

**The Serbian Orthodox Church
to her spiritual children at Christmas, 2008**

+PAVLE

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!

Every year, dear spiritual children, and so it is this year as well, we anticipate and welcome Christmas, the birthday of the Son of God, with joy, faith, hope and love. Why? Because it is in this event that the “fullness of time” was fulfilled, and so God the Father, “gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). This event is the fulfillment of all cosmological and historical events: everything that had happened in God’s creation and mankind’s history received in that day “which the Lord had made” its fulfillment and realization. The entry of God into the innermost part of life represents, also, a fulfillment of all of mankind's deepest yearnings as attested and proclaimed in all earthly nations before the birth of Christ. With His birth, the light of the knowledge of God shone forth. In that Divine light the meaning of the world, nature, and the ultimate goal of man’s existence and the existence of all creatures, both visible and invisible, was revealed to us.

In Christ God, Whom we in the Creed confess as “the Only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made; being of one essence with the Father, through Whom all things were made, Who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and became man...” – the victory has been realized once and for all over imperfection, sin and death. With the manifestation of the fullness of His Divinity and His unification with human nature, man's fullness and perfection has also been realized. Without mingling or change, the undivided unity and community of the divine and human natures in the God-man Jesus Christ bestows upon the world and man humanity, through the indestructible truth and the eternal, Divine-human community which is God’s Church.

From the day of Christ's birth the world is not nor can it ever be that which it was before. Man's nature and the world, filled with the yeast of eternal Life, received the potential to be a new man, a new heaven and a new earth, a new eternal mankind. This is why Christ was the only one Who could say these words: "Behold, I create everything new" (cf. Rev. 21:5). He, as "the Only new under the sun," eternally renews everything that exists; His Light enlightens everyone and everything, enlightening every man that comes into the world (cf. John 1:9).

As such, Christ is the "fullness of the Law and Prophets" as He Himself said: "I did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it." (Matthew 5:17) This word – "to fulfill" – has dual meaning: to accomplish, on the one hand, and to give to the world fullness and perfection, on the other hand, so that we humans and the world may be filled and grow in Him until, as the divinely wise Apostle Paul says: "we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

It is on this all encompassing truth about the Person Christ, as the beginning and the endlessness of all that exists, that everyday life is founded, and which enlightens man's way of life and behavior. This is why we always come back to the Nativity of the God-child, His Theanthropic work, with which we enlighten our own works and our relationship with each other, with God and with His creation.

With His birth as a man, the holiness of every birth and of all life is affirmed. It is fearful to imagine – let alone to accept and legalize as something normal – that defiling attitude towards the sanctity of life which would allow that even the Mother of God could be a child killer, just as are many contemporary women who kill their offspring in their wombs. Those mothers who kill their children become not only child murderers, but also God murderers, since every human being is a God-bearer and Christ-bearer. We will mention only one distressing and sad example of one mother who gave birth to a few daughters, and together with her husband wanted to have a son. When she conceived again, because the doctor wrongly determined that she was carrying another girl, she underwent an abortion, despite the pleas of her husband and others. It was discovered after the fact—oh, how heartrending—that she was carrying two boys, twins! What then, can comfort and heal this unfortunate mother's deep wound?! May our Lord have mercy upon her and all other child destroying mothers who, in their selfishness or some similar reason, sacrifice their most holy gift from God. Don't they turn the mother's womb – that workshop of life – into a shop of death and nothingness!

The selfishness and self-indulgence of man, such as that cited above, leads

to the endangerment and misuse of the very nature into which we are born and live. As man lives and breathes with love, likewise all creatures and all nature's elements need mercy, love and goodness: the water which we drink, the air that we breathe, the flowers and trees in the field, the fish in the sea, the beasts in the mountains, the domestic animals – all yearn for mercy, love and goodness. If we misuse any part of creation or infect and pollute it – it becomes alienated, falls apart and disintegrates, and retaliates against its abusers. In this way the God-given order is broken : water loses its healthiness, and so does the earth, and with it the earthly fruits are polluted, and in turn they contaminate those who consume them – man and other living beings. The climate is changing, the ice is melting in the North Pole, the change of seasons is diminishing; the rising heat is preparing the globe to be one day, God forbid, consumed in fire.

Together with this, contemporary man, in conquering with his technology far-flung territories, imperils the living space of numerous other beings. Instead of turning to the inner spiritual dimensions which are limitless and conquering those territories which endanger no one, but rather which give fullness to all things, opening up inexpressible horizons of growth and perfection – instead, man turns to that which is by its very nature limited and transient, and thus himself becomes limited and crippled. The real and true fullness of all things is precisely the Theanthropic Person of Christ in Whom is the “plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God” (Ephesians 3:9). When “Christ enters into our hearts through faith,” only then can we be “rooted and grounded in love...comprehending with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19).

Aside from this, today's mankind is very concerned with the beginning of a severe economic crisis. More frequently than not, it is overlooked that the crisis is not only economic, but rather its nature is more complex and deeper. Is it no wonder that it is manifested first of all among the wealthiest: the most frightened are those who are the most affluent. Their unquenchable greed for money and enjoyment, their over-consumption of natural and material goods, produces an imbalance in human relationships — the relationship towards the deepest mysteries of life and the relationship towards the entire creation. This means that behind the economic crisis is hidden a spiritual and moral crisis, and with that a crisis of all of mankind. It has been rightly stated that the economic crisis is connected with political calamity; as is the disregard for international rights and the ignoring of the United Nations Charter on human rights – as well as the extinguishing of justice in general, engenders a political

crisis, and this in turn engenders economic and financial chaos. The law and justice, both God's and man's, are ignored because of lust for power and economic interest. The consequences of placing the economic and global interests of the world's mighty ones above justice and human rights are best seen in the tragic situation of our country and of the Serbian people, as well as other countries and peoples in the modern world.

The new hedonistic-utilitarian myths, today placed on the pedestal of divinity and propagated with all the modern means, are endangering most of all those most innocent and least able to repel them: children and youth. Drugs and immorality, the narrowing of life to instinct and the satisfaction of carnal lusts, the desire of the eye and of vanity (cf. 1 John 2:16), are the fruit of these ancient myths dressed in new and eye-catching clothing.

In the midst of all this we Christians, as before and as always, "wait for Christ, and not better times" (St. Nikolai of Zicha); we wait for Him Who is "the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow." We always go back to Him – "to a Young Child, the pre-eternal God," as the absolute measure and criterion of everything that happened and happens in all of human history. In Him as God's Son and Man's Son, as perfect God and perfect man "we have known and believed the love that God has for us" (1 John 4:16). Since God appeared to us with His Birth and lived with us, we know that "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this..." (1 John 4:16-17), and with "this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also" (1 John 4:21).

In the name of such a God Who is Love, and in the name of such a Love to which all peoples and nations are called, we greet you all, dear spiritual children – most especially you in the suffering Kosovo and Metohija and throughout the world, with the greeting of God's truth, justice and eternal love:

PEACE FROM GOD - CHRIST IS BORN!

And may the crown of the goodness of the new year of our Lord be blessed!

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

Metropolitan of Zagreb and Ljubljana JOVAN
Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Coastlands AMPHILOHIJE
Metropolitan of Midwestern America CHRISTOPHER
Metropolitan of Dabro-Bosna NIKOLAJ

Bishop of Sabac-Valjevo LAVRENTIJE
 Bishop of Nis IRINEJ
 Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla VASILJE
 Bishop of Srem VASILJE
 Bishop of Banja Luka JEFREM
 Bishop of Budim LUKIJAN
 Bishop of Canada GEORGIJE
 Bishop of Banat NIKANOR
 Bishop for America and Canada (New Gracanica Metropolitanate) LONGIN
 Bishop of Eastern America MITROPHAN
 Bishop of Zica CHRYSOSTOM
 Bishop of Backa IRINEJ
 Bishop of Great Britain and Scandinavia DOSITEJ
 Bishop of Ras and Prizren ARTEMIJE
 Retired Bishop of Zahumlje and Hercegovina ATANASIJE
 Bishop of Bihac and Petrovac CHRYSOSTOM
 Bishop of Osijek and Baranja LUKIJAN
 Bishop of Central Europe CONSTANTINE
 Bishop of Western Europe LUKA
 Bishop of Timok JUSTIN
 Bishop of Vranje PAHOMIJE
 Bishop of Sumadija JOVAN
 Bishop of Slavonia SAVA
 Bishop of Branicevo IGNATIJE
 Bishop of Milesevo FILARET
 Bishop of Dalmatia FOTIJE
 Bishop of Budimlje and Niksic JOANIKIJE
 Bishop of Zahumlje and Hercegovina GRIGORIJE
 Bishop of Valjevo MILUTIN
 Bishop of Western America MAXIM
 Bishop of Gornji Karlovci GERASIM
 Bishop of Australia and New Zealand IRINEJ
 Vicar Bishop of Hvosno ATANASIJE
 Vicar Bishop of Jegar PORFIRIJE
 Vicar Bishop of Lipljan TEODOSIJE
 Vicar Bishop of Dioclea JOVAN
 Vicar Bishop of Moravica ANTONIJE

THE ARCHDIOCESE OF OCHRID

Archbishop of Ochrid and Metropolitan of Skoplje JOVAN
 Bishop of Polos and Kumanovo JOAKIM
 Bishop of Bregal and locum tenens of the Diocese of Bitolj MARKO
 Vicar Bishop of **Stobija** DAVID

[Path of Orthodoxy translation]