THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE of Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow and All Russia

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

(1 Jn 4:9)

Your Eminences the archpastors, esteemed fathers,

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

It is with a heart overflowing with joy in the Son of God who has come in the flesh that I address all of you and congratulate you on the radiant and life-bearing feast of the Nativity of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (*Lk 2:14*). In glorifying from year to year the ineffable benevolence shown to us by the Saviour, we, as once the shepherds of Bethlehem who heard from the angel the “great joy, which shall be to all people” (*Lk 2:10*), hasten with spiritual eyes to see the Messiah, whose coming was foretold by the glorious prophets and awaited by a great multitude of men and women.

Thus, the desire, as the prophet Haggai puts it, of all nations (*Hag 2:7*) “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (*Phil 2:7*). The Lord of the universe selects for himself not an imperial palace, not a dwelling of the rulers of this world, not a mansion of the rich and highly placed. No room is even found for him at an inn. The Son of God is born in a cave for cattle, while his cradle is a manger for the feeding of animals.

“What, then, is poorer than the cave and humbler than the swaddling clothes in which the richness of the Godhead has shone forth?” Having chosen for the Mystery of our salvation utmost poverty (*Hypakoe* for the feast), Christ consciously rejects the values which are considered important in our world: power, wealth, fame, noble birth and social status. He offers to us another law of life, the law of humility and love, which vanquishes pride and enmity. It is by this law that human frailty, united with the grace of God, becomes the force which cannot be countered by those who possess power and might in this

world. The power of God manifests itself not in earthly majesty and worldly comfort, but in simplicity and humility of heart.

As St. Seraphim of Sarov puts it, “the Lord seeks out a heart that is overflowing with love of God and neighbour. This is the altar upon which he loves to ascend...’Son, give me thine heart,’ he says, ‘and the rest I shall give to you,’ for the kingdom of God can be contained within the human heart (*Conversation on the Goal of the Christian Life*). The Lord is not disdainful of the poor and homeless, he does not despise those who have little money and unglamorous jobs, and even more so he does not hold in contempt those who are physically disabled or seriously ill. None of these things in themselves put a distance between the human person and God, and therefore should not lead one into being downcast or become a cause for destructive despair. The Saviour seeks us out. “My son, my daughter, give me thine heart, - he exhorts us (*Prov 23:26*).

The wondrous feast of the Nativity reminds us of the need to follow unceasingly Christ “who has come so that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly” (*Jn 10:10*), and who is the one true path and unchanging truth and genuine life (*cf. Jn 14:6)*. And may we not be afraid of the difficulties that we inevitably encounter, and may none of us be broken by the trials that befall our lot, for God is with us! God is with us, and from our life fear disappears. God is with us, and we find peace of soul and joy. God is with us, and with steadfast hope in him we shall accomplish our earthly journey.

In following Christ, the human person goes against the elements of this world. He does not submit to the temptations he encounters, and he determinedly tramples down the barriers of sin that stand in his way. Indeed, it is sin that draws us away from God and genuinely renders our lives harsh. It is sin that, in eclipsing the light of the Divine love, plunges us into many and varied afflictions and hardens our heart towards other people. Sin, though, is vanquished only by the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is given to us through the Church. The power of God which we receive transforms our inner world and helps us in accordance with the Lord's will to change the outer world. And thus those who have in one way or another have fallen away from Church unity lose, like a tree that has dried up, the ability to offer truly good fruits.

I would like today to say a special word to the people of Ukraine. The fratricidal conflict which has arisen in the land of Ukraine should never divide the Church's children by sowing enmity within peoples' hearts. The true Christian cannot hate his neighbours or those afar. “Ye have heard*,* – the Lord says to those who hear him, - that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mt 5:43-45). May these words of the Saviour become a guiding force in our lives and may

evil and hatred towards others never find a place in our hearts.

I call upon all the children of the multinational Russian Orthodox Church to pray fervently for the speedy cessation of hostilities in Ukraine, for the healing of wounds both physical and spiritual that war has caused people. Let us in church and at home sincerely beseech this of God; let us pray also for those Christians who live far from our lands and who are suffering as a result of armed conflicts.

On this light-bearing night of the Nativity and the following holy days let us praise and exalt our Saviour and Lord who, in his great love for humanity, deigned to come into the world. Like the biblical Magi, let us offer to the divine Infant Christ our gifts: instead of gold – our sincere love; instead of frankincense – our ardent prayer; instead of myrrh – a kind and caring disposition towards our neighbours and those afar.

Once more I congratulate you all, my beloved, on the radiant feast of the Nativity, and on the forthcoming New Year I prayerfully wish you the abundant mercies and compassion of the greatly compassionate Lord Jesus. Amen.

+ KIRILL

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUS

Moscow

The Nativity of Christ

2015

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