,**

As we approach the end of November and prepare to welcome December, it is important that we remind ourselves of the significance of these two months. November marks the beginning of the new liturgical year, while December is the time when we commemorate one of the most important events in the liturgical calendar: the Nativity (birth) of Christ.

For us, as people of God, our lives revolve more around the church calendar than the common calendar we follow. It is important that we make commitments during this new liturgical year to enhance our life in Christ. Some of us may need to develop the discipline of daily Scripture reading, praying as a family, daily repentance, giving tithes to the Lord, observing the church calendar and its events, caring for others, and the list may go on.

I encourage you to faithfully commit yourself to these spiritual disciplines and be consistent in making them part of your lives. The key to all of this, is to faithfully follow the church calendar, which will make it much easier for you. The calendar includes all the fasts and celebrations (feasts) deliberately designed by the church to shape your spiritual life. The church calendar is organised in such a way as to commemorate the important events in the earthly life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, beginning with the season of Annunciation, the highlight of which is the Christmas celebration.

Christmas carries a powerful message of hope, peace, and joy. It helps us to reflect on God's immense act of love and salvation. The angel's proclamation to the shepherds on the night of the Nativity perfectly captures this sentiment: "I bring good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Saviour—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!" (St. Luke 2:10–11). Just as the angel declared, this news is meant for everyone, including us, and it fills our hearts with joy and hope. God has entered our human history and became Emmanuel,

God with us, as the Scripture says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (St. John 1:14) The angels, the Magi, and the shepherds did not keep the good news Christ's birth to themselves, but they passed on the truth and their experiences to others they encountered. During this season of Christmas, let the joy and celebration extend beyond the walls of the parish, homes, and our hearts and expand into the community we are part of.

Leading up to the Christmas Day, orthodox Christians worldwide observe the Nativity or Christmas Fast – a period of time which helps us to prayerfully meditate on the awesome miracle of the Son of God taking on flesh and becoming one of us. During this fast, we prepare ourselves both inwardly and outwardly so that, just as Christ became like us, we may become like Him. It is an invitation to renew our commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ - a time to restore balance, peace, and holiness in our lives.

Too often, we think of fasting as just abstinence from food. But St. John Chrysostom admonishes us that "he who thinks that the fast consists only in abstinence from food is mistaken; true fasting is departing from evil." So, we must remember that while fasting from food, we are also challenged to fast from sin, gossip, jealousy, anger, and those things we all too often allow to control us.

As a church, let us make use of all these opportunities to live out as one body of Christ by actively participating in the church calendar and its various elements. May this new liturgical year be a call to action, to go beyond the walls of the church, for the parishes to thrive in mission, and to become like Jesus Christ, our Lord!

May the peace and grace of the Almighty God be with you forever!

**Your Father in Christ,**



Athanasius Yohan I Metropolitan

**Date : 20 November 2023**

**Place : Holy Synod**

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**P.S:** Please make sure this is translated into all regional languages and read in all parishes for the encouragement of the faithful.