

**PASTORAL LETTER
FOR THE FEAST OF THE LORD'S NATIVITY 2017**

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by the mercies of God

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*To our beloved clergy and Orthodox Christians,
peace and joy from Christ the Lord,
and from us hierarchical Blessings.*

*Do not be afraid,
for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all the people.
For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
(Luke 2, 10-11)*

**Most Reverend Fathers,
Beloved Faithful,**

The words of the angel of the Lord, *'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy'* addressed to the shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem, give us today the same joy now and then. They did not lose neither power nor actuality because they are the words of eternal joy that announces the *'fullness of time'* (Galatians 4, 4). The birth of the Lord is the celebration of joy and hope because man sees the promise of God becoming a reality.

But why is this so long awaited? The Book of Genesis (Genesis 3, 6) presents us the moment when Adam and Eve, at the suggestion of the serpent, fall prey to temptation away from God. St. Basil the Great speaks of the consequences of the temptation for which Christ had to become incarnated:

Realize that God is flesh for this reason: for the flesh that was cursed needed to be sanctified, the flesh that was weakened needed to be strengthened, the flesh that was alienated from God needed to be brought into affinity with Him, the flesh that had fallen in paradise needed to be led back into heaven.¹

The result of temptation was the loss of holiness given by God to man, the penetration of weakness into the human nature, and the loss of the natural communion with Him. Man thus departs from the Eden of dialogue and of the communion with God and escapes into the world of shadows and lower elements. In this perspective, we better understand why the angel speaks of great joy at the Nativity.

With the Nativity of the Lord a new world is born for all mankind. Life is centered on God, the Fathers of All, not in the man who divides and creates separations and enmities between them - says Archimandrite Vasile Vasilachi. Indeed, with Him, man and mankind have a majestic walking on a new foundation of life. ... It

¹ St. Basil the Great. *On Fasting and Feasts*. St Vladimir's Seminary Press: Yonkers, New York 2013, p 30

*is a universal calling of all mankind to a new and great unity, to union with One and the same God.*²

The joy is given by the regaining of hope in a new world in which God reverts to the center of man's life. The lost unity is regained by the incarnation of the Son of God. The Creator become human and *'it is made newborn and babe so that you become a perfect human'* says St. Ambrose of Milan.³ The curse, the weakness, the estrangement, the fall of the human nature are healed through the Incarnation. The human nature regains its original harmony, unity with itself and with God. The man rediscovers the joy of the lost Eden, finds the familiar inner path known from a beginning.

But how is made the link between the historical and objective act of the Incarnation of Christ the Savior and the personal integration of this event in the life of each one? We find an answer at archimandrite Vasile:

*The birth happened in Bethlehem's manger ... is the Archimedean point on which all the divine work of salvation is built. (...) We, men, have the everlasting Bethlehem among us, first the one in the Holy Land, as the first historical act, then through the Bethlehem of the Christian Churches all over the world in which Christ is born, being offered in Holy Eucharist, the sharing of the Holy Body and the Holy Blood, to all those who first received a new birth 'out of water and spirit.' And so as all the man who entered through Baptism within the frontiers of the kingdom of God, we also receive in the souls the birth of God, ourselves becoming a Bethlehem in which the Son of God comes into the world, to bring salvation.*⁴

Bethlehem - that is, Christ God - Man - becomes the premise of community and personal Bethlehem. Each church becomes a historical Bethlehem in which Christ indwell through the Holy Eucharist. Then through Baptism the believer becomes himself a Bethlehem receiving Christ through the Holy Mysteries.

The joy proclaimed by angels in the historical Bethlehem of the nativity of Christ becomes the joy of the one, which is prolonged in time in the Holy Churches, and then within, personally, in every one who believes. Through the Holy Sacraments Christ's saving events for us - Nativity, Baptism, Easter, Ascension and Descent of the Holy Spirit - are becoming personal events springing up grace for justification and salvation. The necessary condition of all others is the nativity of Christ:

A celebration is coming and is the most holy and wonderful of all celebrations - says St. John Chrysostom. We are not wrong to call her mother of all other holy days ... It is the nativity of Christ according to the flesh. This day is the source and foundation of the feasts of the Lord - Baptism, Easter, Ascension and Descent of the Holy Spirit. If Christ was not born according to the flesh, he would not have been baptized at the time of His Epiphany; nor would He be crucified, that is, the

² *The threefold love for God, Church and people.* Ed. Word of life: New York, p 223

³ *Commentary to the Gospel according to St. Luke 2.41 – 42*

⁴ *The threefold love, p 246 - 247*

*Easter; nor would He have sent the Holy Spirit, namely Pentecost. Therefore, as the rivers come from one source, so all these feasts have their beginnings in the birth of Christ.*⁵

The birth of Christ is thus the beginning of our salvation through the inner renewal in the way shown by the Son of God.

Beloved faithful,

The years 2016 and 2017 meant for the Romanian parishes and missions in Canada a fulfillment of a dream for more than three decades and a crowning of Romanian permanence here for more than 125 years. The recognition of the Romanian Orthodox Diocese of Canada by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church at the end of October 2016, the first Congress of this new diocese and the enthronement of its first bishop in early May 2017 meant redefining the mission and the organization of the communities here in a new framework more suited to the spiritual and cultural demands of the Canadian context by efficaciousness and pastoral realism.

The year 2017 through its theme - *The homage year of icons and church painters and The commemorative anniversary of Justinian the Patriarch and the defenders of Orthodoxy during communism in the Romanian Patriarchate* offered the content and substance of this framework. Confessing the faith through icon and through the living examples of *Justinian the Patriarch, Metropolitan Valeriu Anania, Archimandrite Vasile Vasilachi, Fr. Adrian Făgețeanu, Mother Teodosia (Zorica Latțcu)* and others brought back the attention of all to the personal dimension of the Church and to the need for concrete involvement in the dynamics of a society that goes further away from the essential Christian values – family, identity, education, etc. in what they have better and holier.

The joyful Bethlehem of our time is a community and personal event at the same time. Those above mentioned remind us of the need for a confessing Church made up of renewed people in the Holy Spirit according to the image and likeness of God; of a Church that takes full responsibility for the role of spiritual ferment to combat indifference, suffering and isolation; of a Church that remains anchored in its millenary values - love, kindness, mutual help, attention to the one in need; of a Church that remains vigilant in discerning, in the rapidly changing conditions of contemporary society, the most appropriate way to preach the word of God and to feed the man journeying towards eternity with God's Mysteries.

The concrete translation of these thoughts and hopes into reality means a more thorough pastoral ministry among the faithful in order for them to know, understand and live more fully their own Christian-Orthodox faith, a greater openness to the contemporary world with its implicit challenges, an increased attention given to the clergy and its material conditions that affect the pastoral work, an improved material and financial level of our parishes and missions, which would allow for a more careful work

⁵ *On the incomprehensibility of God 6.23 - 24*

with the younger generation and a charitable activity sensitive to the immediate needs of the needy. All this can only be done together - clergy and believers - through *a faith firmly anchored in the experience of the encounter with God and through the knowledge of His merciful grace* that are the signs of the eternal joy.

On the occasion of the Nativity of the Lord, New Year and Epiphany, I wish you joy, peace, blessing and salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many Years!

Your brother in prayer to God,
desirous of every heavenly good,
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