



## **Primate of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia celebrates at the Church of the "Joy to All the Afflicted" Icon of the Mother of God in Moscow**

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On 7 February 2010, the Sunday of the Last Judgment, His Beatitude Christopher. Archbishop of Prague and Metropolitan of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Moscow church of the "Joy to All the Afflicted" Icon of the Mother of God.

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Concelebrating were Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations, and Archbishop Nifon of Philippopolis, representative of the Orthodox Church of Antioch at the Moscow Patriarchate. Taking part in the divine service were also archpriest Alexy Yuschenko, rector of the Moscow metochion of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, hieromonk Serafim (Shemyatovsky), and clerics of the church.

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After the Divine Liturgy, the DECR chairman greeted His Beatitude Metropolitan Christopher, saying: "Your Beatitude! I am happy to welcome you at this holy church on this solemn day, when the Orthodox Church commemorates the Last Judgment, while preparing for Lent. This is a special day for the Russian Church, as we commemorate the new martyrs and confessors of Russia, the great hierarchs, martyrs and confessors who suffered persecution from the godless power in the 20th century. The Church also commemorates a great hierarch, St. Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople, who opposed heresy in the hard years of the Arian discord and expounded the Orthodox teaching of the Holy Trinity. His memory is commemorated throughout the world.

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This church has been opened for many years, and even in the years of persecution. Divine services were celebrated here by many renowned hierarchs of our Church, and ardent prayers were offered up before a miraculous icon of the Mother of God called "Joy to All the Afflicted" for many decades. Today we are welcoming you, Your Beatitude, who celebrated the Divine Liturgy for the first time in this church. We welcome you as the Primate of the fraternal Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, and as a man upon whom the Lord has entrusted with caring for a Local Orthodox Church.

Your Beatitude! We love you not only as the head of the Church, but also as a man of kind heart and precise mind and solid sense. It is a joy to celebrate with you and a pleasure to associate with you. We have been acquainted for many years and met on different occasions in different countries. We have defended Orthodoxy together before the non-Orthodox world; we have worked together in the field of

inter-Orthodox cooperation and interreligious dialogue.

I would like to wish you, Your Beatitude, grace, good health, and strength from the Lord to carry your primatial cross for many years. May the Lord strengthen you in your archpastoral ministry. I would like you to know that you have friends and brethren in the Russian Orthodox Church, in the capital city of Moscow. You will always find support here, an opportunity to have a rest, if need be, and to pray at the Moscow holy sites in this holy church, and to celebrate here when you so wish. We shall always wait for you and welcome you here."

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Metropolitan Hilarion presented the Primate of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia with the "Joy to All the Afflicted" Icon of the Mother of God for prayerful memory.

His Beatitude Metropolitan Christopher thanked the DECR chairman for concelebration. The Primate of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia shared his reminiscences of a meeting with Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk at St. Nicholas' Church in Vienna that took place when His Beatitude was locum tenens of the Metropolitan's Throne. "You said firmly that the Lord would give me the throne of the first hierarchs of the Czech and Slovakian lands. Four years have passed, and history repeats: I am standing near you as the first Primate who greets you with your elevation to the rank of metropolitan on the first Sunday after the elevation.

You are not only a hierarch and a metropolitan, but also a theologian, writer, teacher, and composer," the Primate of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia continued. He noted a profound prayerfulness that permeates the Divine Liturgy composed by Metropolitan Hilarion celebrated today at the request of His Beatitude. "Your music brings us from earth to heaven, offering us an opportunity to hear the voice from the Heavens," His Beatitude said, "We are journeying along the way of the Resurrection of Christ to the feast of Pascha."

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His Beatitude Metropolitan Christopher presented Metropolitan Hilarion with a panagia, which, as His Beatitude said, brings Paschal greetings, "so that the Lord preserves you in good health in all goodness for many and good years."

Archpriest Leonid Kucheruk congratulated Vladyka Hilarion with the elevation to the rank of metropolitan on behalf of the clerics of the church, saying: "This high award has been given to you for your work, and we witness it also in our church. You have been rector for over six months, and we see changes here, for instance, pious divine services, a wonderful choir, and many other things."

The archpastors prayed at the venerated shrine of the church, the "Joy to All the Afflicted" Icon of the Mother of God.

The DECR chairman gave a luncheon in honour of the Primate of the Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

After the divine service, Metropolitan Hilarion was greeted by his sub-deacons, who wished their archpastor God's help in carrying his archpastoral cross, promised to be his faithful associates, and presented him with a bouquet of flowers.

On February 6, His Beatitude Metropolitan Christopher, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, and Archbishop Nifon of Philippopolis celebrated the All-Night Vigil at the Church of the "Joy to All the Afflicted" Icon of the Mother of God.

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