



Christmas Message by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia



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to the Archpastors, Pastors, Deacons, Monastics

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 all on the radiant feast of the Nativity of Christ. Today the Church in heaven and on earth is triumphant as she rejoices at the coming into the world of our Lord and Saviour and lifts up praises and thanksgiving to God for His mercy and love for the human race. It is with spiritual trembling that we listen to the words of the hymn: "Christ is born; glorify Him! Christ comes from heaven; go out to meet Him" (Hirmos for the Canon of the Nativity of Christ). With reverence and hope we set our gaze upon the cave of Bethlehem where the Divine Infant lies wrapped in swaddling clothes in a lowly manger.

Truly, today there has been revealed the great "mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels" (1 Tm 3:16). It is not possible for the human intellect to penetrate the depths of the mystery of the Divine Incarnation. It is not possible to comprehend fully how the One Who is the fount of life for all that exists is now warmed by the breath of animals! The Creator of

the universe humbles Himself in taking upon Himself the image of creation. The Son of God becomes the Son of Man! “And ask not how,” St. John Chrysostom exhorts us, “for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed; He had the power; He descended; He redeemed; all things yielded in obedience to God. This day He who is, is born; and He who is, becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is His” (Homily for the Nativity of our Saviour Jesus Christ).

As we celebrate the world-saving feast of Christ’s Nativity, we contemplate its unsurpassed spiritual meaning and fundamental significance for all of humankind. All of this is true; yet it is also important to grasp the personal dimension which the mystery of the Divine Incarnation has for each one of us, for it is not fortuitous that we turn to the Lord in prayer and call him our Saviour.

We know from experience that we cannot vanquish of our own accord the evil which is within ourselves, no matter how desperately we may try. Sin, which has so deeply smitten the human soul and distorted human nature, is impossible to overcome with spiritual practices and psychological trainings. God alone is capable of healing and restoring all of the human person to his or her original beauty. “For what purpose did God become clothed in human flesh?” asks St. Ephrem the Syrian and answers, “In order that the flesh itself may taste the joy of victory and be filled with and come to know the gifts of grace..., in order that people may ascend to Him as though borne aloft with wings and find comfort in Him alone” (Commentary on Tatian’s Diatessaron, Chapter One). Christ’s incarnation liberates us from slavery to sin and opens up the path to salvation.

“I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness,” the Lord proclaims (Jn 12:46). Like the bright star of Bethlehem, which led the wise men from distant lands of the East to the Divine Infant, we Christians, being true sons and daughters of light (cf. Jn 12:36), are called upon to enlighten this world with the light of faith (cf. Mt 5:14) so that those around us, in seeing the example of our steadfastness and courage, long-suffering and spiritual nobility, magnanimity and unfeigned love for our neighbour, may “glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pt 2:12).

Today, when the peoples of the earth are enduring the arduous trial of a new disease, when peoples’ hearts are overwhelmed by fear and anxiety for the future, it is especially important that we strengthen our collective and individual prayer and offer to the Lord the diligent labours of good works. Many of our brothers and sisters, as a result of the devastating pestilence, no longer enjoy the opportunity of visiting churches. Let us lift up our petitions to the Merciful Lord that He may renew their bodily and spiritual strength, grant the soonest recovery to those who are sick and send down His help to the physicians and all medical workers who with self-sacrifice are doing all they can for peoples’ health and lives.

Let us recall that no problems are ever capable of breaking the human spirit if we retain our living faith and place our hope in God for all things. Let us therefore accept without murmuring the afflictions that have befallen us, for “if I put my trust in Him, He shall be my sanctification: for God is with us” (the Office of Great Compline), as Christ’s Church sings during these holy days of the Nativity. Let us pray that the lowly cave of our life be illumined by the incorruptible light of the Godhead, so that our contrite and humble hearts, like the manger in Bethlehem, accept with reverential awe the Saviour Who has come into the world.

God finds an expanse in the human heart if it is filled with love. “The one who labors in love will live with the angels and will reign with Christ,” St. Ephrem the Syrian tells us (Homily on the virtues and vices, 3). May these holy days of the feast become for us a special time for the accomplishing of good deeds. Let us use this grace-filled opportunity, too, to glorify Jesus Christ, Who is born, by displaying kind-heartedness to our neighbours, by rendering help to the needy, and by comforting the afflicted and, perhaps above all, those who are suffering from the coronavirus infection or its effects.

May the Lord illumine with the light of knowledge of Him the peoples of the earth, may He bless them with peace and may He help each and every one of us to be aware of our special responsibility for the present and future of the planet. May the Divine Infant send down His love and accord into our families and protect our young people and all of us from sin and dangerous errors. Once again, I cordially greet all of you, my dear, with the radiant feast of the Nativity of Christ and wish you all good health, unceasing joy and the bountiful aid from God Who is “the true light that enlightens every man... coming into the world” (Jn 1:9). Amen.

+KIRILL

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA

Moscow Nativity of Christ 2020/2021

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