



UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH
SVIATOSLAV SHEVCHUK
MAJOR ARCHBISHOP OF KYIV-HALYCH

Вих. BA 19/395-ENG

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CHRISTMAS PASTORAL LETTER
OF HIS BEATITUDE SVIATOSLAV

**Most Reverend Archbishops and Metropolitans,
God-loving Bishops, Very Reverend Clergy, Venerable Monastics,
Dearly Beloved Brothers and Sisters,
in Ukraine and throughout the world**

Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy!
Lk 2:10

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Beloved in Christ!

Today the angels in heaven sing and celebrate, all creation is filled with joy, for the Saviour and Lord is born this day in Bethlehem of Judea. This joy, which we especially experience with today's illustrious feast, is an integral part of being for every believing Christian, a visible sign and fruit of God's unceasing presence. The joy of the Saviour's coming on earth dissipates all the fears and uncertainties of human life, for "God is with us," once and for all!

In the Gospel narrative the light of God's presence initially causes fear, as a human being by nature is afraid of the unknown, the unexpected or the uncertain: "And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear" (Lk 2:8-9). But the word spoken by the angel "Fear not!" and the good news about the birth of the Saviour takes away that fear: "And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (2:12). The shepherds readily go to the place indicated by the angel, there they bow before the newborn Saviour, and in turn, themselves become proclaimers of joy.

The Newborn Saviour is the incarnate Love of God, who as the only and eternal source of joy dispels fear. Authentic love is not a temporary or passing human emotion, but a life-giving power, the expanse of life, given and guaranteed by God Himself. Only in the space of Divine love and joy can human beings fully live, develop, and be themselves. God does

not desire for His creation to be afraid, and thus in the Nativity, He comes to us as a vulnerable child. The Son of God allows Himself to be laid on hay in a manger, He allows Himself to be embraced by human hands, to be fed at the human breast of the Mother of God. The Almighty God, who needs nothing, makes Himself needy, helpless, and dependent on the warmth and tenderness of human love! Today He makes us capable of opening our embrace to God and neighbour without fear.

So, where does this fear come from? Above all, humans are fearful because, being separated from God through sin, they feel abandoned and lonely: confronting the unknown world alone and unprotected before its hostility. When people are closed to the love of their Creator, they are fearful of Him, erroneously perceiving God as a hostile and foreign power, which seemingly might threaten them, and so they seek to build their life without Him. They hide before their God and Lord, as once did Adam in paradise following his sinful fall. We read in the book of Genesis: "But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid...'" (3:9-10). The life of a person without God's love is transformed into "a space of anxiety and restlessness." A human being, having distanced himself or herself from the face of God, falls into a place of constant fear for their life in the face of death. It is this fear that is the tool of evil, which inevitably takes over and paralyzes a person, takes away his or her freedom, deprives them of joy and hope. A person without God is also afraid of his or her neighbour, the foreigner, the emigrant, as subconsciously they see them as competitors for their illusory space of security and plenty. In the end, such persons fear themselves, their weaknesses and limitations. They are afraid of failing to fulfil the expectations of others, they are afraid of being a failure in learning and work in the context of increasingly aggressive competition in the world. And so today the voice of the heavenly angel resounds in our present night of fear and insecurity: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy!" (Lk 2:10).

The Son of God was born in a human body in order to overcome the very reason for a person's alarm, fear, and uncertainty. This day, in His Nativity, with His liberating divine love He enters into the cold and dark cave of human existence, into our world, increasingly filled with anxiety, into our personal expanse of life. He is born in our midst in order to remove the paralyzing power of our contemporary fears and anxieties, and to say to the person of the XXI century, to say to each one of us: "Fear not!" We read of this in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." (2:14-15).

Christmas is the source of victory over today's fears: fear of the future and the unknown, fear of others, fear of death. In celebrating the birth of our Saviour, His joyful entrance into the horizons of humanity today, let us not allow anyone to frighten us. The word of angels spoken today "Fear not!" is also directed to the Ukrainian people in the midst of the challenges we face in this historical period of our nation's existence. If "God is with us" then who can frighten us, take away or imprison our will to defend our country and

people, our desire for true justice, dignity, and liberty? St. John writes: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:18-19).

Christmas in the unification of God with humankind: God Himself enters into human living space and begins living as a human being, accepting all discomforts, challenges, and threats. Let us rejoice, therefore, for we are the ones whom Christ in His Nativity has liberated from fear, granting us joy in love. He will also renew our capacity to love God and neighbour. In Him are the foundations of our national, state, and ecclesial existence.

Dear Brother and Sisters. With Christ's birth, I sincerely greet you all: those in Ukraine and abroad, those who celebrate together with loved ones and those who are far from family, the young and the old, children and parents, the healthy and the infirm, the wealthy and the poor. Today we are all rich in the joy and love of the newborn Saviour. In thought and heart, I am with those who suffer bodily and spiritual wounds. Those who have doubts and are searching in the midst of the dangers and anxieties of today's world, who thirst for true peace and joy – receive my Christmas greeting and my loving embrace. Today, in a special way I unite myself in prayer with those who fearlessly stand on the frontlines and defend our country. On the occasion of this feast, I express my gratitude and impart my blessings on our battle-worn veterans. May the words of our carol-koliadka speak to the heart of each of you:

*Let us imitate the shepherds,
Let us bow to the One Born
That He deign to grant us peace
Transform sorrows into joy,
For those who believe, who believe in Him (Vselennaya Veselysia)*

From the bottom of my heart, I wish all of you the authentic joy of the children of God, a tasty kutia, a cheerful celebration of Christ's Nativity, and a happy, peaceful, and blessed New Year!

Christ is born! Glorify Him!



Given in Kyiv

at the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ,
on the day of the all-praiseworthy Apostle Andrew the First-called
the 13th of December (30th of November) in the 2019th Year of our Lord