



The Serbian Orthodox Church
to her spiritual children at Christmas, 2021

PORFIRIJE

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!

*“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”
St. Luke 2:14*

We know that the birth of Bethlehem’s Divine Child is at the center of the world’s history and that the Christian wreath of values is founded upon the salvation of mankind in our Lord Jesus Christ. The birth of the God-Man surpasses even the creation of the world, for with the arrival of God’s Light in the world, under the arch of a humble cave near God’s city of Jerusalem, mankind was enlightened by the possibility of eternal life. In the Light which has shone forth in darkness but which has not been overcome by the darkness (cf. St. John 1:5), Christian culture and civilization have blossomed. The New Adam has replaced the old one so that the Holy Spirit renews the entire creation through Him. *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation”*, exclaims the Apostle Paul, *“the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new!”* (2 Corinthians 5:17) In this spirit the Evangelist John gives us the glad tidings that everything has come into existence through God’s Logos (St. John 1:1-3), Who took upon Himself human nature and restored the communion between God and mankind, making the covenant between them eternal.

Love, dear brothers and sisters, is the primordial mover of all the events in the history of salvation, and especially in the coming of the Christ Child, the little God, into the world at Christmas, so that we can only experience the beauty and strength of today’s Feast Day with pure love. Moved by love, God created the world and mankind. Guided by love, He came down amongst us, causing humanity to receive into its bosom the Divine, as well as causing the Uncreated to embrace the perishable. In all the wisdom of the Holy Fathers of the Church, the central thread stands out that the Son of God became one of us so that by grace we may become what He is. God’s love made the created world, not to be overcome or destroyed by divine power in the God-Man Christ, but to be healed and saved by following the narrow path of the Lord’s humility. That is why in today’s festal joy, it is important to understand that the birth of the God-Man in the humble cave of Bethlehem invites us to true love, imbued with a sincere sense of brotherhood among people. Hence, the joy of the feast day should be nourished by the nobility of

our Christian witness, love guided by our care for others, and not the selfish illusions of communal life that the global culture, especially in these holidays, uses for commercial purposes, without bringing true peace and pure joy. Let us, therefore, draw near to each other by entering into the humility of Bethlehem's cave, and let us see that the Son of God was born to show us that we need each other, God to man and man to God, friend to friend and relative to relative, everyone to everybody, for the one without the other cannot exist! Let us not burden ourselves with the question of who is our neighbor, but instead of evaluating what others are doing towards us, let us ask ourselves to whom are we neighbors and what are we doing for others. Let us, therefore, be neighbors to everyone to whom we are directed by the measure of Christ's love.

If this principle of love comes to life in us, we will, in this world which deeply yearns for love, have germinated the sprout of salvation and will nurture it. There is no true and eternal love without Christ the Savior in Whom God's love toward man and man's love toward God have met and united. Saint Justin of Celije's thought that *only love has the fragrance of immortality, for its fragrance is that of God* resounds with the power of the Gospel. Love teaches us the possibility of growth in God and eternal life in Christ's love. If we neglect Christ's love within us, we fall into a tragic dead end, but if we renew it with effort and grace, we grow towards the fullness of life. The source of spiritual joy is love, the source of unconquerable moral courage amid life's difficult trials.

Our people, who in these joyous days bring to life the tradition of exchanging God's peace amongst themselves, have known this from ancient times. In family and neighborhood, amongst relatives and in the workplace, in all places where we find ourselves, reconciliation with God and one's neighbors is accompanied with the ancient greeting – *Peace from God, Christ is born!* With this greeting the biblical prophecy of the great Isaiah is made manifest: *“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given... And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* (Isaiah 9:6) Let us therefore during these blessed days pray to the Lord and King of peace (cf. Hebrew 7:2), to extinguish animosity among nations, to save people throughout the world, and that He be merciful and love mankind so that we may be worthy of our ancestors according to flesh and spirit; that we be worthy of the blessing promised to us from prophets of old, given to us in the God-Man Christ.

And as we prayerfully look at each other during these holy days, the feeling that our joy is not complete smolders in our hearts. We celebrate the birth of Christ the Savior in a world filled with fear and unrest, an atmosphere of misunderstanding, mistrust, and intolerance, leading all the way to estrangement and exclusion stemming from an advanced culture of selfishness and the exhibition of individualism, essentially the leading values of the global consumer mentality. Besides this, in a world of constant change in which the only thing that is not evaded is the fear of the loss of life's security, it is as if today's man is not being helped by medical, industrial, and technological achievements. It seems as if our society in essence is no longer the same, for scientific and technological contributions, under the influence of informational technology, tend to change the way of communication among people, ever increasing their estrangement and loneliness. It is enough to see the insecurity surrounding curing basic illnesses, so that fear takes on an extreme existential form.

All this describes the atmosphere which was prophetically described by Ivo Andric, our Nobel laureate, who said that *the real and the biggest danger is not the actual danger, but rather the fear that is within us*. The Divine-Child Christ casts out that fear from us. This is witnessed by His beloved disciple John: *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”* (1 John 4:18) But, before the Apostle of love, the message that unites many was written in the Old Testament: *“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I*

will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10) Therefore we need to search for the answer to our situation today which weighs on us in the words which our Lord Christ said to his disciples before His suffering: *“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* (St. John 16:33) Let us rejoice, therefore, brothers and sisters, for the Victor comes to us at Christmas! Let us cast out the shade of fear, despite difficulties, and with a strong faith in God let us celebrate the birth of the God-Man, Whose New Testament name, Emanuel, strengthens us with its powerful literal meaning – *God is with us.* (Isaiah 7:14)

In the joy of this Christmas feast day, with explicit pastoral care and responsibility, we send our paternal greeting and prayers for our sisters and brothers in the homeland and diaspora, wherever Orthodox Serbs live, but especially to those in Kosovo and Metohija, our spiritual and national cradle. We send them the message that we know their trials are still present, but their Mother Church has always been with them, and she will continue to be so. Today we are with all of you, spiritually and prayerfully, in all places where you may be living. Every Orthodox home becomes a little Bethlehem in which the meaning of the yule log (badnjak) and the warming straw permeates us; in which together, we sing the song: *“Your Nativity, O Christ our God, has shone to the world the Light of wisdom...”*

With exceptional respect and gratitude we today wish a blessed and merry Christmas to all doctors and health care workers, for whom we offer our prayers to the Divine Infant Christ! We also pray for the sick and their speedy recovery, and that the epidemic that has attacked the world fades away! We also pray that we, Orthodox Christians, no longer fear for our lives and that we do not draw back in the face of the dangers which accompany the illness caused by the spread of the virus; rather, that we have a strong confidence in God, the true Physician of our souls and bodies, and that the feeling of fear stimulated by the suggested “social distancing” will not prevent us from doing that which is for the benefit of our neighbors and of the communities to which we belong in every way: spiritual, family, business. For us Orthodox Christians, this lesson has an eternal value: *“You have seen the face of your brother, you have seen your God.”* A centuries-long examination of our godlike nature has concluded that it is always directed towards communion with God, our brothers and sisters, and with the all of nature. The Church, therefore, calls us all during this pandemic to observe reasonable guidelines and recommendations of governmental and other relevant state and local institutions where our people live, but at the same time she reminds everyone to avoid exclusion; she calls us to respect human freedom as the highest and most valuable of God’s gifts given to mankind. Keep in mind the call of the Apostle Paul: *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”* (Galatians 5:1) Let us remain free, but nonetheless responsible, safeguarding others and ourselves.

Confronting then the global threat of the Corona virus in this way, let us understand above all that man is created to labor in this world as the only true worker of stability and survival. Depending on the use of his free will, he may also be the only disruptive factor, the only real virus. By his disruption of human nature and violence against creation, man disturbs the magnificent harmony of everything God has created. In that sense the Corona virus, like any other virus, only reflects an incomparably deeper problem. Therefore it is, among other things, one expression of an instructional warning to man to return to the commandments of God, because when nature is violated and not lived in accordance with the order that God has established, it ceases to be our peaceful habitat. Nature remembers and suffers injustice for a long time, but sooner or later, she fights back. Nature therefore, must be respected, cherished, and preserved as God's most valuable gift.

The meaning of Christmas consists precisely in the fact that the Divine-Child Christ, in the event of His miraculous birth, once and for all gives us the possibility of restoration from our virus-like actions and the unique possibility of again restoring our relationship with God, creation and people. Let us be sober about it, listening to what the verses of John of Damascus, the great saint and church poet, tell us in the light of the Feast Day: *"Heaven and earth are glad today, as the prophets said, and angels and men keep spiritual festival, for God, born of the Virgin, has appeared in the flesh to those who sit in darkness and shadow: the cave and the manger receive Him; the shepherds proclaim the wonder; the magi from the East bring gifts to Bethlehem: and with our unworthy lips we offer Him the praise of the angels: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace!"*

May this day on which our Salvation and Redeemer Christ was born be happy and blessed by God. With these wishes and prayers to the Divine Infant Christ we, as a whole conciliar church body and also personally, wish you every true good in the New Year 2022.

PEACE FROM GOD - CHRIST IS BORN!

Given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade at Christmas, 2021.

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

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

Metropolitan of Dabro-Bosna CHRYSOSTOM

Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Coastlands JOANIKIJE

Bishop of Sabac LAVRENTIJE

Bishop of Srem VASILIJE

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 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 Düsseldorf and Germany GRIGORIJE

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 Buenos Aires and South Central America KIRILO
Bishop of Australia and New Zealand Metropolitanate SILUAN
Bishop of Dalmatia NIKODIM
Bishop of Osek-Polje and Baranja HERUVIM
Bishop of Valjevo ISIHJE
Bishop of Budimlje and Niksic METODIJE
Bishop of Zahumlje and Hercegovina DIMITRIJE

Vicar Bishop of Moravica ANTONIJE
Vicar Bishop of Remezijan STEFAN
Vicar Bishop of Toplica JEROTEJ
Vicar Bishop of Hvostan JUSTIN
Vicar Bishop of Mohac DAMASKIN
Vicar Bishop of Marca SAVA
Vicar Bishop of Hum JOVAN

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

[Path of Orthodoxy Translation]