

PATRIARCHAL AND SYNODICAL EPISTLE FOR THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST - 2020 - PATRIARCH OF BULGARIA NEOPHYTE



“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in the darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Beloved in the Lord children of our Holy Church,

In the days and months of new and severe trials, which we also share with the whole world and all mankind, again we are surrounded by the unique in its kind joy and hope, having risen today with the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Again, the jubilant choir of the heavenly host heralds the most wondrous mystery of the Incarnation of God. Again, in our joy we are in a hurry, following the wise men from the East and the shepherds from Bethlehem, to bow our heads to the majesty of the inexhaustible love of God generously pouring out over all creation, witnessing, together with the divine Gospel writer, for the All-Generous and All-Merciful our God, Who “so loved the world that He gave His only-

begotten Son, so that everyone who is believing in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Abiding in this incomparable to anything else joy due to the coming of the Son of God among us, glorifying the rising of the true Light, "who enlightens everyone was coming to this world" (John 1:9), we, the summoned from above „children of light“ (Eph. 5:8), we have the God-ordained and really apostolic mission and high responsibility to ceaselessly herald the truth about the divine humanity, about the fact that since the Son of God became for us and our salvation a Son of Man, we are already not alone, because with us and beside us is God Himself and that is why anymore“neither death, nor life... nor things present, nor things to come... will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). This love, with which God always embraces us, we feel also today, together with the salvific presence of God, and all this gives us strength and confidence to overcome each trial and each temptation, which we face daily in our earthly life.

We live in a world full of pain and suffering, which is torn every day by interpersonal struggles and contradictions and is more and more gasping in its despair due to its willful alienation from its loving Creator. A world created by God in expression of His love, which has fallen in the sin of apostasy, but has been redeemed by its Creator and intended for salvation, for sanctification and transfiguration: in the proclaimed to us by the God-seer “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). To the very same world, which often forgets that it all is embraced by God’s love and that it is called for communion with God and assimilation to God, today, on the day of the most explicit expression of this love of God, we, the faithful to the Christ’s covenant with the mankind, have to remind again that “God became man so that man might become god” (St. Athanasius the Great) – and this is something that we can do only assimilating ourselves to God and His infinite and selfless love for us. Because“this is how everyone will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

The day of the Nativity of Christ is a day of light and joy, of hope and trust, a day to realize the most supreme and the last designation of man: to become god by grace. A day, in which although so much surrounded by pain, suffering and death, we glorify life with faith, blameless hope and mind enlightened by God.

“Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One! Angels with shepherds glorify Him! The wise men journey with a star! Since for our sake the Eternal God was born as a Little Child!” (Kontakion of the Nativity of Christ, Tone 3).

The wondrous glorification, having poured out once through the God-inspired Roman the Sweet Singer, expresses in a uniquely wonderful way the whole joy that has come to the world with the birth of the Child Christ. The celebration of life, which is going to be finally demonstrated with the Resurrection of Christ, starts today: with the mystery happening in the cave of Bethlehem, with the birth of God Himself in our world, of the One “by Whom all things were made” (The Creed, 2) and Who, because He could not bear the suffering of the created by God’s image and God’s likeness man in the despair of his abandonment by God, came among us, assumed our nature and became a man, so that He could give us the chance to return back to the way of the assimilation to God, once abandoned by our ancestors. On this day the ancient prophesy is being fulfilled: “the people who sat in darkness saw a great light, to those who sat in the region and shadow of death, to them light has dawned” (Matt. 4:16).

Illuminated by this light, witnesses of its power and its divinity, we continue to walk in the darkness of this world in the narrow way towards the Kingdom of God, always thanking God for His great mercy and all His bounties to us, glorifying with enlightened and pure hearts Him and „the acceptable year of the Lord“ (Is. 61:2), the beginning of which sets His coming among us.

May the light rising today with the Nativity of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ illuminate all righteous children of our holy Orthodox Church, within the borders of our Fatherland and abroad, and may His peace be with us all!

HAPPY NATIVITY OF CHRIST!

HEAD OF THE HOLY SYNOD

† NEOPHYTE

PATRIARCH OF BULGARIA

METROPOLITAN OF SOFIA

MEMBERS OF THE HOLY SYNOD:

- † METROPOLITAN IOANIKIY OF SLIVEN
- † METROPOLITAN YOSIF OF USA, CANADA AND AUSTRALIA
- † METROPOLITAN GRIGORIY OF VELIKO TARNOVO
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