

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE FEAST OF THE LORD'S NATIVITY 2015

† NICOLAE

by the mercies of God

Archbishop of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas

*To our beloved Clergy and faithful Orthodox Christians,
peace and joy from Christ the Lord, and from us a hierarchical blessing.*

***Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace,
goodwill among men! (Luke 2:14).***

**Most Reverend Fathers,
Beloved Faithful,**

What more fitting words could we find to proclaim the joy and peace brought by the Savior's Birth? And what more fitting words could we find to proclaim peace on earth today to our world, so troubled by wars and terrorist attacks? The descent of God to the earth, the Incarnation of the Son of God is the proclamation that can turn this world back to peace, joy, and understanding. From the succession of events leading up to this moment of the singing of the angels, we too can discern the path leading to reconciliation among men and doxology offered to God.

The world of two thousand years ago did not have much peace to boast of either. They were not times of harmony and good understanding among people and nations, but rather times characterized by the desire for power and wealth, and by division between rulers and oppressed, rich and poor, slaves and free. It was into this world and at this precise moment in history that God decided to come down to bring peace.

The announcement was first made by the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary: *"Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women"* (Luke 1:28). And to the Virgin's amazement, the Archangel revealed to her that *"the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you"* (Luke 1:35). Mary rejoiced and received the overshadowing of the Spirit even without understanding how a virgin could give birth to a child. The receiving of the announcement showed her to be a bearer of the Spirit, for Elizabeth's baby leaped for joy in her womb at her meeting with Mary, and she too was filled with the Holy Spirit, calling Mary **"the Mother of my Lord."** We can say that the overshadowing of the Spirit is "contagious," for the one filled with the Spirit passes Him on to others, and that transmittal brings forth fruit. Elizabeth gave us this name for the Virgin Mary that is above every name, "Mother of the Lord," and she is the one who congratulated Mary, recognizing that she is blessed among women.

The Spirit's work continues through the mediation of the Archangel. For when Joseph doubted the faithfulness of his betrothed, the angel strengthened and calmed him: *"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins"* (Matthew 1:20-21). "Unusual are the words; they surpass the human mind and are above the laws of nature," says St. John Chrysostom. "Will Joseph believe, never having heard of such things happening?" the Antiochian father continues. "Yes, he will believe on the basis of the troubling of his soul... The angel had explained all the struggles of his soul to him so that through them Joseph would believe in the conception that is beyond nature" (Homily 5 on Matthew). The Spirit's working is seen in the peace brought to him who had doubted and in the spiritual illumination given so he could receive what was revealed. Was it not the same with the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation, and with Elizabeth at her wondrous meeting with Mary?

The Spirit continued to work through the announcement, full of joy and peace, of the wonder in the manger of Bethlehem in the event mentioned earlier, the proclamation to the shepherds: *“And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’”* (Luke 2:9-11). The initial fear is calmed by the news of the Lord’s Birth, and is followed by the doxology of the heavenly hosts: ***“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill among men!”***

This revelation of the Spirit’s work which brings peace, enlightenment, spiritual understanding, and doxology is also found in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians (5:22-23): *“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”* Also in the songs of this feast: *“Rejoice, righteous ones, be glad, heavens, and you mountains, sing with glee, for Christ our God is born.”* *“The powers of Heaven rejoice, the earth and all mankind dance with glee.”*

Most Reverend Fathers, Beloved Faithful,

The Christian’s answer to the world’s unrest can only be found within this revelation of the work of the Spirit in human lives. The Spirit continues to work and bring us the peace of God and the spiritual light of the understanding of the meaning of this world. Like the Virgin Mary, Joseph, and Elizabeth, the Christian is a bearer of the Spirit in this world, and it is fitting that we should “contaminate” this world with this heavenly “transmission.” The Spirit-bearing Christian proclaims the joy of the Lord’s Birth and brings doxology together with the angels. Doxology means to bring glory to God through song. In the Kontakion of the Feast it says that *“the angels with the shepherds sing His glory, and the Wise Men with the Star travel on their way.”* Traveling to the manger of Bethlehem in accord with the angels’ announcement, the shepherds join their voices with those of the heavenly heralds, the heavens unite with earth, those having earthly bodies sing together with the bodiless ones, and everything together is a harmony bringing peace and joy. Proclaiming to one another the Lord’s Birth, it is fitting that we too should bring doxology and thanksgiving to God for sending His Son, and to show ourselves to be heralds of joy and bearers of the Spirit.

Orthodox Christians proclaim the joy of the Lord’s Nativity to the world through carols. On Christmas Eve, although we are fasting, we prepare our homes and tables, as one of our carols says. But this is not for the carolers, but for God Himself, Who descends into every dwelling and brings blessings. This is the joy we share with the carolers. We are hosts, but God is the heavenly Guest who comes and dwells among us, bringing peace and happiness from beyond. Today’s troubled world awaits our carols, proclaiming peace, bringing joy and hope to those who have suffered in terrorist attacks or have been forced to leave their homes because of war. My thought for this glorious feast is this, the invocation of heavenly peace and of the fellowship of the joy of the carols.

I pray that God will descend and bless each priest and parishioner, each parish and monastery of our Archdiocese. May He bring each of us His peace, may He grant us the joy of proclaiming the Birth of the Heavenly Baby. May the New Year be blessed, may our hope be multiplied, and may we grow in our faith in God.

With a brotherly embrace in Christ the Lord, I wish you all health, peace, and spiritual joys in the celebration of the Holy Feasts of Christmas, the New Year, and Theophany!

Many Years!

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

† NICOLAE

Chicago, the Feast of the Lord’s Nativity, 2015