

CHRISTMAS EPISTLE OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV

JANUARY 5, 2014 FATHER RECTOR

This is an unofficial translation and is presented until such is promulgated.

*To the Son, eternally and immaculately born of the Father,
Who—in the fullness of time—was born bodily, without seed, from a Virgin,
Let us cry out to Christ-God: Holy are You, O Lord,
Who fortified our strength!
(Canon of the Nativity).
Christ is born!*



At the voice of the angel, calling to the shepherds in the dark of night, let us now hasten to the poor stable in Bethlehem. Here we see in the Blessed Virgin Mary's arms the Son of God, who came into our world as a man. Together with them, let us rejoice and marvel; let us sing and contemplate the living and true God, who—born in a human body—gives Himself into human hands as a small, gentle and defenceless child.

Our Saviour's Nativity reveals the depths of Divine life as well as the truth about man. He—who today appears in human flesh—existed before the creation of the world, for—as God before all ages—He is *eternally and immaculately born of the Father as a son!* This is the ineffable and incomprehensible mystery of Jesus Christ's divine sonship which today is revealed and preached to all mankind. This feast makes the divine sonship accessible for all through the proclamation that God the Father loves us as his sons and daughters. In His new-born Son, we experience today our nearness to God. We experience the same warm, powerful, real and life-giving intimacy which is the Father's intimate affection for His first-born.

Gazing into the faces of the Divine Child and His Mother Mary, let us grasp the truth the Nativity teaches us about our humanity and of His humanity, which is a sign of God's presence: "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:12). This child—the God of Israel, *Who—in the fullness of time—was born bodily from a Virgin without seed.* He bestows upon Joseph the Betrothed, the wonderful role of guardian. At the Nativity of Christ, we receive the Eternal God in our own form. For people rightly desire to be cared for and here in Bethlehem, God himself—as a child—is the one caring for the human family!

Humaneness—as a sense of and respect for the sanctity of human life—is a moving and saving path along which—on this mysterious night—the Son of God, the Son of Mary, comes to our homes, to our families, to our nation. And this divine-humanity—the God-Manhood of Incarnate Son of God—gives us a Christmas path to follow in order to love God and neighbour. By celebrating Christmas with travellers and the homeless, or in solidarity with those who are despised and whose dignity is denied, we, Christians, as true guardians and evangelists of God’s presence among us, make our world, our society more humane and dignified for man himself.

The birth of the Son of God, the Eternal Word of the Father, reveals along with the greatness and glory of our God, the Creator and Saviour, the greatness and glory of man as the crown of all creation. In His Incarnation, God reveals the special dignity of man, because He is incarnated in it—that is to say, in his own image. St. Irenaeus of Lyon says: “When the Word was made flesh... He Himself became what His image was... making man like the invisible Father through the visible Word” (*Adv. Haer.*, 5, 16, 2).

Glorifying the dignity of the human person, Christ’s Church today sings out: “*Let us cry out to Christ-God: Holy are You, O Lord, Who fortified our strength!*” Just as the coming to earth of the Son of God through the Incarnation became the centre of world history, similarly the dignity of the human person is the foundation for a true and indeed humane society. The Church teaches that social institutions and their leaders must respect each human person and their prime duty is to promote the holistic growth of each person. The person can never be a means for the realization of economic, social or political agendas imposed by secular authorities. Rather governments must be vigilant when placing restrictions on freedoms or burdens on a person’s private life to never harm human dignity (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 131-133).

There is no future for a society in which man is demeaned. The dignity of the human person is the source for just laws and equitable social order. For in the human person the temporal and eternal, the divine and human, are united. Humanity is the door to eternity opened on Christmas Day by the Son of God’s humanity. So celebrating the Nativity means to keep open the doors of our hearts to human dignity, especially of the weak and defenceless, as was the Divine Child Himself in the arms of the Virgin Mary.

Today once again Ukrainian society is striving to build its future on the foundation of the Christian faith. The new-born Saviour is the fulfilment of the hopes of all mankind for the coming of God’s kingdom—a kingdom of justice, peace and goodness. The birth of the eternal King of Peace was announced by the angel, when he said to the shepherds: “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will come to all people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour” (Lk 2:10-11). This historic moment is important to us, for the word of the Evangelist proclaims that Christ Himself is the source of our joy and the end of our fears! In the Nativity of Christ, may our anxiety be transformed into hope, may confusion and uncertainty be directed along the path that leads to the place of our Lord’s birth. On this Christmas Day, when, according to the apostle Paul, the power of God was made manifest in human weakness (cf. II Cor. 12:9), our sense of powerlessness is turned into a realization of our self-worth. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, this realization of our self-worth becomes a

force that will enable us to build a society worthy of man. That is why today we glorify the power of the divine-humanity, singing: “*Holy are You, O Lord, Who fortified our strength!*”

Dearly beloved in Christ! On this joyous feast day of Christ’s Nativity, I wish all of you my sincerest greetings. I wish for you goodness and peace, harmony and health. I desire to knock on the door of every Ukrainian family! With the sound of ancient carols, I wish to cheer every Ukrainian heart! Announcing the great joy of our Saviour’s birth, I want to gather around Bethlehem’s stable all of our church—both in Ukraine and abroad— into one community of God!

Today let us feel like one Christian family in which our Saviour is born. Along the path of humanity and Christian solidarity, we can touch all who defend their own dignity, the dignity of their family and their nation! Let us share our Christmas joy with those who are far from home, in hospital beds or prison bunks. Together, guided by the light of the star, let us make haste towards our neighbours in order to see in the flesh—the Invisible One; in His poverty—the Source of all goodness; in His weakness—the Almighty, as the new-born Christ-God in the embrace of the Theotokos.

Christ is born!

Let us glorify Him!

† **SVIATOSLAV**

*Given in Kyiv,
at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
19 December 2013,
on the feast day of St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra, the Wonderworker*