

**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

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.
(Is. 7:14)

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Beloved in Christ!

In this time of war, we, the Ukrainian people need a sign, a sign of hope—that God is with us, that God's life-giving power is stronger than the deadly power of the enemy fighting against us. In the Holy Scriptures, the birth of a child is a sign of hope from God! Today throughout the world the Church proclaims: “But as he [Joseph] considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit... She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us)” (Mt. 1:20, 22–23).

Isaiah prophesied about Christ: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Is. 9:6). As often happens with God’s promises, the fulfillment of the prophecy exceeds all human expectations because the Child that is born is not just an ordinary human child but the Son of God! He is the living God present among us. What is now being sent to humankind is not only a sign and symbol of hope – the Lord Himself comes to ensure and fulfill this hope. He comes as a baby in whom is God's power and might, God's authentic peace for all humanity, and for Ukraine in particular. The eternal God becomes man, one of us, for all time. So indeed, God is with us!

Angels rejoice in heaven, and people exalt today, and all creatures leap with joy because of the birth of the Lord Saviour in Bethlehem; for all deceit of idolatry has ceased, and Christ reigns forever.

We must live with the hope of Christ, overcoming all challenges and trials. Even when it seems to us that the world around us is collapsing, when the enemy’s deceitful propaganda suggests to us that we have no future, we still hope against hope—because God is with us! The Holy Apostle Paul reminds us: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). If we have Christ, we have a future that no one can take away from us.

The Almighty God comes into the world even now, this year, in His Nativity, in the body of a defenseless, weak child, to dispel fear before the strong and powerful of this world. God does not force anyone to anything but captivates us with his beauty and light, joy and peace. He appears to us today as a weak and vulnerable baby so that we accept Him, love Him, and tenderly embrace Him—embrace the One who envelops us with His love. How wondrous are God’s plans! The Ruler of the world, the Prince of Peace is the Child of God! So, in the Nativity of Christ, we can already see today that our future is not to be feared—it is full of peace, joy, tenderness, grace, and love, as we sing in the carol:

*And the bright star cries out to the world: The Messiah brings joy and happiness!
To Bethlehem hasten all of you now, To welcome God in a poor cave!*

God makes Himself dependent on people. He becomes a child so that we, taking up the mission of Mary, His Mother, and Joseph the Betrothed, protect Him from all dangers, all the Herods of this world.

We feel the same responsibility today regarding the children of the war in Ukraine. This is the most vulnerable segment of our society, and the trauma of war in children is the most complex. There are millions of women and children among Ukrainian refugees and internally displaced persons. Among the various types of humanitarian crises are the education and upbringing of children under the constant threat of rockets and bombs, poorly implemented school programs, stolen years of childhood innocence, and freedom from worry. We will protect our children in every way available to us! At the same time, let us remember that their spiritual wounds are healed in love, both in their family and in the family of God's children—in the Church of Christ. Let our church communities be a safe space for children, free from all forms of violence and contempt for human life, because to accept a child in the name of God is to accept the newborn Christ.

Dreaming of a bright future for our children, we must understand that for our people true victory is not only the liberation of territories and secured borders. Winning the war means creating a safe spiritual space of hope for the Ukrainian family, unafraid to give birth to children in their native land. Let every Ukrainian child be for us a sign of hope from God and of our faith in a blessed future.

On this joyful day of Christ's Nativity, "let us commend ourselves, and one another, and our whole life to Christ our God." May all those imprisoned and held captive know that we have not forgotten them and continue to pray for them. May all the wounded and traumatized experience the joy of our Savior's birth and God's healing touch. May the relatives and friends of those who have gone missing without trace never doubt the Lord's closeness to them.

With Christ in our hearts, already today let us plan to rebuild all that has been destroyed—both physical and spiritual, so that our brothers and sisters, scattered around the world, do not lose hope of returning home, but, on the contrary, dream of their active participation in the revival of the country. But above all, let all the children of our nation know how much God loves them, and that with God's love even the greatest evil can be overcome.

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 authentic joy of the children of God, a tasty kutia, a merry celebration of Christ's Nativity, and a happy, peaceful, and blessed New Year!

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

† SVIATOSLAV

Given in Kyiv
at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on the day of the Holy Praiseworthy Apostle Andrew the First-called
the 30th of November in the 2023rd Year of our Lord