

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV

To Most Reverend Archbishops and Metropolitans, God-loving bishops, reverend clergy, venerable monastics, beloved brothers and sisters in Ukraine and in the diaspora.

*Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.
(Luke 2:10-11)*

Christ is born!

It is with these words of the heavenly messenger that the Church of Christ announces the news of salvation. Today the Savior is born to us; the Lord came down to earth and appeared in the flesh in the town of Bethlehem. Heaven and earth exult today, and the whole of humanity is filled with gladness for our Creator did not abandon His creation, but came to share in its destiny. He became man to share in man's life: in its pains and joys, tribulations and uncertainties. The Lord becomes one of us, He manifests Himself as our Savior and Redeemer.

During the feast of Christ's Nativity we are rejoicing because we no longer feel abandoned or alienated; we are celebrating the fact that God is with us, that He loves us. We see the love of God incarnate in the newborn child Jesus, sleeping tenderly on the hay in a manger. The mystery of the Nativity of our Savior makes manifest for us the truth about the powerful divine nature appearing in the weak human one, about small and trivial human affairs transcending themselves to become great in God.

The Holy Gospel tells us that the Lord of the Universe was born to a family of refugees. At first, because of Caesar's decree, and then due to the tyranny of King Herod, the Holy Family had to abandon its home and ask others for help. Our God deemed it worthy to be born as a refugee and homeless. In these circumstances, only the Wise men from the East as well as all those who were not ashamed of being close to the needy, refugees or the persecuted, had the privilege of being near the Divine Child. Those people opened to Him the doors of their hearts, of their homes, saw the sign of salvation in the Lord born in a manger and, as a result, they were filled with the divine joy in the dark of the night. The Mystery of Christmas is the capacity to be in God's presence and to encounter the newly born Christ through the ability of being close to those who are weak and defenseless, who suffer from cold and the lack of bare necessities.

Ukraine lived through a strange year, in which everything was bigger than life, be it hope or desolation, certainty or despair, gain or loss. The fear was also immense, the fear sent by Darkness that saw our victorious ascent unto the Light. The darkness, then, sent us pain and blood, wounds and even death in the hope that the people would be terrified of this suffering and return to the old road of silent and unquestioning subordination.

There is no Ukrainian who did not participate in this trial of Divine Providence that continues to this day. In a way, all of us are in a zone of risk, in the zone of the

anti-terrorist operation (ATO). Just like those shepherds who, in their pastures heard the heavenly choirs of angels and received the news of the Savior's birth, we also have our own place of spiritual vigil, our own "security checkpoint" for our Christian and civilian mission. And even if one becomes tired and wants to escape, he is still working. In this case, however, by his passivity he gives evil a helping hand.

Our road to Christmas this year was the road to the wounded, to the forsaken. In a very literal sense, our Church became a field hospital erected to be a haven for the persecuted and healing for the injured. And even after Maidan, the Church remained that hospital, for it is her duty to be so. Pope Francis also says, "I see the church as a field hospital after the battle."

No one was prepared for this war, but the war continues and has an effect on every Ukrainian family, especially in the east of the country. There is the danger of lessening our sensitivity towards misery and suffering of our fellow men. The Christian knows that indifference kills no less than "Grad" rockets. It is the duty of the government to resolve in a wise manner the obligation to help its suffering citizens. And it is the duty of us Christians to be near to those who are in distress. It is this Christian unity with the needy, this solidarity that makes us stronger. Through it the power of the God incarnate, the work of the Savior born to free us and make us invincible in God, is manifest and given to us.

At Christmas time, every one of us looks up to heaven hoping to see the light of the Bethlehem star. The New Year is not promising to become any easier, neither our choices any simpler. Our most important task for the year 2015 is to be on our way towards a civilized and dignified life. To achieve this we all must put on the new man, the man of God, in other words, we have to abandon all unworthy compromises with the evil one. This is the task of each and every one of us, even those who think themselves completely unimportant. This task of moving towards good is also important from the point of view of responsible citizenship, because if every Ukrainian is changed – the country will be changed also. All of us share the responsibility of clothing our nation with effective governmental structures that will no longer be structures of sin. The government can indeed be a blessing, if it starts serving people.

Both of these tasks cannot be achieved realistically without at least once experiencing feelings of doubt, or without error, or without taking a step backwards. Let not our pride fool us into thinking we are perfect; it is better to acknowledge our failings before God and humbly ask, "O God, help my powerlessness." The humble do not lose faith in their abilities, for, as Ivan Franko writes, they "feel the Lord's hand on their shoulders." Let us remember, therefore, that despair, disappointment or the desire to exact revenge on those who disappointed us – these are the instruments used very effectively by the Darkness to strengthen its lost power. Let us not help the Darkness ruin our chances. Defeat lies not in that we have unsuccessful in accomplishing everything we wanted to, but in not doing anything at all.

We also have another task, without a doubt. It is our task to pray. The Maidan overcame the odds because people there prayed sincerely. Let us not let our "adaptation" to living in a time of war lessen the intensity of our prayers. Let us do everything in our power so that our prayer for Ukraine continue in our families and

communities, so that in our country, as in the poor manger of Bethlehem, would shine the light of faith, so that our hearts may be purified, and a new life continue to grow. Only then, through God's grace, may we become the most fortunate nation on earth.

Through the dark night of uncertainties and worries, the ancestral carol is heard, dispelling every sorrow and misfortune. With this Good News of Christmas, I desire to visit every home of every person of good will who accepts the newly born God and Savior and rejoices in Christ's Nativity.

We send today our Christmas greetings to our soldiers who will spend this holiday in cold trenches and bunkers in the front line and who are ready to sacrifice themselves for their people. Our festive greetings and wishes of everything good go to those who have lost their home and their family.

With the singing of the angels of peace on earth and glory in the highest, let us visit those who are grieving for their loss of relatives and friends, who are suffering from injuries, who are taken prisoner. Because during this Christmas night happiness wins over sadness, and the heavenly light outshines the dark, may our Savior fill us this Christmas with the power to conquer evil with good, falsehood with truth, and may the peace from heaven be triumphant over war.

To all our faithful in Ukraine and in the diaspora I wish from all my heart a joyous feast of the Nativity of Christ, tasty kutia and resounding koliada.

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

+Sviatoslav