SYRIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE
OF ANTIOCH & ALL THE EAST
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DAMASCUS - SYRIA

بـاب تومـا - ص.ب ٢٢٢٦٠
دمـشـق - سـوريـة

BY THE GRACE OF GOD

Ignatius Zakka I Iwas
Patriarch of Antioch and All the East
Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church

No.E332/11

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Apostolic Benediction to our beloved Metropolitan His Eminence Mor Theethose Yeldho and to our beloved spiritual children: the Venerable Corepiscopos, the Esteemed Priests, the Reverend deacons and all the faithful of our Malankara Archdiocese in North America.

The Feast of the Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is approaching, and a new year is also at hand. As we prepare to celebrate this blessed and joyous occasion, let us mediate the words of Mary, the Mother of God that ***"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word". (St. Luke 1:38).*** Mary's faithful response is that of the highest obedience to God. The incarnation is not only the work of God, but it involves the free response of mankind in the person of Mary. Whereas Eve once disobeyed, Mary now obeys; whereas Eve closed herself to God, Mary opens to His Will. Mary's response says, "I am a tablet; let the Writer write whatever He desires on it," as one of the church fathers explains this verse. The greatest of all virtues is humility indeed but as Christians we lack it now. Obeying the commandments of God requires a lot of humility. God commands us to love our enemies, not only our friends. Without forgiving love we can never pray for our enemies and persecutors. Our churches and homes should be places of forgiveness not of wrestling. There is a great increase in violence, hatred and vengeance all over the world. It reflects in family as well as church circles. How can one pray the Lord's prayer when one is filled with hatred in one's heart. God the Father is the God of Love, God the Son is the Embodiment of Love who prayed for his enemies on the Cross, God the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Forgiving Love. Centuries ago, Prophet Isaiah wrote: ***"But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in Spirit, who trembles at my word". (Isaiah 66:2).*** This word was fulfilled perfectly in the Blessed Virgin Mary. Moreover, the angel of the Lord announces the good news to the poor and humble shepherds, ***"You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger". (St. Luke 2:12).*** It tells us that our life's journey should be towards poverty and humility like the journey of the poor shepherds. We should remember the poor in our society. In a world of pomp and luxury we should travel towards the poorer, weaker and oppressed sections of our society in this Christmas time. Let us imitate the examples of the Humble Jesus who forgave all the enemies even on the Cross, the Lowly Mary who renounced all the luxuries of the world, and the Poor Shepherds who travelled to meet a Child who was poorer than them. We advise you all to take care of all the poor and the oppressed at this Christmas tide. Pray for a violent world to be transformed into a forgiving world. We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We extend our Apostolic Blessings to you. May the grace of God be with you all. آمين وجعلنا مهنأ

Forwarded by Christmas Greetings.

+Archbishop Theethose Yeldho

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