

## **Patriarch Daniel's Christmas Encyclical 2020: full text**



Please find below the full text of the pastoral letter of His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of Romania on the feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ 2020:

† DANIEL

By God's Grace,

Archbishop of Bucharest, Metropolitan of Muntenia and Dobrudja, Locum tenens of the throne of Caesarea of Cappadocia and Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church

To the most venerable monastic order, The most reverend clergy And the Orthodox Christians in the Archdiocese of Bucharest Grace, peace and joy from our Lord Jesus Christ, And paternal blessings on our behalf "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Very Reverend Fathers,

Beloved faithful,

The feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ is, first of all, a celebration of God's humble and generous love for the world. It is the celebration of the merciful love of God's eternal Son, who humbled Himself by becoming a mortal man to raise humans from sin and death, giving them life and eternal glory.

Therefore, the mystery of Christmas is the mystery of God's humble and merciful love so that we may become like Him through merciful love (Luke 6:36). The more the Son of God came down to us, the more He opened the way for us to ascend to Him.

The mystery of the humble love of the Son of God, who became a Man out of endless love for humankind, is the foundation and the core of Christian faith. This holy and great mystery of God's assumption of the human nature or Christ's incarnation was the purpose for which God made the world. This mystery was foretold by God's prophets inspired by the Holy Spirit, then experienced and confessed by the Apostles of Christ (Romans 1:2), defended and dogmatized in the face of heresies by the Church Fathers, conceived in theology and chanted in the liturgical life by all Orthodox or right-believing Christians who love God.

Thus, eight hundred years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah foretold His birth from a Virgin when he spoke of the wonderful sign that God would give to the house of David: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14); "For to us a child is born, to us, a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6).

And the prophet Micah (8th century BC) foretold the birth of Christ the Messiah in Bethlehem of Judea, showing at the same time that His origin is eternal: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, ancient times." (Micah 5: 2).

St. John the Evangelist, nicknamed the "Theologian" or "Apostle of Love," overwhelmed by the greatness of the mystery of Christ's merciful love, says that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Also, St. Paul the “Apostle of the Gentiles,” penetrated by the holy thrill of perplexity at the love of God for the world shown in Jesus Christ, exclaims: “Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16).

Following the faith of the Holy Apostles, the Holy Fathers of the Church, the great teachers of the world and hierarchs, pious and confessors, hymnographers and melodists, did not cease to glorify the mystery of God’s humble and endless love for the world – love revealed to us through Jesus Christ.

For example, St. Maximus the Confessor († 662) says that “Out of His infinite longing for human beings, He has become truly and according to nature the very thing for which He longed” (Ambigua, 5), that is, man, and elsewhere the same Holy Father teaches that “The mystery of the Incarnation of the Word contains in itself the meaning of all the symbols and all the enigmas of Scripture, as well as the hidden meaning of all sensible and intelligible creation. But he, who knows the mystery of the Cross and the Tomb, also knows the essential principle of all things. Finally, he who penetrates yet further and finds himself initiated into the mystery of the Resurrection, apprehends the end for which God created all things from the beginning.” (Two hundred chapters on theology, I, 66)

Emphasizing the overwhelming value of Christ’s Incarnation and Birth as Man, to understand the first and last purpose of the universe and humanity, Saint Maximus the Confessor states: “This is the great and hidden mystery, at once the blessed end for which all things are ordained. (...) With a clear view to this end, God created the essences of created beings (...) Because of Christ—or rather, the whole mystery of Christ—all the ages of time and the beings within those ages have received their beginning and end in Christ. For the union between a limit of the ages and limitlessness, between measure and immeasurability, between finitude and infinity, between Creator and creation, between rest and motion, was conceived before the ages. This union has been manifested in Christ at the end of time, and in itself brings God’s foreknowledge to fulfilment.” (Ad Thalassios 60).

According to the Holy Scriptures and the teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Church, to save man means to heal him or deliver him from sin and death, to make him a partaker of eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

In this sense, St. Irenaeus of Lyon († 202) shows the purpose of the Incarnation of Christ: “For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who

was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons?" (Against Heresies III, 19, 1).

Beloved spiritual sons and daughters,

The eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ, became a bearer of an earthly body to make us humans bearers of the heavenly Holy Spirit. He became a Man to divinize us, humans, by grace. The glorified Son of God was made the humble Son of Man to raise humans to the dignity and glory of spiritual sons of God, as the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John says, 'But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' (John 1:12-13)

Therefore, the eternal Son of God descended from heaven, was conceived by the work of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a humble Virgin of Nazareth, and was born in a poor cave in Bethlehem, in the interior of the earth, for us earthlings, to exalt us by grace to the Kingdom of Heaven, in the intimacy of the love and glory of the Most Holy Trinity.

Since Jesus Christ as a man humbled Himself and became obedient to God to the point of death on the cross, God raised Him from the dead and exalted Him to glory. (Philippians 2:8-9).

Thus, the humility of Christ who was obedient to the sacrificial death on the wood of the cross heals Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden and gives people, through the resurrection, humble love, holy peace and joy, as a provision for eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Thus, the humble love of the crucified and risen Christ changes the humility of man's transient earthly life to the glory of imperishable heavenly life (Philippians 3:21). Through His Incarnation as a Man, Jesus Christ assumes human life mixed with death, to make mortal humans partakers of His eternal life.

Therefore, only the humble and sacrificial love of the crucified and risen Christ can give people eternal life (1 Corinthians 15: 3-4, 12). And after the universal

resurrection of all humans, those who have shown humble and merciful love to those in need during their earthly life will receive from Christ the Righteous Judge the joy and glory of eternal life in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 25: 31-46).

The Holy Scripture of the New Testament also teaches us that the Mystery of Christ's Incarnation points to the direct link between the Son of God and creation because the Incarnation of the Son of God was from the beginning the purpose of the creation of the world itself (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9).

"All things were created through Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:16). "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1: 3-4).

Therefore, Jesus Christ comes into the world to share with the world His humble and merciful love, which gives peace and joy, as a provision for eternal life in the Kingdom of God (Romans 14: 17).

Therefore, the Orthodox liturgical hymns regarding the Feast of the Nativity urge us as follows: "Come, ye believers, let us ascend in a divine manner and behold a divine condescension, revealed to us from on high, openly in Bethlehem. And having purified our minds by good conduct, let us offer virtues instead of frankincense. Let us go before and prepare with faith entrances for the Nativity among the spiritual treasures, crying, Glory in the highest to God, the One in Trinity, through Whom good-will appeared among men to deliver Adam from the ancient curse; for He is the Lover of humankind." (Idiomela for the Sixth Royal Hour of the Nativity of the Lord).

Right-believing faithful,

In the Romanian Patriarchate the year 2020 was a "Solemn Year of the Pastoral Care of Parents and Children" and a "Commemorative Year of Romanian Orthodox Philanthropists", aiming to cultivate Christian life in the family and promote Christian education in contemporary society, as well as promoting Christian philanthropy today, as an essential work in the activity of the Church.

The family, blessed by God to cultivate mutual love and give birth to children, is a source of holy life for every people and for all humankind.

Knowing the current challenges to the Christian family, it is necessary to strongly affirm the sanctity of marriage, solidarity in the family and between families, the dignity of motherhood, fatherhood, sonship and brotherhood, as gifts of God's love, which must be cultivated in a communion of love and co-responsibility.

In the context of today's pandemic, humanity facing the new coronavirus is going through a difficult period as regards human life and health. Romanian people are also bereaved and saddened because many Romanians have died and others have suffered until they have been cured of this disease.

Therefore, there is a great need for much prayer, solidarity and brotherly help. In this regard, we appeal to all parents, to come to the aid of those in need and insufficiency, of poor families, supporting families with many children, the elderly and the lonely, discouraged, grieving and sorrowful, giving them a sign of Christ's merciful love to them – a good word and a good deed.

The Feast of the Nativity of our Lord is an occasion to strengthen communion, mutual help, and acts of almsgiving, which are the fruits of true faith, concrete testimonies of our humble love for God and for our fellow people.

The light of the Baby Jesus born in Bethlehem calls us to always show around us, in word and deed, signs of hope, peace and joy.

As in previous years, at the turn of the year, that is, on the night of December 31, 2020, to January 1, 2021, and on New Year's Day, let us offer prayers of thanksgiving to God for the blessings received from Him in the year 2020 that has passed and to ask for His help in all the good and useful work of the New Year 2021 that we are entering. Let us also remember in our prayers all the Romanians who are among foreigners, around the borders of Romania or in the Romanian diaspora, to preserve, with much fraternal love, the unity of faith and nation.

On the occasion of the Holy Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, the New Year 2021 and the Epiphany of the Lord, we convey to you all paternal blessings, wishes for good health and salvation, peace and joy, happiness and much help from God in all good deeds, along with the traditional greeting: Happy New Year!

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." (2 Corinthians 13:13)

Your intercessor to Christ the Lord,

†Daniel

Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church

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