

**Eminent brother-archpastors, father-concelebrants, God-loving monastics,
beloved in the Lord brothers and sisters, parishioners and worshipers
of our churches, scattered throughout the world:**

I extend to you my heartfelt greetings on this grace-filled feast day of the Nativity of Christ, when the Omnipotent God, Creator and Master of the heavens and the earth, became a living Person, One of us, born a helpless Infant in the small Judean village of Bethlehem!

Why did God descend from Heaven to earth and become a man, incarnate of the Most-Blessed Virgin Mary? In order to restore and renew our fallen, profoundly damaged human nature, which was distorted by sin.

From the moment of the Incarnation of the Son of God, Who became man, mankind must no longer despair of achieving eternal salvation, no matter how gravely sinful it has been before God, no matter how disgraced by lawless acts and sinfulness. Through repentance, through active striving for the Kingdom of Heaven, and through deep faith in the mercy of God, each of us returns to the embrace of our Heavenly Father, Who will console and grant us tranquility through His own grace and peace.

Our sorrows have multiplied, complicating our lives on earth, but it is obvious that we are also offered consolation, for there is joy even amid troubles. This Divine consolation is a quiet, serene joy which abounds in every believing soul, a joy that no one and nothing can take away from us, which no sorrow can darken, for “great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh” (I Tim. 3:16).

“Where is there peace on earth?” asked the Righteous John of Kronstadt. He answers the question himself: “The Divine peace proclaimed by the angels is present in the Church and was given to it by the Price of Peace, Christ.” Let us heed the compunctionate angelic song, sung on the eve of the Nativity of Christ above Bethlehem: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men” (Luke 2:14). This angelic song must embolden and console us. It declares to us the joy of God’s love, the blessed union of Heaven and earth, emergent holiness and deliverance from the oppression of sin with its anger and hatred. How can we not rejoice and find consolation in our spirit as we ponder the eternal mercy of God, which we are granted within the Church? It is no wonder that the Heavenly Hosts declared glory to Heaven and peace to earth and to man, the blessed hope of receiving endless salvation, uncorrupted joy and bliss.

Actively striving for this blessedness, let us give ourselves over to the service of God and neighbor during these festive days, attending the churches of God and undertaking deeds of love and mercy, reading Holy Scripture and spiritually beneficial literature. Let our parishes joyfully celebrate these holy days as a family and as friends, receiving edification in the Church, strengthening and supporting each other in our service to God, the Church and mankind!

I wish you all a joyous holiday and happy New Year!

With love in the Lord,

+HILARION

Metropolitan of Eastern America & New York

First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad

Nativity of Christ 2015/2016