

Dearly beloved in the Lord:

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Today the unfolding of God's love is revealed in the birth of His only-begotten Son. Today heaven and earth are sanctified by the virginal birth. Today the dividing wall of hostility between all peoples is abolished by the One who emptied Himself "taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (*Philippians 2:7*).

The joyful proclamation of the birth of the Savior resonates against the backdrop of war, terrorism, the death of innocent men, women, and children and a prevailing uncertainty that impacts virtually every facet of daily life. As we embrace each other in the brilliant light of the feast, we are acutely aware of the destructive darkness which not only surrounds us but also entices us to succumb to its power. Given this awareness, the celebration of the Nativity challenges us to respond in ways that will allow light of Christ to illumine and release all who are enveloped by the darkness of ignorance, desperation, hatred, and confusion.

We who have entered the mystery of Christ's birth are responsible for revealing to the world the One who is our Peace (*Ephesians 2:14*). Our proclamation of our Lord's Nativity must be used to comfort those recently burdened by the tragic and sudden loss of loved ones. Our faith in the Incarnation of Christ must be lived by ceaselessly offering love, forgiveness, and mercy to all.

He who is born of the Virgin has come to destroy all sin and death. With the eyes of faith we see this feast inseparably joined to the Lord's saving death and resurrection by which all things are made new (*Revelation 21:5*). With pure love burning in our hearts we join the hosts of angels glorifying God in the highest who, through the birth of His Son as man, forges peace and good will among all people.

Today Christ is born and we are commissioned to share our gift. We must be generous in proclaiming by word and deed the birth of the universal Savior. To a world seeking comfort and healing—to a world strangled by the tyranny of sin and death—we must offer the ongoing ministry of the Lord. For it is His ministry that imparts the Word of Life. It is His ministry that distributes the bread of immortality. And it is His ministry that embraces the poor, nurses the sick, comforts the suffering and remembers the forgotten. This is the work that imparts the power and beauty of our celebration. This is the work that will enable "all flesh to behold the salvation of God" (*Luke 3:6*).

Be assured of my prayer that the Lord will bless you, your families, and your friends with the light of His presence during this Christmas Season and throughout the New Year.

*Father Alexey*