

NATIVITY ENCYCLICAL 2022/23

*"Thy Nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shined the light of knowledge upon the world"*

Now the long-awaited day of the Nativity of Christ has come, which has gathered us in the temples of God, united us with prayer and Christmas joy - the Lord has again allowed us to live until the bright and joyful days of the feast of the appearance of the Son of God into the world. What a wonderful feast this is! What a bright celebration! The lips close before the sacred silence of the Bethlehem night, the heart in silence listens to the angelic singing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men!"

"Now is not the time for teaching," says our own mentor, St. Theophan, "now it is not the time for teaching, but the time for doxology; now is not a time of instruction, but a time of thanksgiving." And this is what the Holy Church is calling us to. "Christ is born; glorify Him! Christ comes from heaven; go to meet Him! Christ is on earth; be exalted. Sing to the Lord, all the earth, and praise Him with gladness, O people, for He has been glorified."

The humble shepherds, who were guarding their flock, saw with trepidation the heavenly angel of glad-tidings, and heard from him the joyful news that the Savior of the world was born on earth. They were the first of the entire human race to hear the angelic doxology, which the Church received from the holy angels and repeats constantly, not only during the festive days of Nativity, but throughout the year during matins. And by this, she incessantly reminds the world of that great beneficence, of that mercy which He who became incarnate "for us and for our salvation" brought to earth.

But now it is impossible to silently avoid this time in which we are destined by God's Providence to follow our life's path - the path of salvation. This, the time of apostasy of almost all of mankind from Christ, is the time of the betrayal of Christ. Living amongst our contemporary society, we find ourselves horrified by the enormous chasm between the joys of the world and the joy of Christ's Holy Nativity for Orthodox Christians.

Already, it is possible to speak of many things with certainty: the upheavals and difficult circumstances, which people must live through, both in our Fatherland and throughout the diaspora, are the results of spiritual choices, which everyone makes for himself. In these choices lies the beginning of God's judgment, the beginning of sickness (Matt. 24:8). But God does not deprive us of our free will. God gives us more time to recognize our mistakes and falls.

In just the last few years, the world has seen such changes taking place, which in the past would have taken centuries. Evil has spread so much that one involuntarily contemplates that great sorrow, which will take place in the last times before the Second and glorious Coming of Christ. This Coming of His will be incomparably greater and more beautiful than the First. The First Coming was His suffering, death, and Resurrection. In the Second, He will appear in glory, as the Conqueror, surrounded by many angels. Since the beginning of the Nativity Fast, the Church has been calling her children to meet the Born Savior, to prepare for a worthy meeting with Him, but does modern humanity hear this joyful call?

We live in a world that is spiritually empty, cold and hostile to the demands of the spirit. Every witness of Christ brings it confusion. Like the ancient Herod, by cunning and violence he seeks to destroy in man the beginnings of spiritual rebirth, to kill Christ in him and one's faith in Him. Cunning and violence, deceit and murder remain the invariable weapons of modern Herods. But let us take comfort in the fact that the born God-infant Christ has compassion for us even now in our present trials.

Once the Pharisees and Sadducees asked the Lord to show them a sign from heaven. The Lord said: "When it is evening, ye say, it will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? Why don't you judge by yourselves what should be?" (Matthew 16:1-4; Luke 12:12:5-7). Do not the above words of the Lord apply to us? We can distinguish the face of the sky, for example, to foresee a change in the weather, but do we tempt the sign of the times?

Where are these signs? They were in the fulfillment of prophecy and the teaching of the word of God. The Lord Himself pointed to the sign of the prophet Jonah: "The Lord Himself will give us a sign, Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Is. 7, 14)." Signs were also in the fulfillment of events. "And this shall be a sign unto you," says the Angel to the shepherds of Bethlehem, "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Luke 2:12)."

And we, Orthodox Christians, in the fulfillment of the words of Scripture, in the study of the Judgment of God on the peoples, of which many have disappeared from the face of the earth, in a careful examination of the events of the present, in the study of ourselves, our path to God, we have a way to at least approximately recognize the future, whether it will be joyful or mournful.

The approach of the great event - the end of the world - the Lord Himself indicated in the signs of His coming (Mt.24, 6): "See that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass." "Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? (Luke 12:57)" The center of signs for the recognition of times is in ourselves, the Kingdom of God does not come with observation: it is within us. The fate of both an individual and a whole nation depends on everyone, it is in the hands of the person himself, in his freedom: everyone, according to the proverb, is the blacksmith of his own happiness. "I have set before you life and death," the Lord said to the people of Israel, giving the law through Moses, "choose life, that thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. 30:19).

During these festive days of Christ's Nativity, it is not to the chagrin of everyone that we appeal to the formidable instructions of the word of God, they are caused by the time we are now living through. But as a consolation to the children of the Church, let us once again ponder the words of the prophet: "Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and give birth to a Son." This Virgin, our Intercessor, the guarantor of all sinners, is the Mother of God. "Here is a sign for you," says the Angel to the shepherds, "you will find the Infant lying in the manger."

God is with us! The Lord, out of love for us sinners, descended to earth, approaching Baptism, looking for every lost sheep... The Lord came to save everyone, shed His blood for everyone. Meek, Savior, He is now not a fearsome Judge for us, but a Merciful Savior, who dwells among us and seeks our salvation. No matter what sorrows oppress us, no matter what darkness of delusions, vices and unbelief surrounds us, we, like wise men, will go to the shining Sun of truth, following Christ and following in His footsteps. The Lord is with us, our protector is the God Jacob, let us put all our hope in Him, in sorrow and joy, in happiness and misfortune, crying out to Him: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

God is with us! And if we are Christians not only in words, but also in life, we must be with Him, so that He lives in us and acts in us and through us. Only then will the "peace of God", which is "higher than all understanding" (Phil. 4:7), settle in our hearts, and no enemies will be fearsome to us: neither external - in the form of a human, nor internal - in the form of demons and sinful thoughts fighting us. "Of their fear shall we not be afraid, nor shall we be confused." Filled with high spiritual joy, with the Grace of God, we will always victoriously repel the enemies of our salvation, singing with the whole Church: "God is with us, understand all ye nations and submit yourselves, for God is with us!"

With this great feast of Christ, we heartily congratulate you, dear in the Lord, fellow Bishops, most reverent pastors, the diligent in their struggles monastics, the God-beloved flock of the Russian True Orthodox Church, with heart and soul we prayerfully wish you to partake in the fullness of the wondrous joy of our exalted celebration, renouncing in mind and heart all the apostate abominations surrounding us, with which this modern world has abandoned Christ the Savior, is filled. Let us remember that we are not on the path with this world, for we must follow the path that was shown to us by the Infant Christ Born in Bethlehem. In Him is our pure, holy joy and eternal salvation!

This day the world has known that God is with us. If God is with us, then who is against us? Who is against us if we remain faithful to the Lord Christ? Sing unto the Lord, all the earth, and with joy, sing all ye people: for our sake, was born a young child, the Eternal God!

CHRIST IS BORN, GLORIFY HIM!

Nativity of Christ

December 25 / January 7 2023

+Archbishop Tikhon of Omsk and Siberia
First Hierarch of the Russian True Orthodox Church