

**Nativity Epistle of the Episcopate of the Ukrainian Orthodox
Church of Canada in the 2023-2024 year of our Lord**

**To the All-Venerable Clergy, to the Diaconate in Christ, and to all the
faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada**

CHRIST IS BORN!

By the grace of God, once again this year, we have the joy of celebrating the great feast of our faith - the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In this winter time of year the days are short, and the nights are long and there is so much darkness in our lives. Feelings of sadness, depression, and despair over evil and injustice fills and dominates the world. It is especially difficult to witness the ungodly and diabolical war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine that continues. The star that shone over the city of Bethlehem gives us hope and shows us the way to the light in our lives. We are created by God to live and be in the light, are called to be His children, children of light, and we should not be in darkness.

Today, the Star of Bethlehem illuminates the whole earth with the light of God's great grace and shows all of us the road to the Savior and to salvation. The world, which has been in the darkness of sin and death for thousands of years, is returning to the light, because God sends His Only- Begotten Son, to live and be among us and to bring us back to the light of life. The Lord said:

"I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

So humanity, which was in darkness, in the kingdom of sin and death and despair, is filled with a new joy "that never happened". Let us rejoice and be glad now, because God is with us! The Son of God is born of the Virgin Mary, becomes in likeness to us in everything except for sin. God lowers himself in the person of the New-born Christ the Savior. As St. Apostle Paul declares, "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, coming in the likeness of men." (Philippians 2:7). The world and the powers of this world did not love Him. The Savior did not even find a place to be born among people. He was born in a cave among animals. King Herod saw even the small and innocent baby Jesus as a threat to himself, and the little Savior was forced to flee to Egypt with the Virgin Mary and the righteous Joseph.

It seems that evil and sin rule in this world, goodness and holiness are weak. St. Apostle Paul says: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:7).

Everything earthly is temporary. Where are the great and famous, the rich and powerful of this world? They have come and gone from this world; only God's love for us is eternal. Our Lord, out of great love "for us people and for the sake of our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became a man" (Symbol of Faith); to suffer, to

be crucified and resurrected, to defeat evil, sin and death, to grant eternal life and peace to all who believe in Him and obey His commandments. God humbles Himself, but this does not mean that He is weak and defeated. No one can ever defeat our God. Evil will never defeat good. Sin will never defeat holiness. Hell will never defeat the Kingdom of Heaven because the Savior is born. He is the fountain of life and immortality. He conquered hell and its powers through His crucifixion and resurrection.

Today the angels sing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Lk 2:14). Today Heaven is reconciled with the earth, the temporary with the eternal, man with God. In the darkness of the kingdom of sin and death, the star of Bethlehem shines, filling everyone with the light of joy, peace and God's mercy.

On these holy days, we especially pray for our long-suffering motherland, Ukraine. May the Lord hear our prayers and grant Ukraine victory over the enemies. May He strengthen, help, and save all who are in danger with His grace.

We especially welcome and pray for all our brothers and sisters and their children from Ukraine, who have found refuge in the hospitable land of Canada. May Christ the Savior, who was a baby refugee in Egypt, fleeing from the threat to His life by King Herod, bless you and help you carry a difficult cross. May the temples and parishes of our Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church of

Canada become a spiritual home for you and your family, where you will always receive God's blessing and support in moments of joy and sorrow.

Dear fathers, brothers and sisters,

Just as the Star of Bethlehem helped the shepherds and wise men find the New-born Baby Jesus, may the star guide and lead each of us through the narrow and thorny path in 2024 so that we can also meet the New-born Savior and find a place for Him in our soul and heart.

May the New-born Lord bless you, fill you with grace, peace, hope and spiritual joy. May He strengthen all of you spiritually and physically, and give us His gracious help to bear our earthly cross.

We prayerfully wish that the coming year 2024, will be peaceful and blessed by the Lord and that God will favor us. May we all meet the great feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ again in a year's time.

With fervent prayers for all of you,

+ Ilarion

Archbishop of Winnipeg and the Central Eparchy
Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ Andriy

Bishop of Toronto and the Eastern Eparchy

