



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

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

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

of the Russian Orthodox Church

Your Eminences the archpastors, honourable fathers,

venerable monks and nuns, dear brothers and sisters!

On this present light-bearing night we again spiritually relive the joy of the world's finding of its Saviour. Again in our thoughts we gaze upon the Son of the Living God who lies in a manger of the cave of Bethlehem. Again we hear in our hearts the voice of the angels giving praise to the Creator and Redeemer: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men' (Lk. 2:14).

As we listen attentively to the powers of heaven, we realize that Christ's Nativity is filled with an extra-temporal meaning and has a direct bearing upon the destiny of each human person. Even he who does not know of the Saviour's feat may now acquire the knowledge of the Truth, become a son of God and inherit life eternal. Christ's Nativity reveals to us the truth about ourselves and makes it possible for us to understand and assimilate this truth.

Let us recall that the first man was made by the Creator as perfect 'in the image and likeness of God' (see: Gen. 1:26). Yet Adam transgressed the commandment and distorted the Creator's intention for him. Deprived of a living communion with God, humanity buried itself evermore into the abyss of sin and pride. And then the Lord, in loving his creation and desiring salvation for it, sends into the world his Only-begotten Son, who restored the integrity of human nature and became the New Adam. Christ has shown to us an example of life conforming to the divine plan for the human person. This example is a reliable guide, which enables us not to depart from the way and to find only true direction leading to the fullness of life in both the conditions of our earthly existence and in eternity.

We progress along this saving path when we respond to the calls of God. One such call directed towards us is contained in the Epistle of St. Paul: 'glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's' (1 Cor. 6:20). This means that we render praise to God not only in our prayers and hymns but also through good deeds for the benefit of our neighbour, people and Church.

This labour becomes a joyous labour in the name of Christ; it genuinely transforms the world around us and ourselves. People achieve a sense of togetherness when they work not by compulsion and not for the sake of gain but when moved by the sincere desire to do good and useful deeds. It is in this way that we serve the Creator together by embodying his will in our lives. The Greek word *leitourgia* ('liturgy') is translated as 'common cause.' Our entire lives should become a Liturgy, a common prayer and cause accomplished so that God's plan for the world and human person may be embodied in life and so that we can thereby give glory and praise to the Creator. This demands from us solidarity with our brothers and sisters in faith and even with those who have not yet found the Lord in their heart yet, like the Magi of the Gospels, find themselves on the path towards him.

The importance of unifying our endeavours in order to overcome tragedy and misfortune was demonstrated to us by the fires, droughts and floods of the past year in Russia and in the other countries of historical Rus'. They once more reminded us of our Christian duty to help our neighbours without regard to their beliefs, nationality and social status. During the hot summer months many people generously shared their efforts, time and material goods with those they may not even know and whom they shall ever likely see. To what purpose did they do this? Out of compassion for those to whom misfortune fell, who experienced hardship and who needed help.

Public solidarity and joint labours for the attainment of common goals are impossible without overcoming selfishness, without forcing oneself to do good, without the renunciation of exclusive attention to our needs and interests. At the foundation of true 'unity of the Spirit' (Eph. 4:3) there lies the law of love bequeathed to us by the Saviour. National unity cannot be limited to merely times of trials. It has to become an integral part of our national self-consciousness and life.

I manifestly felt the strength of church unity during my numerous journeys to the dioceses of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. Everywhere I saw the readiness of the bishops, clergy, monks and nuns to labour for the good of the Orthodox Church, to bring to perfection their parochial, monastery and diocesan ministries. This plants hope for a successful growth of church life in the spirit of unity and co-operation.

From the bottom of my heart, which is filled with joy, I congratulate you, Your Eminences the archpastors, honourable clergy, monks and nuns, brothers and sisters, on the great and saving feast of the Nativity of Christ and the New Year. I prayerfully wish that you be zealous executors of the will of

God, bringing spiritual gifts to the Saviour of the world who has now been born so that his name be glorified always, now and forever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

KIRILL

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

The Nativity of Christ 2010/2011

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