



The Serbian Orthodox Church
to her spiritual children at Christmas, 2019

+IRINEJ

By the Grace of God

Orthodox Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgrade Karlovci and Serbian Patriarch, with all the Hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church, to all the clergy, monastics, and all the sons and daughters of our Holy Church: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, with the joyous Christmas greeting:

Peace from God! Christ is Born!

In this year of our Lord, when we once again celebrate the most-glorious Incarnation of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ – the only New under the Sun, we all hasten towards the temple of God to gather around the Divine Child, the Most Pure Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and the righteous Joseph.

We do this to warm our souls with the words of the Holy Gospel about the very real event of the Incarnation and the Nativity of our Savior, the God-Man Jesus Christ, when the Heavens and Earth sang to him: Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace good will among men!

About this unique and greatly glorious Event in history and in all the worlds, our holy Church hymnographer sings:

“Earthen Adam, at first partaking in the grace-filled breath of life, slipped down into corruption through the guile of a serpent, but we know that for his sake the Word has become one of us.

O Virgin, you have surpassed the limits of mortal beings by giving birth to the Eternal Word, Who was pleased to pass through you, the sealed Vessel, O unburned Vessel and Bush.

You, God of peace, sent to us the Angel of Your Great Council to bring us peace and to lead us to the light of the knowledge of God.

Where sin greatly multiplied, You have given indescribable grace, and we all have become inheritors of the light from on High.”

To our spiritual children, to our Serbian people in the fatherland and diaspora who are suffering even today, we, your spiritual shepherds, wish that the pious thoughts and feelings of this Christmas may be with us permanently and abundantly, and that our whole life may abide in God with all the saints. In this way we may walk before the face of St. Sava and all the Serbian saints and enlighteners of our Holy autocephalous Serbian Church. It is important for us to take care of how we live our lives, so that we may have all our holy ancestors at our side at Christ’s just Judgment. This is how they will recognize us as their posterity. Here we find the holy duty of our existence!

Our dear spiritual children, let us do everything we can to ensure that the abundance of our possessions will be used to fill in what our neighbors lack, such as help of any kind, but most importantly our brotherly love. Godly Maximos the Confessor teaches us in this way: “Let us

endeavor with our sober-minded discernment to equalize the unevenness of nature, and out of our abundance let us make up what others lack.” This is pleasing to the Incarnated Son of God, Who for us became the smallest and the poorest. Therefore, whoever does good to them does it for Him. Did not the Divine Child come, above all, to feed all mouths and to comfort all our hearts?

If Christ has put on flesh for us and has become the God-Child Who has died and resurrected, should not our deeds in this world, as our response and hope in Him, be our adornment making us well-pleasing to Him? For this we all need humility and the awareness that we are God’s co-workers and beautifiers of His Church.

If the entire world lives in evil passions and sins, which it truly does, then no one should participate in it, that is, in the works of darkness! We Christians have given an oath to follow the heavenly order of things, not an order without God’s heaven and in spite of heaven. In accordance with one insightful word, in regard to the theme of freedom, let us say that we are free inasmuch as we are free from sin, and, as such, we are free to enter communion with God. Beginning with that point, and affirming ourselves with repentance and humility, we will be able to grow in God’s virtues. We will be able to be shaped in the image of Christ by doing God-pleasing deeds. This way we will gather the fruits of virtues from our Lord as from the Tree of our Life, planted in the midst of the Church as the Sweet Paradise, and to be nourished by Him in this life and in eternity.

The main message again this Christmas is to safeguard our Orthodox Faith and preserve it at all cost. Our Orthodox Church Revelation and the Holy Tradition teach us that it is God-pleasing to confess faith in the Incarnate Son and Word of God, Christ the God-Child, and with this to confess our faith in the Most Holy Trinity! This gives light to our walk in the darkness of this world permeated by sin. On this fulness of the Church’s faith depends our understanding and acceptance of the light of the Lord’s Image, the perfect measure of all things, Jesus Christ our Lord. In Him we grow and we hope in His glorious Second coming. The subsistence of the entire creation depends on the completeness of the Church’s Orthodox Faith. It is from this Orthodox Faith that comes the possibility of our most complete communion with God in the midst of our existence: in the Holy Liturgy. It is through the Liturgy that our Orthodox Church lives and witnesses in the most complete way about our communion with the God-Child Christ.

Our holy duty is to carry the cross of the historical events and temptations in all local Churches as one. But it is also the duty and obligation of all local Orthodox Churches to respect and honor each other. Therefore, it is necessary to remind all laborers in the Vineyard, regardless how deserving they might be, that nothing is to be done without the agreement and the unity with the rest, nothing by force, so as not to tear Christ’s cloak made not by hands, that is, so that the image of the God-Child Christ is us may not be blemished.

In this Christmas message, sent to our faithful children of Saint Sava, we remind you that we cannot forget our Old Serbia (Kosovo and Metohija). Our relationship toward this holy place should be like that toward the Serbian covenantal though, word and heritage – inseparable from our people’s being. For all the choirs of Serbian martyrs and the new-martyrs have witnessed to this with their blood throughout all the centuries. Today on this Christmas day, let us in a most celebratory way mention the martyrs from Kosovo, Jasenovac, Gradina, and all the martyrs from all other places of suffering. We pray to them for help, that we also may personally confess the Church’s Orthodox Faith in the God-Child Christ to the end, without being afraid to witness to that faith before anyone.

The problems of life of today’s man, and, it seems, of the man of the future as well, oftentimes discourage us, and even surprise us. And our Serbian man today, it seems, has decided by the killing of unborn children to contribute to a division of mankind appearing before

the Dread Judgment of God, one part, the killed unborn children, greater in number than the other part, the children who are born and have received the chance to live. How can we go before the God-Child Christ with that fact? How we can go before His Mother, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and before all the saints, is the most painful of all the questions we face here and now!

Obviously there exists a readiness by the creators of the new world to snatch from our hands our sanctified life in every way, even when it comes to gender and Christian marriage, and to bring us to a place where no human thought, word, or deed, and where no human foot has yet gone. Despite this, there exists a word of encouragement from the God-Child Christ: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" One repentant soul being saved is of more value than the whole world.

Bringing into an organic connection the celebration of Christmas and Theophany, as our iconographers rightly do, let us say to conclude this Nativity Encyclical the following:

Our Lord Jesus Christ stepped into this world in the same manner as He stepped into Jordan River in ancient times. Then, as John was placing his hand upon Him, every sin fled from Him, like the waters of the Jordan fled before Him. That also has happened when the apostles, bishops and priests throughout the centuries have laid their hands upon the heads of all of us people whom they have baptized and have led on the path towards God. We have received the grace-filled flame, before which the Cherubim stand in awe, in the sacrament of Baptism, in that fountain of the new birth in Christ by water and the Spirit. We have become the flame-bearers of faith in the Son of God and the God-Child Christ, having received the gift of the possibility of reigning with Him in Eternity.

It is very important how we and all our descendants will live and upon what will we build the home of our entire Christian existence. Will we build it upon water, sand, or hay, or upon Christ, the Cornerstone of the Church, the House of God our Father Who is in Heaven? For all of our deeds, in the end, we will be tried by the flame of God's grace!

Only the flame of grace, trying our deeds and all people personally, will show us and our deeds either to be justified and condemned. They will show us to be either true children or cast out children of the God and Father, brothers of the Only-Begotten Son and God-Child, and the vessels of the God the Holy Spirit! Will it show us, too, to be faithful worshippers of the Trinity One in Essence and Equal in Power, All-Honorable and All-Glorified?

We, gathered around the God-Child in Bethlehem's Cave, also wish to be found in the Father's embrace!

Therefore, may this heavenly-earthly hymn of the God-Child warm our homes and may it bring joy and happiness in the Holy Spirit to us all: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

PEACE FROM GOD - CHRIST IS BORN!

Given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade at Christmas, 2019.

Your intercessors before the cradle of the divine Christ-Child:

Archbishop of Pec,
Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci and
Serbian Patriarch IRINEJ

Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Coastlands AMPHILOHIJE
Metropolitan of Zagreb and Ljubljana PORFIRIJE
Metropolitan of Dabro-Bosna CHRYSOSTOM

Bishop of Sabac LAVRENTIJE
Bishop of Srem VASILJE
Bishop of Banja Luka JEFREM
Bishop of Budim LUKIJAN
Bishop of Banat NIKANOR
Bishop of New Gracanica-Midwestern America LONGIN
Bishop of Canada MITROPHAN
Bishop of Backa IRINEJ
Bishop of Great Britain and Scandinavia DOSITEJ
Bishop of Western Europe LUKA
Bishop of Zicha JUSTIN
Bishop of Vranje PAHOMIJE
Bishop of Sumadija JOVAN
Bishop of Branicevo IGNATIJE
Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla FOTIJE
Bishop of Mileseva ATANASIJE
Bishop of Budimlje and Niksic JOANIKIJE
Bishop of Düsseldorf and Germany GRIGORIJE
Bishop of Valjevo MILUTIN
Bishop of Ras and Prizren TEODOSIJE
Bishop of Western America MAXIM
Bishop of Gornji Karlovac GERASIM
Bishop of Eastern America IRINEJ
Bishop of Krusevac DAVID
Bishop of Slavonia JOVAN
Bishop of Austria and Switzerland ANDREJ
Bishop of Bihac-Petrovac SERGIJE
Bishop of Timok ILARION
Bishop of Nis ARSENIJE
Bishop of Australia and New Zealand Metropolitanate SILUAN
Bishop of Buenos Aires and South Central America KIRILO
Bishop of Dalmatia NIKODIM
Bishop of Osek-Polje and Baranja HERUVIM
Bishop of Zahumlje and Hercegovina DIMITRIJE

Vicar Bishop of Moravica ANTONIJE
Vicar Bishop of Remežijan STEFAN
Vicar Bishop of Mohac ISIHJE
Vicar Bishop of Diokleia METODIJE

THE ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF OCHRID:
Archbishop of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skoplje JOVAN

Bishop of Polog and Kumanovo JOAKIM
Bishop of Bregalnica MARKO
Vicar Bishop of Stobi DAVID

[The Path of Orthodoxy Translation]