THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Christmas Message from Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow and All Rus’



Christmas Message from Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow and All Rus’ to the Archpastors, Pastors, Deacons, Monastics and All 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,

The unutterable love of God has gathered us today so that in *the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* (Eph 4:3) we may celebrate one of the most solemn and at the same time mysterious feasts of the Church – the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Glorifying our Saviour’s coming into the world, I extend my heartfelt congratulatios to all of you, my beloved, on the joyful event which opened a new era in the

relationship between God and humanity.

Looking back at that moment two thousand years ago, we every time strive to fathom the great miracle of the Divine Incarnation, and our Creator's loving-kindness and mercy never fails to amaze us. For many centuries, humanity had been living in tense expectation, awaiting *the Peacemaker* (cf. Gen 49:10) promised by the Lord, which is to say a *King… just and having salvation* (Zech 9:9), in Whose name *nations will hope* (Is 42:4). Thus, in the fullness of time *unto us a Child was born* (Is 9:6) *that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life* (Jn 3:16). The love of God which *passes knowledge* (Eph 3:19) sent into the world *not an ambassador or an angel*, or the strong and mighty ruler tha people had been expecting, but God Himself Who took flesh in order to deliver humankind from the bondage of sin and evil.

It is astounding that the greatest milestone event in human history, heralded by the Old Testament prophets and foreknown by prominent thinkers of antiquity, came to pass so quietly, seemingly unnoticeable. Bethlehem lay sleeping. Jerusalem lay sleeping. The whole of Judaea lay sleeping. Neither to the powerful *sound of the trumpet* (Ps 150:3), nor to worldwide jubilation, but humbly and meekly did the Almighty Lord – the King of kings and the Lord and Creator of all things – reveal Himself to the world in the nightly silence of a poor cave, glorified by the angelic hosts and a small number of shepherds who came to *see this thing that has come to pass* (Lk 2:15).

It is as if at the very start of His earthly journey the Lord desires *total humiliation [to become] the measure of His Goodness*, St John Chrysostom writes. Only love which is perfect can act with such nobleness, for it *does not seek its own* (1 Cor 13:4-5), nor does it parade itself or demand honour and glory. Perfect love endures all things, every hardship and affliction for the sake of others. *For this He assumed my body*, John Chrysostom continues, *that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life* (The Nativity Sermon). God's abundant love for us was revealed in that we received the true *treasure of Life* – the Lord Himself, *for of Him and through Him and to Him are all things* (Rom 11:36).

Love is the real reason and driving force behind God's actions. He brought the world into being and created the human person, giving him gifts in plenty. And out of love He came to save the human person

when he had fallen away from communion with his Maker. Our Creator ordained that the purpose of our life is to *love one another* (Jn 13:34). But how can we achieve this when the world around us is so full of evil and hatred? To do so, we need to open our heart and offer it to God. He alone can transform it and make our heart, weak and constrained as it is, capable of embracing all those who are near or far off, all those who do us good or wrong. We are called to love them all, as Christ's commandment teaches us, and be perfect, just as our *Father in heaven is perfect* (Mt 5:48).

As we kneel in prayer before the Newborn Divine Infant, let us ponder on what gifts we can offer to the Lord and Creator of all things. Is there anything worthy of and commensurate with the greatness of the Pre-Eternal Maker? Yes, there is such a precious gift which is most desirable in God's eyes – it is our humble, loving and merciful heart. So let us magnify the Incarnate Christ not only with beautiful hymns and words of congratulation but above all with our good works. Let us share the radiant Christmas joy with those in need, comfort our neighbours by our loving care, visit the sick and afflicted. Let us console and support people who have lost heart and shield with our prayer *all those in turmoil and grief*.

By its great salvific power love heals all indifference and malice, heals enmity and grievance. It assuages the hard-hearted and makes straight the many things that have gone awry in social relations. By doing so we will indeed fulfil our lofty vocation as Christians, for *in effusion of love* we *resemble God* (Isaac of Nineveh, Mystic Treatises, Chapter 74).

The mystery of the Divine Incarnation is the mystery of God's real presence in the world. The Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian bears the following witness to the life of the world to come when the Lord abides forever with humankind: *He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God* (Rev 21:3). However, the ineffable mystery of the Divine presence is revealed here, on earth, for with the Nativity of the Saviour *the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand* (Mk 1:15). We become a visible part of this reality, making up the One Holy Church of Christ, through which we all, my beloved, serve as messengers and envoys of this Higher Kingdom of love. In some mysterious and profound way, we experience that *God is with us*, and this experience constitutes the very essence of the hidden mystical life of the Church.

Let us always remember that inasmuch as the Almighty God Himself – *the Alpha and the Omega, the*

Beginning and the End, the First and the Last (Rev 22:13) – embraced the history of humanity and promised to be with us *even unto the end of the world* (Mt 28:20), we have nothing to fear even though we live in anxious times. In responding to the great love of our Saviour, let us learn to entrust our whole self to the Lord and His good Providence, so that unto the second glorious coming of Christ we may bear bold and joyful witness even to those *from far countries* (Is 8:9) that

God is with us!

+KIRILL

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUS'

Christmas

2023/2024

Moscow

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