



The Serbian Orthodox Church
to her spiritual children at Christmas, 2022

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 most joyous Christmas greeting:

Peace from God! Christ is Born!

*“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor,
The mighty God, the everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”*

Isaiah 9:6

Our dear spiritual children,

On this great and most wonderful feast day of the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, let us rejoice, for by it the salvation of the world has been accomplished! Let us join the angels in singing: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”* (Isaiah 2:14). The rays of the Lord’s glory have revealed to us the cave which to the world has become the source of the Way, the Truth, and the Life! Let us rejoice with the entire creation, singing a new song for the Great and most Praised One, the Lord above all, has become a Child! Let us sing and like shepherds in that irradiated night, brighter than day, embrace Him Who has brought heaven down to the manger! Let us celebrate, and like the wise men from the East, fearlessly preach the brilliant Star which has banished the darkness of death and brought us to eternal Light and eternal Meaning!

The mystery of Christmas is contained in the infinite humility of the Most Eternal One, Who was born as a Child and allowed us to touch him, and almost, according to Herod’s naïve idea, hurt Him. But, not caring about human weaknesses, the Son of God expects our love and enables us to embrace Him. So, at Christmas we are called to be partakers of His growth in this world and to grow *unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*. (Ephesians 4:13) In this divine-human relationship, we adopt the Gospel virtues, the eternal values that the Son of God brings to earth.

Living according to the Lord’s commandments in the Church, we begin to see with His eyes, breathe with His lungs, and think with His mind. In this way we adopt the mind of Christ,

the ethos of the Gospel and its eternal values, becoming reborn people, citizens of the Heavenly Kingdom and members of God's Household.

Brothers and sisters, if we choose to be shaped by the Mystery of love and humility, proclaimed in the Event of the Birth of Christ, everything around us will be transformed. If the measure of all values becomes the Divine Child Who is lying in the manger wrapped in swaddling clothes, we will hear the same invigorating voice of the angels which on that first Christmas night comforted shepherds: *"Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord!"* (Saint Luke 2:10-11) This eternal and perpetual encouragement of angels, with its grace filled message and power, changes suffering and this world fragmented by unrest into a place of Christmas peace and joy. In order for that gifted peace to become active in our time and in our life, we must make every effort; we must not only accept it, but also make it the essential substance of our life.

The fratricidal and destructive wars, which still spread death throughout planet Earth, show that true peace is not simply the absence of armed conflict, but the fruit of self-sacrifice that was sown among people and sealed by the Lord Himself with His Incarnation. The peace of God is revealed to us in the divine-human Person of Christ, knocks on the door of our freedom and invites us to bring it into our homes and schools, our workplaces, hiding places, trenches and lives. It invites us to join with all who share with us the same, eternal, sacred and unchanging ethos, or value system, what we love and what we are, what we believe and what we know. Then we will recognize the God-Child in our neighbors and be able to give them the gold of life's joy, the frankincense of truthful love and the incense of true humility.

Dear spiritual children, the Birth of Christ has always and by everyone been respected as a family holy day, the feast day of the family homestead and its warmth. That is why it is wrong if on Christmas Eve, the eve of the joyous Feast Day, we do not receive the God-Child, Who is the pre-eternal God and the Child born for us in a domestic atmosphere which through a Yule log, scattered straw and everything else, reminds us of the modest cave in which He, the Most Calm among the humble, was born, swaddled and laid in the most ordinary manger, but instead celebrate in the streets and squares in a half-pagan way in a half-drunk atmosphere.

Just as the powerful ones of that time persecuted and wanted to destroy the God-Child, so their heirs of today raise their voices against the family, founded on Christian values. The Church's response to this public and permanent aggression cannot be other than evangelical, apostolic and Christmas like. This means that the Church steadily stands on her eternal and unchanging convictions, safeguarding the boundaries of the Law as approved by God, not imposing its values on anyone, but at the same time, not deviating from them even one iota. We do not bring any person under the sun to our own human judgment, neither do we throw spiritual stones at those who do not share our faith, but we resolutely refuse to equate anyone's free but wrong choice with our freedom and the responsibility that goes with it.

For children in a deeply wounded society to resist the flood of calls for violence in schools, on social networks, in stadiums and in sports halls, they should be raised in a healthy family environment, shaped by love, not hatred and aggression. The appearance of violent and destructive behavior in our schools is accompanied by the already mentioned inadmissible efforts to impose teachings, ideologies, practices, and customs on the entire instructional and educational system, from kindergartens to universities, which are completely contrary to the Christian code of ethics and the God-pleasing life of not only us Orthodox people, but also of everyone with whom we share our living space.

In these days of Christmas joy, peace, and family warmth, in our prayers are those among whom the fire of war is burning, first the brothers and sisters of the same faith from

Ukraine and Russia. We look with sadness at war, conflicts and its victims, in which various actors participate, publicly or secretly. The consequences of the tragic fratricidal Russian-Ukrainian conflict, fueled daily from outside, are terrible, and the conflagration of war, as never before, threatens the whole world. For this reason, we turn with a particularly fervent prayer to the God-Child Christ, and with a sincere fraternal appeal to all direct and indirect participants in the war, to find the strength within themselves, so that the suffering ends, the refugees return to their towns and villages, their homes are restored, and peace returns to the areas affected by war.

Since the middle of this year even in our own covenant homeland, Kosovo and Metohija, our neighbors have been issuing ultimatums and provocations, carrying out terror and continuously threatening the remaining, unprotected Serbs with persecution and cruelty, with ominous silence or, it seems to us, the tacit support of a certain powerful country. We remind all competent authorities that the universal human rights and freedoms enjoyed by Albanians and all people in the world should also apply to Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. Personal safety, security of property and freedom of movement belong to everyone equally and as such must be unfringed.

Worshiping the Birth of Christ, we pray that in us, but also in all those with whom we share space and time, and in all the nations of the world, love, understanding and Christmas goodwill and peace that surpasses all understanding may reign (Philippians 4:7). Moved by the festive joy of Christmas, with special archpastoral care and responsibility, we send a message to all our fellow compatriots, brothers and sisters, Orthodox people, wherever they live, that the Mother Church is always with them and calls them to be ever ready to hear and practice the Gospel of Christ, and in this way to always be ready, without being silenced, to proclaim the good news of peace and love to every person and the whole world.

Congratulating you on Christmas and the New Year 2023 of God's goodness, we wish you every true good and inalienable joy from the Godchild Christ, with the most joyful Christmas greeting:

PEACE FROM GOD - CHRIST IS BORN!

Given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade at Christmas, 2022.

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 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
Bishop of Sabac JEROTEJ
Bishop of Western Europe JUSTIN

Vicar Bishop of Moravica ANTONIJE
Vicar Bishop of Remezijan STEFAN
Vicar Bishop of Mohac DAMASKIN
Vicar Bishop of Marca SAVA
Vicar Bishop of Hum JOVAN
Vicar Bishop of Hvostan ALEKSEJ
Vicar Bishop of Novo Brdo ILARION
Vicar Bishop of Jegar NEKTARIJE
Vicar Bishop of Lipljane DOSITEJ
Vicar Bishop of Toplica PETAR

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]