



UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH
SVIATOSLAV SHEVCHUK
MAJOR ARCHBISHOP OF KYIV-HALYCH

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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 she 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).*

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Beloved in Christ!

The Nativity of Christ envelops us with the invincible power of light and the warmth of God's love! Today, the Son of God is born in a human body, taking on all the experiences of human life: facing poverty, rejection and enmity, the coldness of broken human relationships, and the darkness of human hatred and persecution. God comes exactly where "there is no place for Him," where man has thrown Him out of his life space and the horizon of his own dreams.

On Christmas night, the spiritual darkness created by man through the coldness of his own indifference and sin dissipates before God's light from heaven in the Child Jesus, resting in a manger on hay. Under the angelic chant, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace..." the coldness of man's alienation from God and his neighbour transforms into warmth by God's drawing close to man. This is prophesied by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined" (9:1).

At the same time, God drawing close to man in the Nativity of the Son of God gives rise to an authentic rapprochement of man with man, to authentic reconciliation and peace that comes to us from heaven. In response to God's closeness, which warms and saves life, the shepherds say to each other: "Let us go to Bethlehem!" (cf. Lk. 2:15). They go together, seek out and find Joseph and Mary with the Child lying in the manger. Having seen the Child in the stable cave, as they were foretold, they go out and joyfully tell about the wonder they experienced.

The description of this meeting breathes warmth on us. The Divine Child is for us, Ukrainians, the light of God amidst the darkness of war, the warmth of God's closeness amidst the inhuman alienations of today.

This winter, in Ukraine the enemy wants to turn darkness and cold into weapons of mass destruction, the cheapest in the world! Every night, air attacks of the aggressor methodically destroy our cities and villages, homes and their vital infrastructure, kill civilians. The enemy seeks to turn a flourishing country into an icy desert, exporting to Ukraine the wasteland of its own Siberia. What he cannot steal, he recklessly destroys; those he is unable to enslave, he kills. Wherever he goes, there is no room for anyone – neither God nor man. How much effort he puts into sowing cold, hunger, darkness, and his own spiritual emptiness! One can boldly say this about him with the words of the prophet David: "Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD? There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge" (Ps. 14:4-6).

But despite the uncertainty, anxiety, mourning, and grief, we Ukrainians celebrate Christmas, as our ancestors did from generation to generation, even when we were under the rule of the godless communist regime of the last century. In the hiding places of the Carpathian forests, in exile or secretly in their homes, they lit a Christmas candle as a sign of living faith, as a sign of the presence of Christ the Saviour among us. When darkness surrounds us, the light, which is the newborn Lord, shines even brighter! He himself assures us of this: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn. 8, 12). And then he makes each of us bearers of God's light: "You are the light of the world... In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 5:14.16).

The light of the Newborn in the soul and body of our people illuminates a place of hope and invincibility. As darkness surrounds us, may the light of Christmas that is within us become even brighter! Instead of worrying about the darkness, let us light at least one Christmas candle! When we feel cold, let us warm at least one person with the kindness of our own heart, and together we will experience the warmth of God's love! Let us spread this Christmas light and warmth around us today.

In the middle of the night of prolonged Russian aggression, we, Ukrainians, light up the invincible light of God's truth and love with our witness. Examples of this light are the self-sacrificing service of our defenders, the self-sacrificing work of volunteers, doctors and chaplains, the numerous expressions of solidarity that we show to our neighbours in need in the daily circumstances of this calamity of war. And a particular sign of the presence of God's light in our midst are the Centres for resilience and the treatment of the wounds of war, which were built by the efforts of our faithful and in which the most vulnerable social groups of our society find spiritual and humanitarian support. These centres, which are usually located near our communities, resemble the quiet place near Bethlehem, which St. Joseph found for Mary and in which she gave birth and swaddled the Child Jesus.

In these contemporary Christmas mangers, where thanks to the glow of human solidarity during the blackouts there is electricity and you can warm up, today carols resound! There a place is provided for God, there a place is provided for every person who can not only satisfy his temporary needs but can also renew the lamp of his own heart, in order to shine unto others "with the hope to which the Lord calls us" (cf. Eph. 1:18), to be a bearer of resilience for the tired.

Today the heart of every believing Ukrainian becomes a hospitable Bethlehem, where Jesus finds refuge, who comes to us in the form of our neighbour in need. It is in the hearts of the sons and daughters of our people who in their native lands or in the settlements, raise their hands in prayer to the sky and extend a helping hand to their neighbour. It is here that

the common victory of Ukraine over a modern Herod, who set out to destroy our people, is forged. And so, with faith in our hearts, we can sing a song of victory over the Herods of all times:

*Bless us, Divine Child,
Give us today your gift of love
May not the power of hell ever be able
To separate us from You.
Bless us, for we are Your children,
Christ is born, give praise! ("Na nebi zirka - In the sky a star").*

On this joyful and bright day of Christmas, I greet each of you with the warmth of God's unceasing presence. With deep gratitude in my heart, I greet our military, volunteers, doctors, energy workers, and rescuers. For several years now, you have been the bearers of hope, tirelessly protecting, supporting, and preserving the lives of our long-suffering people.

I also greet our teachers and educators, who with great dedication in conditions of war not only impart knowledge to children, but also nurture in them a sense of resilience, teach them to be human, even in inhumane circumstances. To everyone who shines with a bright heart in the midst of darkness and projects the warm of kindness in the cold of war and devastation, I express my deep gratitude.

I greet those who are currently on the front line, in the occupied territories, in hospitals. I especially greet those who lost their homes, and those who provided shelter to those in need, whether in Ukraine or abroad, so that they might experience some home comfort and Christmas joy.

With Christ's Nativity I wish to hasten to those who mourn the loss of the dead and the missing in action, who watch over the wounded in hospitals.

I embrace those who are far from their homeland, parents who miss their children, wives who are waiting for their husbands to return from the front, and children who are praying that daddy will come home as soon as possible.

From the bottom of my heart, I impart on you all my fatherly blessing, and wish each of you, from the youngest to the oldest, the true joy of God's children, a tasty kutia, a merry celebration of Christ's Nativity, and a happy, peaceful, victorious and blessed New Year. As long as we are able to shine and warm one another with the light of Christmas, carols and prayer, no darkness or cold will ever overcome us!

Christ is born! Glorify Him!



Given in Kyiv

at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on the day of our father, St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia, the Wonderworker,
the 6th of December in the 2024th Year of our Lord