THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Christmas Message by His Holiness Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow and All Russia



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of Moscow and All Russia

to the Archpastors, Pastors, Monastics and All the Faithful Children

of the Russian Orthodox Church

Your Graces the archpastors, all-honourable presbyters and deacons, God-loving monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters,

Offering praise to God glorified in the Trinity and sharing with all of you the joy of this feast, I convey to you, the Orthodox children of our Church living in Russia and other countries of the Moscow Patriarchate's pastoral responsibility, my heartfelt greetings on the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, which is the celebration of the Maker's incarnate love for His creation, the fulfillment of the promise of the Son of God's coming into the world and the hope for salvation and life eternal.

A great and most glorious wonder is wrought today: A Virgin giveth birth, yet her womb suffereth no corruption! The Word is incarnate, yet is not separated from the Father! Angels give glory in company with shepherds; and with them we cry out: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men! (Sticheron of the Feast). With these words the Church bears witness to the mysterious event which occurred more than two thousand years ago in the cave in Bethlehem and altered the entire further course of world history. It is with a sense of amazement and awe that we incline the knees of our hearts before this mystery of the Divine plan for salvation, incomprehensible to human mind. It is with gratitude that we accept this sacrificial gift of the Maker and Provider, for it pleased Him to do so for our sake, and *confess His grace, proclaim His mercy, conceal not His gracious deeds* (cf.: the Great Blessing of Water).

What then are we, twenty-first century Christians, to do in order to become partakers of this truly precious act of God's loving-kindness and to be counted worthy of His kingdom *prepared from the foundation of the world* (Mt. 25.34)?

All we can and must do is respond in kind to His love. And this means to believe and fully trust God, to observe the Gospel commandments, *to depart from evil and do good* (Ps. 34.14), to be, as the Saviour calls us to, *the light of the world and the salt of the earth* (Mt. 5. 13-14).

Endowed with free will and the inalienable right to choose, any person may accept Christ or reject Him, be on the side of light or plunge into the darkness of sin, live in accord with their conscience or *according to the elemental spirits of the universe* (Col. 2.8), through good works create paradise within their hearts or, by contrast, in doing evil experience already here on earth the torments of hell. In other words, each of us is called to joy and the fullness of life or, put simply, to happiness. And happiness (it is

vital to realize and understand) is impossible without God, for He is the fount of life and all good things. He is the Maker and Provider, He is the loving Father, our caring Helper and Protector. Having free will, we can choose life and attain the likeness of God, but we are also free to choose for ourselves a different, godless and graceless way of life that leads to perdition.

For this reason the Lord, Who created us, nonetheless does not save us without our participation. It is in the harnessing of *the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect* (Rom. 12.2) with the human will, albeit imperfect yet striving towards the good, that we have the pledge of a successful journey through our earthly life. Life everlasting for every one of us, ultimately, is the continuation of that spiritual condition which characterized us in our earthly life.

Mindful of this, let us, as the Apostle Paul says, strive to acquire within ourselves *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Gal. 5.22-23) along with other gifts of the Holy Spirit. Let us do everything possible to remain Christians not only in name but in our way of life, in how we treat our relatives and friends, our colleagues and co-workers, and every human being who is in need of our help and sympathy, compassion and support.

Every day, and even more so on this great feast, we are called to pray ardently for *the peace of the whole world, for the welfare of the holy Churches of God, for the sick, for the suffering, for captives and for their salvation*. These petitions are of great significance today, for the powers of evil which desire warfare and division have risen up in arms against Orthodoxy. They sow enmity and hatred, exploiting any means to implement their cunning designs. Yet we believe and hope that the power of God will put to shame all *the powerless boldness* of demons and their henchmen. Thus it was many times in our history, and so it shall be now. The centuries-old experience of the Church assures us of that.

I express my special gratitude to all those who, carrying out their pastoral ministry in the territory of Ukraine, remain faithful to canonical Orthodoxy even at the risk of their life and health, who fearlessly tread the path of confessing Christ, who endure vilification and affliction for Christ and for the Church. May the Lord help these courageous defenders and champions of the Truth in their hardships and may He count their sufferings as righteousness.

All this notwithstanding, we are united in spirit. We are one, for we have emerged from one baptismal font. We are one, for together we manifest the fullness of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We are one, for we are linked by the indissoluble bonds of love in Christ. We are one, for inviolable are the words of Christ, Who said: *I am with you always, until the end of the age* (Mt. 28.20). That is why we Christians have nothing and no one to fear, as Saint Paul reminds us in his exhortation: *If God is for us, who is against us?* (Rom. 8.31). Inspired by this promise, we live and create, we struggle and vanquish in the name of the Lord, for as the Holy Apostle Peter says, *there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved* (Acts 4.12). There has not been, there is not, nor shall there ever be, as the Church testifies.

Since the coming of the Lord into the world and to this day, all those who believe in Him are given the opportunity to be children of the Heavenly Father, for, as Saint Paul says, now we are *no longer strangers and aliens, but also members of the household of God* (Eph. 2.19). This means that we are all His children, and that in Him and through Him we become closer and dearer to one other.

In the divine services and sacraments of the Church, which serves as the meeting point between the human person and the Maker, the veil of eternity is drawn aside for us and here, on earth, we receive a foretaste of the coming fullness of life when, according to the Holy Scripture, *God will be all in all* (1 Cor. 15.28), when no one and nothing *will be able to separate us from the love of God* (Rom. 8.39), from the joy of communion with Him, when *God will wipe every tear, and death will be no more, … for the first things have passed away* (Rev. 21.4).

In proclaiming to people the glad tidings of the Saviour’s coming into the world, the Church, like a loving mother, exhorts everyone to believe in Christ and live according to His covenant so that we may become inheritors of eternal blessedness. Truly, the Lord has come to earth so that He may raise us up to heaven. He always encourages people to follow the path of spiritual and moral transformation which is attained through fulfilling the Gospel commandments, through the voluntary cooperation between the human person and God, through the participating action of His grace, sent down in the sacraments of the Church.

And if in our relationships with people, in our everyday affairs and concerns we learn to be guided by the divine ordinances, then many things will change both within and around us. Life will acquire true meaning and be filled with real joy and happiness.

Let us then be worthy of the Christian name and calling. Let us tread our path through life with steadfast faith and unwavering hope in help from above, joyfully welcoming every new day and every new opportunity to perform good works, showing love for our neighbours and *giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for all things* (Eph. 5.20), to Whom belong all glory, honour and worship unto the ages of ages. Amen.

I congratulate all of you, my beloved, on the Nativity of Christ!

+KIRILL

PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA

The Nativity of Christ

2024/2025

Moscow

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