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No. 656/2008 O

This Number Should be Prefixed to Your Reply

Office of the Metropolitan

CHRISTMAS PASTORAL LETTER OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC HIERARCHS OF THE USA

CHRIST IS BORN!

It is our beautiful tradition that on Christmas Eve, as the first star appears, we light a candle in our homes and greet the Newborn Savior, Jesus, with our ancient carol, "God Eternal".

The evangelist Matthew speaks of a bright star which guides the wise men from the East to Bethlehem. He writes that "when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding joy. And having come into the house, they saw the little child with Mary his mother, and falling down they did him homage" (Mt. 2:10). Of the wise men we sing in the tropars, "those who worshipped the stars were taught by a star to worship you, the Sun of Righteousness". And the prophet Malachi speaks of the healing power of the "Sun of Righteousness" for those who are faithful to the Lord's name (Mal 4:2). This special light which we celebrate at Christmas has a special meaning for all of us.

First, it is the light of understanding. We sing in the tropars, "Your Nativity, O Christ our God, made the light of knowledge dawn on the world". Today, God has revealed Himself in a Newborn Child. He grants us understanding regarding Him. He is the one who is here for us. We proclaim this by singing "God is With Us" during the Great Complines. God is with us today. God became one of us, became human, so that we may share in his divine life. The light of God's revelation is a light of joy. How can we not rejoice with such joyful news!

The light is also an example of our Christian life. Almighty God does not come to earth in a royal palace, or in the home of the powerful or a rich family. He comes in a poor stable, laid on hay in a manger. In this we come to understand that the power of God reveals itself in humility, in poverty, in suffering. We are called to humble service without elevating ourselves above others. As God is with us and for us, we too must be at the service of one another.

Finally, the light is the light of witnessing the Good News. The salvation given by God is not limited to a chosen group of individuals. It is to be shared with all humanity. Our festive joy cannot be limited to the privacy of our homes. It must be a visible witness to the fact that God loves us and hopes to share His divine will with all.

In the Holy Gospels, the three wise men are described as bringing gifts: gold, as a sign that the Newborn Infant is the King of the Universe; frankincense, for the Child is God Himself; and myrrh, as a sign of suffering, for in ancient times, the dead were anointed with myrrh. Here is born the One who will give up his life for the salvation of all.

What gifts shall we bring? Let us bring the gold of our love. As the Father showed his love to us through Jesus, the Son, so today, through His disciples, he does the same. Secondly, let us offer the frankincense of our prayer. We need to serve the Lord not only on major holidays and on Sundays, but indeed, our mouths should be filled with praise each day. Finally, let us carry the myrrh of suffering. All that has true value in life requires sacrifice. That which has eternal value requires particular and constant sacrifice. This is the meaning of Bethlehem and the example given to us by our Divine Teacher.

We pray today that God may grant all of us, and all those united with us in our hearts both near and far, the understanding of the Light which comes from above at Christmas. May each of us experience the joy of true understanding that "God Is With Us". Jesus has been born for us and for our salvation.

God grant to you a most blessed celebration of Christmas, filled with much joy and happiness. May our celebration of the birth of Jesus be a source of renewal in our expression of love for God and for all those whom He gives us to love and serve during our lifetime.

A Blessed and Holy Christmas to all!

Most Reverend Stefan Soroka
Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the U.S.A.
Archbishop of Philadelphia for Ukrainians

Most Reverend Robert M. Moskal
Bishop of the St. Josaphat Eparchy in Parma

Most Reverend Richard Seminack
Bishop of the St. Nicholas Eparchy in Chicago

Most Reverend Paul Chomnycky, OSBM
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Most Reverend John Bura
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