

**2013/2014 PASTORAL LETTER OF THE
UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF CANADA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD**

To the Reverend Clergy, Religious Women and Men, Monastics, Seminarians and Laity

Christ is Born! Let us Glorify Him!

Welcoming the Stranger in Our Midst!

The birth of Jesus.

Luke's Gospel records the birth of Jesus Christ in these words: "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. . . . Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem. . . ., to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2: 1-7).

No room in the inn.

Already at Jesus' birth, he knew what it was like to be turned away, rejected, unwanted. When it came time for Mary to deliver her child, she gave birth to a son, "laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2: 7).

Imagine. No room for the Son of God.

Immediately following Jesus' birth, his parents feared for his safety and had to flee to a distant land. Matthew's Gospel describes the flight into Egypt in these words: "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for King Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.'" (Mt 2: 13).

With that, within days of his holy birth, Jesus, the Son of God, becomes a stranger in his own land, who must flee to a foreign place, in search of peace, safety and security. With this, the infant Jesus, the son of Mary, shares in the vulnerability of humanity by himself becoming a migrant, a refugee.

Migrants and Refugees: Towards a Better World

Pope Francis, chose for his theme for his 2014 Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees: "Towards a Better World." "Each individual is a part of humanity and, with the entire family of peoples, shares the hope of a better future."

The pope writes: "I think of how even the Holy Family of Nazareth experienced initial rejection: Mary 'gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn' (Lk 2: 7). Jesus, Mary and Joseph knew what it meant to leave their own country and become migrants: threatened by Herod's lust for power, they were forced to take flight and seek refuge in Egypt (cf. Mt 2:13-14). But the maternal heart of Mary and the compassionate heart of Joseph, the Protector of the Holy Family, never doubted that God would always be with them. Through their intercession, may that same firm certainty dwell in the heart of every migrant and refugee."

Pope Francis reminds us that "migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes

for various reasons... in their hearts they long for a better future, not only for themselves but for their families and those closest to them."

An invitation, a challenge.

Pope Francis invites us to reflect on what is involved in the creation of "a better world."

He writes: "Every human being is a child of God! He or she bears the image of Christ! We ourselves need to see, and then to enable others to see, that migrants and refugees do not only represent a problem to be solved, but are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved. They are an occasion that [God] gives us to help build a more just society, a more perfect democracy, a more united country, a more fraternal world and a more open and evangelical Christian community."

Hope for the future.

At one time or another, we were all immigrants in search of a better life. Let us not forget that. Instead, let us welcome with love and open arms the 200,000 migrants and refugees that each year either freely choose Canada as their adopted homeland or are forced to flee their own countries as a result of war, conflict, discrimination, human trafficking, suffering and death.

The Jesus who was born in Bethlehem for our salvation, and who at his birth experienced rejection for there was no room for him in the inn, is the same Jesus who shares our humanity so that we might share his divinity. Jesus desired to touch those left untouched in our societies. And now Jesus entrust this healing ministry to us, we who are the body of Christ. God uses our words, our hands, our feet, our bodies to extend to others the Kingdom of God. God needs us!

A Christmas wish and blessing.

This Christmas, Pope Francis, together with all your bishops and pastors, pray, "Dear migrants and refugees! Never lose the hope that you too are facing a more secure future, that on your journey you will encounter an outstretched hand, and that you can experience fraternal solidarity and the warmth of friendship! To all of you, and to those who have devoted their lives and their efforts to helping you, I give the assurance of my prayers and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing."

May our new-born Saviour, Jesus Christ bless you as you open your hearts wide to receive him. As we share the Good News with one another, "Christ is born!", "Let us Glorify Him", let the words heard by the shepherd of Bethlehem be our praise to God for his many gifts and wonders: "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors" (Lk 2: 14).

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

Sincerely in Christ,

+Lawrence Huculak, Metropolitan Archbishop of Winnipeg
+Michael Wiwchar, Eparch Emeritus of Saskatoon
+Severian Yakymyshyn, Eparch Emeritus of New Westminster
+Cornelius Pasichny, Eparch Emeritus of Toronto
+David Motiuk, Eparchial Bishop of Edmonton
+Stephen Chmilar, Eparchial Bishop of Toronto
+Ken Nowakowski, Eparchial Bishop of New Westminster
+Bryan Bayda, Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon