

Nativity Epistle from the Episcopate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada in the year of our Lord, 2024-2025

To the All-Honorable Clergy, to the Diaconate in Christ, and to all the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada:

CHRIST IS BORN!

By the grace of God, we are able again this year in 2024, to celebrate the great feast of our faith - the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. All humanity had anticipated this event since the time of Adam and Eve. As the prophets of the Old Testament proclaimed: "Behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Immanuel" which is translated, " God is with us"(Isaiah 7:14). The salvation of the human race cannot be achieved by human forces and for this reason it is necessary for God to come into the world.

Mankind, which had been dwelling in gloom and in the realm of sin, darkness and despair, has received good news and is filled with joy because the Savior of the human race is born - God is with us! The Son of God is on earth! He is born of the Virgin Mary as a little Baby! The Son of God becomes the Son of man and through the Incarnation takes on human flesh in the person of the newborn Christ. The Lord becomes like one of us, in everything like us, except He is without sin. God is humbled in the person of the newborn Christ the Saviour. As the Apostle Paul writes: "He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of man." (Philippians 2:7).

More than 2000 years have passed since the birth of Christ the Savior. Millions of people have come into this world, rich and poor, famous and infamous, some trying to live with God in holiness, while others think they are all-powerful, that they are like God, that they will destroy or subdue nations and kingdoms, and some even think that they will destroy or control the Church of Christ. The greatest sin is pride. It is the sin of the devil, who causes the greatest evil in the world. Our God is long-suffering, but just. The Lord looks upon us and still gives time for repentance, but the greatest sinners are often taken from this world prematurely. King David says:

"Put not your trust in rulers, in the sons of men, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit will depart from him, and to his earth will he return. On that day all his plans perish".

Very often we hear from proud people who think they know everything and are very progressive. They tell us that we live in the 21st century and the Church must change. They tell us to call black white, to call sin a virtue, to please people, not God, and not to keep God's commandments. Since the creation of the world, everything in this world repeats itself and there is nothing new under the sun. As it was in the days of Noah and King Herod, little has changed between people.

But one event, 2024 years ago, changed everything in the life of the human race.

Today we are celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the birth which St. John of Damascus spoke about "This is the only new occurrence under the sun. The Son of God is born of the Virgin Mary." This Divine providence for us people and for the sake of our salvation is wonderful and incomprehensible because He is born. He, Who created all things and has no beginning or end, is born. The Son of God also becomes the Son of man. The immortal unites with the mortal, the uncreated with the created, to save men from their sins and to grant them salvation.

The King of the world is not born in royal palaces, not in rich houses, but in poverty and humility, in a cave where animals are kept. The Lord came into this world not just so we could serve Him, but so He could serve all of us. He was not interested in political power, nor wealth, nor glory; He remained untouched by all the temptations and benefits of this world. He did not come here to possess them. He came to conquer this world with all its corrupt values, to overcome sin and death. And He has conquered these, conquered them with the greatest power that no one, except the fullness of God, will ever have. This power is love. His love for us even overcame death. The Son of God descends to the earth because God so loved us all "that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

In our time, very often there is no place for the Lord in the lives of many people, in families, in society, in nations and states. Creation does not need its Creator; humans build paradise on earth without God, but in the end, without God, human life becomes hell, dominated only by sin, hopelessness, and death. But the Son of God is born to give us hope that we are not alone, we are not abandoned, we are not orphans, but that God is with us! The heart of every faithful believer is filled with great joy because the Savior is born. He came into the world to sacrifice Himself for us. He alone can bring salvation to all humanity and cleanse us from our sins and overcome death.

On these holy days of the Nativity of Christ, we ask the Newborn Christ the Savior, that a just peace may reign in Ukraine and that the devilish war may end as soon as possible, that modern Herods may not kill children and adults born on Ukrainian soil, that families may not

mourn new deaths of their relatives and friends, that the Lord may hear our prayers, strengthen, intercede and save all who are in danger by His grace.

We pray that our Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada will be a loving mother to all our brothers and sisters who have left their homeland because of war, that the Savior, who as an infant was a refugee in Egypt, fleeing the threat of King Herod, will always generously bless and protect them.

May little Jesus generously bless you and your families with His great mercy and compassion; strengthen you spiritually and physically; give you the strength to carry your earthly cross.

Beloved in Christ, let us rejoice that for our sake a small Child was born, the eternal God. We are not alone; we are not abandoned; we are not orphans. God is with us!

We warmly greet you on this new joy that did not happen until now. May this joy of the birth of Christ the Savior fill your hearts and souls in the New Year. May 2025 be peaceful and blessed by the Lord for all of you.

CHRIST IS BORN!

With fervent prayers for all of you,

+ Ilarion

Archbishop of Winnipeg and Central Eparchy

Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ Andriy

Bishop of Toronto and the Eastern Eparchy

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada