



# GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF CHICAGO

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## ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΣΙΚΑΓΟΥ

December 25, 2020

### The Nativity According to the Flesh of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

[The Virgin Mary] *will bear a son, and you are to name him **Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21)

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Choosing a name for a child can be one of the most joyous—and difficult—tasks of expectant parents. Some pick a name from the family line; others do not decide until they see their newborn’s face. For the Most-Holy Theotokos and St. Joseph her Betrothed, however, there was no indecision. An angel of the Lord told them what the name of their Child must be: Jesus.

The early Christians were fascinated by the name God gave His Incarnate Son. They knew from the Scriptures that Jesus’ name stemmed from the Aramaic *Yeshuah*, meaning “The LORD is salvation.” Taken into Greek, *Yeshuah* becomes Ἰησοῦς (*Iesous*). And as a Greek name, *Iesous* picks up a new and wondrous meaning. It evokes the root *ias-/ies-* which connotes “healing.” In his *Catechetical Lectures (10:13)*, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem writes:

“*Jesus*, according to the Hebrew, means *Savior*, but in Greek, it means *The Healer*; since He is physician of souls and bodies, curer of spirits, curing the blind in body, and leading minds into light, healing the visibly lame, and guiding sinners’ steps to repentance.”

Overall, the Fathers of the Church saw the Greek rendering of Jesus’ name, not as a matter of chance or linguistic accident, but as one of divine design. His name reveals His mission: *to save and to heal* both souls and bodies from the ravages of sin and Satan and death.

When the Son of God came into our world, He brought to all mankind a wonderful gift—this name of immeasurable power, *Iesous*. In the name of Jesus, our prayers reach heaven. By the name of Jesus, fevers are quenched. At the name of Jesus, demons are dispelled. With the name of Jesus, signs and wonders are wrought. Through the name of Jesus, sins are confessed and absolved. Indeed, the very name is a blessing; and for this reason, a clergyman’s fingers spell out “Jesus Christ” (ICXC) when they bless the people with the sign of the Cross.

His name not only means salvation and healing—His name itself IS salvation and healing because this name is inseparable from the Person of the Savior who is named. When we invoke His Holy Name, we connect with Him immediately. “For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. And His name, by faith in His name, has made this man strong” (Acts 4:12, 3:16). The Book of Acts tells us that even non-Christians

recognized the marvelous might of this name and tried to use it for their own purposes (Acts 19:13).

Though this time of pandemic is a time of great sickness and sadness, as Orthodox Christians we also find in this season a cause for joy. With the Birth of the Son of God, a great gift came to all humankind—the healing name of our Savior and Lord. As we herald His name in the songs of the season, we spread hope and healing to the world around us.

An important part of the healing ministry of the Church comes through the Mystery of Confession. Through this sacrament, souls are healed of the wounds of sin, hearts are relieved of the burden of guilt. Spiritual fathers sometimes impose penances, *epitimia*, canons, as a prescription to aid in the healing process. Like any medicine, a penance is assigned for a set period of time. However, if the patient shows signs of recovery before the course of medication is complete, the wise physician will often reduce or end treatment ahead of schedule.

So it can be with penances. When *metanoia*, repentance, has done its work in the soul, it is appropriate for a penance to be lifted. In the medical field, of course, any competent physician can advise a patient to stop a prescription, even if the medication was initially prescribed by another doctor. In the Church, however, a penance can be lifted only by the spiritual father who assigned it, or by the Hierarch under whose Omophorion the priest serves.

In our Metropolis, I have encountered many penitent souls with *epitimia* of long duration, many of which I consider too severe and spiritually taxing. These penances could justly be lifted now, except in some cases the spiritual father has died, or is no longer in active service, or is resistant to extending clemency. In such cases, a parishioner should seek the counsel of his or her Hierarch. It may be that the spiritual medicine has done its work and that the child of God should return once more to the Holy Chalice and to the full Sacramental life of the Church.

In this Christmas season, this season of healing in the name of the Lord, I invite any of the faithful of the Metropolis of Chicago to contact me directly about questions they may have regarding long and difficult penances imposed by a spiritual father. I will gladly spend time with you *personally and confidentially* to discuss your unique circumstances and, if it is appropriate, to reduce the force of a canon that has been assigned to you. My responsibility is to discern what is best for your salvation and to help restore the fullness of your joy in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only true Healer of bodies and souls.

Blessed be the Name of the Lord, from this time forth, and unto the ages of ages!

A Blessed Christmas to you and yours, and a Happy and Holy New Year in the name of Christ Jesus our King and our God. Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

With paternal love in Christ,



† NATHANAEL  
Metropolitan of Chicago