



“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh.» (Mt.. 2, 10-11)

Dear brothers and sisters,

This is how St. Matthew describes the arrival of the wise men from the East to their destination, Bethlehem in Judea. Only God knows how many days and nights they must have travelled. They evidently did not lose hope that they will find the King of Judea and bow before Him. And above that they brought rich gifts to the One who has everything from Himself, the One who is the fullness of all things, and who does not need anything of this world. They are the first who announced the birth of the King to those who did not know God. From that hour, that small manger became the holiest place on Earth. Holier than Sinai, and even Jerusalem. And its glory will grow with the glory of the God-child and His Mother, until the end of this world and time. For look, she hold the One who hold the world, and offers Him to unto us, so small and weak.

Why did God choose this exact way to send His Son? Almost all the Holy fathers have pondered this subject, and yet they have explained it merely partially. For this is a mystery which is hidden even from the angels, and such is with people. The Lord Christ Himself revealed why He came, having said: "For God so loved the world that He sent his only begotten Son, so that all who believe in Him do not perish, but have life eternal." (Jn. 3, 16) The Son of God took man's path, from a small child, to a grown adult, so that He may show us the path to salvation. Christ is the example which we receive, and which receives us. He took the path of humility so that we may find the path to the real man, to the original state of Adam. Christ teaches us to not only think like children, but to live as children. (Mk. 10, 15; Mt. 18, 3) We are all together: children, adolescents, adults and the elderly, servants of the altar and faithful, all called to be the sons of God. (Gal. 4)

Let us welcome Him into our spiritual Bethlehem: our hearts and soul, and all our bodies, our whole being, so that we may be fulfilled with the Sun from above. Only in that will Christ, as the Holy Fathers say, take shape in us. Or at the Holy Apostle Paul says: "I no longer live, but rather Christ lives within me". (Gal. 2, 20) If we open ourselves to Christ our God, we will open ourselves to our neighbour as well. If we get closer to Christ, we will get closer to each other.

We live in a society where people are further and further apart from each other. Sometimes even so that blood relatives are distant from each other. God, however, showed us all, through his incarnation, just how close He is to us, and how much He loves us.

Every birth of a child is not simply a worldly event, but rather before anything else, it is an act of God's love. It belongs, in the first place, to Him, and then the parents. We become children of God in His Church through the holy sacrament of baptism. We take on Christ (Gal. 3, 27), becoming a small Christ. Christ's birth shows us that we have become heirs, and participants, in His Kingdom. (Gal. 4, 7) We become "royal clergy, and a holy nation". (1 Peter 2, 9)

The Nativity of the Lord is especially a children's holiday. And yet how many children are there who will not feel the joy of Christmas? They are left to themselves. And

how many parents are there today whom are abandoned by their children, and would take joy in somebody knocking on their door and saying: Peace from God – Christ is born!

The feast of the Nativity is one where man is healed of the illness of loneliness and all ailments of the soul. It is the sharing of joy with all people, especially those who are one with us in faith. In our time, the joy of family life is diminishing. Why? This is because the real concept of marriage and family is lost. If we want to be real orthodox Christians we need to hold steadfast to the biblical description of marriage and family. In general we are on a path of death and failure, physical and spiritual. May God help our people to be united, God-like, and may we multiply.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Let us be aware of our Orthodox faith, and may we live according to it as our ancestors did. Let us bring before Christ not gold, nor myrrh, nor frankincense, but Christian virtues: faith, hope, and love. We need not travel to Bethlehem to bow before Him. Let us commend ourselves and our children to Christ and His Church. He asks nothing more of us. Let us find Him in our hearts.

Let us not forget, in our prayers, our brothers in Kosovo and Metohija, and in all other parts of the former Yugoslavia, as well as all over the world, whom suffer and toil, and there is nobody to greet them these days, or to help them. Let us open our hearts and offer them a helping hand. For by helping them, we offer unto Christ (Mt. 25, 40). Only in this way will we truly celebrate the birth of Christ. Then we will be able to joyfully proclaim with all the Orthodox Christians of the world:

"Christ is born – glorify Him! Christ on Earth – elevate Him! May all the world ring unto the Lord. And with joy sing all ye nations, for He is glorified!"

We thank you for all of your donations, gifts, and help to your Diocese, monastery, churches, as well as to all those who were in need. May God reward you with his heavenly gifts.

Wishing you all a blessed feast of the Nativity of our Lord and a happy New year, we greet you from the heart with the joyous exclamation:

PEACE FROM GOD – CHRIST IS BORN!

INDEED HE IS BORN!

HAPPY AND BLESSED 2018!

Your intercessor before the manger of Bethlehem,
BISHOP OF CANADA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be in Cyrillic script, likely representing the name of the Bishop of Canada mentioned in the text above. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.