NATIVITY MESSAGE of The Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill

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to the

Archpastors, Pastors, Deacons, Monks and Nuns,

and All the Faithful Children of the Russian Orthodox Church

Beloved in the Lord archpastors, all-honourable presbyters and deacons, God-loving monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters!

From the depths of my heart I congratulate you on the great feast of the Nativity of Christ – the feast of the birth in the flesh of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ from the Holy Spirit and Most Pure Virgin Mary. Today we call upon all people, together with the Church, to glorify the Creator and Maker with the words: “O all the earth, sing ye unto the Lord” (heirmos of the First Ode of the Canon for the Nativity of Christ).

The all-beneficent God who loves his creation sends down his Only-Begotten Son the awaited Messiah so that he may accomplish the cause of our salvation. The Son of God, “which is in the bosom of the Father” (Jn 1:18), becomes the Son of Man and enters our world so that through his blood he may deliver us from sin and so that the sting of death should never inspire fear in the human person.

We know that the Magi who bowed down before Christ brought him gifts. What gift, then, can we bring to the Divine Teacher? The very gift which he asks of us himself: “Give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways” (Prov 23:26). What does it mean to give one’s heart? The heart is a symbol of life. If it ceases to beat, then we die. To give one’s heart to God is to dedicate our whole life to him. This

dedication does not require that we renounce all that we have. We are merely called upon to remove from our hearts that which is an obstacle to the Divine presence within it. When all our thoughts are taken up with our own ego, when there is no room in our hearts for our neighbour, then there is no room for the Lord too. The presence of our neighbour in our heart depends mainly upon our capability to feel another's pain and respond to it with deeds of mercy.

The Lord requires that we "observe his ways." To observe the ways of God is to see the Divine presence in our lives and in human history: to see the manifestations of both Divine love and his righteous ire.

The past year for our people was replete with reminiscences about the tragic events of the twentieth century and the incipient persecution of the faith. We recalled the great spiritual exploits of the new martyrs and confessors who steadfastly bore witness to their fidelity to Christ. Yet even at that terrible time for our country, the Lord bestowed his mercy: after an enforced two hundred year rupture, the Office of Patriarch was revived in the land of Russia, and the Church, at a time of tribulation, found in the person of the holy bishop Tikhon, who was elected First Hierarch, a wise and courageous pastor, through whose ardent prayers before the Throne of the Most High Creator our Church and people were able to pass through the crucible of trials.

Today we are undergoing a special period: afflictions have not yet left this world, every day we "hear of wars and rumours of wars" (Mt 24:6). Yet how much of God's love is poured out upon people! The world exists in spite of the forces of evil, while human love and family values abide in spite of the unbelievable attempts to destroy, desecrate and distort them. Faith in God is alive in the hearts of the majority of people. And our Church, in spite of decades of persecution in the recent past and the endeavours to undermine her authority in the present, remains and shall always be with Christ.

We believe that after undergoing the current trials, the peoples of historical Russia will preserve and renew their spiritual unity, will prosper materially and socially.

The Nativity of Christ is the central event of human history. People have always sought out God, yet the Creator – the Triune God – revealed himself as fully as possible to the human race only through the incarnation of his Only-Begotten Son. He came into a world of sin to make people worthy of the beneficent will of the heavenly Father and lay a firm foundation to the world in leaving this precept: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (Jn 14:27).

May this year be for our people, for the peoples of historical Russia and all the nations of the earth, a year of peace and prosperity. May the Divine Infant, who has been born in Bethlehem, help us to find hope that overcomes fear, and through faith feel the power of Divine love which transforms the life of

people.

Amen.

/+ KIRILL/

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA

Moscow

Nativity of Christ

2017/2018

Patriarchal message is also available in other languages:

- **Ukrainian**
- **Byelorussian**
- **Moldavian**
- **Latvian**
- **Lithuanian**
- **Estonian**
- **Kazakh**
- **Kyrgyz**
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