CHRISTMAS MESSAGE by Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow and All Russia

Your Eminences the archpastors, esteemed Fathers and deacons,

all-honourable monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters!

On this holy night I extend my heartfelt greetings to you all and from the depths of my soul I congratulate you on the great feast of the Nativity of Christ: the feast of the fulfillment of the promises of old for the salvation of the human race, the feast of the ineffable love of the Maker towards his creation, the feast of the coming into the world of the Son of God who is the Messiah.

The Fathers have spoken much over the centuries on the mystery of the Incarnation of God. And now we, as the Fathers before us, hearken to the words of the Church's prayers and hymns, with reverence listen to Scripture which tells us of this glorious event, and cease not to be amazed at this wondrous miracle.

In his reflections on Christ's Nativity, St. Symeon the New Theologian writes the following: “God, as he came into the world … united the divine nature with human nature, so that the human person could become god, and that the Most Holy Trinity may mysteriously abide in this person who has become god by grace” (10th Homily). And St. Ephraim the Syrian speaks of the Incarnation of God thus: “Today the Godhead sealed itself upon humanity, that so with the Godhead's seal humanity might be adorned” (Hymns for the Nativity of Christ).

In attending to these wise words, we ask ourselves: in what manner may we be adorned with this divine seal? How can we attain the likeness of God, to which all people have been called since the creation of the world? How are we to live so that “Christ be formed in us” (Gal 4:19)? The answer is simple: let us observe the commandments of the Saviour. Together with the apostle Paul I address you all, my beloved: “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2). Cover all things with love and you will find peace and tranquility of soul. Be of generous spirit when forgiving all – and in your hearts there will reign the joy which “no man taketh from you” (Jn 16:22). “In your patience possess ye your souls” (Lk 21:19) – and you will inherit life everlasting.

How important it is that we Christians not only call upon others to follow lofty moral ideals, but endeavour to embody these very same ideals in our everyday lives and in the first instance in ministering to our neighbours. And then by God's grace we may obtain within ourselves the true fruits of the spirit: “love,

joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal 5:22-23).

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb 10:24). When we overcome conflict and division, we speak convincingly to the world of the Saviour who is born and in our deeds we testify to the unusual beauty and spiritual power of the Orthodox faith.

We have embarked upon the year 2017. Exactly one hundred years separates us from events which radically transformed the life of Russia – a great multinational country, and plunged her into the madness of civil war, when children rose up against their parents and brother against brother. The subsequent losses and afflictions which our people endured were in many ways determined by the destruction of our thousand year-old statehood and the struggle against the peoples' religious faith, generating a profound division within society.

With awe and reverence we recall the great endeavours of the New Martyrs and Confessors of the Church of Russia, through whose prayers, we believe, the Lord never abandoned our people and granted to it the strength to accomplish many great feats of labour and military feats leading us to victory in the most terrible of all wars, to restoring the country, to achievements which evoke admiration.

We give thanks to God for the miracle he has revealed to the world – the resurrection of faith and piety within our people, for the restoration of holy sites once destroyed, for new churches and monasteries, the construction of which is a visible sign of the profound changes that have taken place in peoples' hearts.

Over recent decades there have been and there remain today many difficulties and hardships. But they are all transient, and that is why we are not afraid of them. The experience of the past century has taught us many things and is to serve as a warning against many things.

Let us fearlessly tread the paths of salvation, “for God is with us.” Let us be stronger in our faith, “for God is with us.” Let hope assert itself within us, “for God is with us.” Let us grow in love and accomplish good, “for God is with us.”

Let us place all our hope in the Lord, for he is “everlasting strength” (Is 26:4) and, as the apostle Peter testifies, “there is no salvation in any other” (Acts 4:12). May the light of Christ illumine all our earthly path, and may this path lead us to the kingdom of heaven, which the Lord has prepared for those who love him.

As I spiritually rejoice today together with all of you who live in various countries, cities and villages, yet making up the one Church of Christ, my prayerful wish is that each of you shall enjoy health of soul and

body, peace in your families and success in your labours. And may the Lord and Saviour who was born in Bethlehem grant to each of us the opportunity with renewed strength and with all our heart to feel his presence in our lives.

Amen.

/+KIRILL/

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUS

The Nativity of Christ

2016/2017

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