

Вих. ВА 16/585 ENG

CHRISTMAS PASTORAL LETTER OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV

**Most Reverend Archbishops and Metropolitans, God-loving Bishops, Very
Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics, Dearly Beloved Brothers and Sisters, in
Ukraine and throughout the world**

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

John 1:14

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Today our hearts are filled with lightsome Christmas joy. The eternal God becomes man, so that man might be united and reconciled with Him forever. The Son of God becomes the son of the Virgin from Nazareth and allows Himself to be carried in human arms. For us, Christians, this great and unfathomable Mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God is the key to knowing the nature of God and understanding the history of salvation. The Nativity of Christ shows us who God is and who we are to be in relation to Him and to one another.

Gazing upon the pre-eternal God born in a simple stable cave, the Church sings: "From the bosom of the Father You came forth, O Lover of mankind, and in ineffable humility accepted supernatural poverty. You, O Lord, deigned to dwell in a cave, and, as a child, You, the Creator and Lord, are nursed at the breasts. Therefore, led by a star, the Magi bring You gifts, as to the Lord of creation, and the shepherds and angels wonder and cry out: Glory to God in the highest, Who is now coming in the form of a human being, to be born on earth" (Sunday before Nativity, Matins Praises).

In the birth of His Only-begotten Son among us, the almighty Creator of all that is seen and unseen shows us the reality of the most important and deepest truths on how parents are to regard their own child. He treats His creation as a loving Father, who sees

to it that His small child has everything necessary for life and for growth to maturity, in His Image and Likeness. And in the figure of the Most Holy Theotokos, He reveals to us the grandeur of a mother, who shares of her own body in order to bring her child into the world, and with tenderness and dedication watches over it, bestowing upon it the highest efforts of her soul, her spiritual world, full of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The Only-begotten Son of God, "True God from true God," in order to fulfill the will of His Father, chose to be conceived and be carried for nine months in a mother's womb, and to be born in all the frailty and weakness of human nature, "taking on the form of a slave" (see Phil 2:7). He did not merely become a human being, but took upon Himself all human susceptibility and helplessness, and having become an infant, experienced all the difficulties and dangers associated with human life. In Christ Jesus, God has once and for all taken upon himself the fullness of all that we consider "being Human" – the full measure of human existence with all its greatness, but also all its drama.

Based on this divine-human experience, the Almighty knows about that which hurts in me, why I cry or rejoice. He knows each one of us, because until the end of the world He continues to live with humanity and in humanity. He continues to share in every human suffering, He rejoices in every joy of ours, He continues to die in each human death, He continues to be persecuted and dishonored in each person whom the present world rejects and scorns. Christmas is the birth of God in me, the incarnation of the Son of God in my human history, in my life, no matter how trivial and complicated it may seem to me. Thus, my life, whatever the case, acquires meaning, for that, which is personally mine, has forever become personal for Him!

Today Christ the Lord is born in the history of our people and of His holy Church "for our sake and for our salvation." In this moment of history, which we are experiencing together, He "is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to intercede," as we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews (7:25). As then in Bethlehem Jesus needed Mary and Joseph to bring him into the world of mankind, so today He needs us, Christians of the third millennium, so that through our faith we might bring Him into our world, into present history and culture. Even more, we must bring Christ, born today for our salvation, into the corners of our personal, family, and social life. God wants to enter there and be personally present. However, He respects our free will and waits for us to be open to Him.

Therefore, it depends on us: to let Jesus Christ into our lives, or to close the door before Him, as was the case with the inns of Bethlehem. Where God is received, there everything is brought to life and is renewed. Those who open their hearts to Him receive hope, a new sense of their own existence, today and for the future. And on the contrary, where He is rejected or not allowed to enter everything dies, is subject to decay, ruin, and corruption. There one abides under the authority of death, is subject to false gods,

violence, and deceit, and in the end loses meaning in his or her life, loses hope in tomorrow, as everything dies before their eyes already today.

So let us celebrate Christ's Nativity, allowing the Savior who is being born to enter into our intimate selves. Let us wrap Him in the swaddling clothes of our personal, family, and social life. Let us warm Him with our hope, like the wise men who followed the Christmas star. May our everyday life be enlightened by the tender love, that the Divine Babe pours out on us.

In our personal lives let us avoid sin and do good. Let us make an effort, so that our thoughts and life choices be filled with God. Let us live in such a way that our neighbors might see that we are God's children, following His Word and His Commandments. In difficult times let us not forget that our Lord God loves with His limitless love, which is greater than our mistakes and failures, is stronger than our sins and offenses. Our Creator desires that we always be able to bring this love of His into the lives of others—and to bring it to life in our relationships and in our actions. Christmas is not only an historical event "in the days of Herod, king of Judea" (Lk 1:5). Christmas is a spiritual event of God's unceasing presence, embodied in every moment and every place, fulfilled for me and in me.

In our family lives, in everything, let us seek to live in love and harmony. Parents, remember that most frequently children create an image of God on the basis of your behavior, your love for one another, your sacrifice, generosity, and joy of life. Teach them to pray with sincerity first of all by your own example. In all remember that your children have been entrusted to you by the very Creator and Heavenly Father, so that you might raise them in love for Him, and for His glory. Especially in these festive days, provide them with wonderful Christmas memories, so they might experience the joy of the Christian life, which allows one to overcome all difficulties and adversities.

In our social life, especially in midst of today's economic and political challenges, and military conflict, let us remember that God is with us! We are not alone in the pain, suffering, and blood of this war. In His birth our Lord is made incarnate also today, in this historical moment in which we are called to live and die, build and restore, defend our Country from its enemy, and heal the wounds of the past and present. On Christmas Day, it is to us that St. Paul speaks, calling us to holiness of life: "...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:17-19).

As Christians, we are called today to be like the shepherds in the Gospel, who first received the news of the birth of the Savior, to carry it into the world and share it with our neighbors. In fulfilling this Christmas task, let us fill our homes, churches and our whole land with the singing of our ancient koliada-carol. Today let our koliada resound in all Ukraine and wherever there beats a Ukrainian heart! Let the joy of today's feast fill

us with hope of victory, not ours, but Christ's, who alone can bring together that, which today seems hopelessly divided, both in Ukraine and throughout the world.

Let us carry the newborn Savior in our caroling to all who today are sad or feel lonely. Let us share our joy and Holy Vigil Supper with those who thirst and hunger for justice and human attention. Let us visit those who are imprisoned, who are far from home or travelling. Let us carry the heavenly light of Christmas to the wounded and the suffering. Let us remember in prayer those held captive, those who suffer abuse and call out to God for the light of hope while under fire in the so-called demarcation line, on the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Let us be united in our thoughts and prayers with our soldiers, who are courageously defending our Christmas. Let us not forget about those, who anxiously await their safe return.

Wherever you may be, Dear Brothers and Sisters, from the youngest to the oldest, whether in Ukraine or abroad, from my sincere heart I wish each of you a tasty kutia, a Christmas full of cheer, and a happy and blessed New Year!

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

† SVIATOSLAV

*Given in Kyiv
at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on the feast of the Holy and All-Praised Apostle Andrew the First-called,
the 13th of December in the 2016th Year of our Lord*