



ГАВРИИЛЪ
Архиепископъ Монреальскій и Канадскій
The Most Reverend Archbishop Gabriel
of Montreal and Canada

NATIVITY EPISTLE

To the clergy and God-saved flock of the Diocese of Canada

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ!

By the time Christ was born, all Old Testament prophecies about the advent of the Messiah had been fulfilled. The time of salvation has come, the time of great change in the history of the human race. The Holy Gospels tell us about this through the words of the Angel, who said to the shepherds in Bethlehem: "I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord... Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Lk. 2:10-11, 14).

But then, did everyone hear and accept these words of the Angel? Remember, when King Herod, believing himself all-powerful, "sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all that region, from two years old and under" (Mt. 2:16), the Infant Jesus was not among the victims, since the Holy Family, having been forewarned by the Angel, left the city. So it was the will of God that the killers and Christ crossed paths: when the soldiers of Herod went on their fruitless search for the Lord in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary with the Newly Born Christ Jesus were already in the Temple of Jerusalem (we remember that at the Feast of the Meeting of our Lord), being on their way to Egypt. The King of the Universe stayed the hand of the evildoers. It shows that the will of God cannot be altered through the efforts of men.

Now the invasion of a dangerous virus has changed almost everything in the way people live on this earth. And the age-old familiar order of our Church life has also been disturbed. These circumstances even hinder us from fulfilling the need, most obvious for us, Orthodox Christians, both lay and clerical – to take part in the Church services. Yet, beloved brothers and sisters, "there is no way for us to lose heart", enjoined St. Seraphim of Sarov. In everything that is happening to all of us, and to all created world – there is the same salvific will of God. We mentioned the impossibility of attending Church services without hindrance because of the pandemic. Now let us be honest: did we always treasure this truly blessed opportunity? Did we not turn it down for some, often less than serious, reasons? But look how much we appreciate it now!

"Rejoice in the Lord always" – the Pre-eminent Apostle Paul tells us – "and again I say, rejoice" (Phil. 4). "Rejoice in the Lord always" – the Pre-eminent Apostle Paul tells us:4). In the days of adversity it is often hard to stop oneself from thinking, and, sometimes, even saying: how can we rejoice with the Angels, shepherds, Magi, when, for almost a year, all of us are being deprived of a chance to meet together in our Church for the Divine service? But the holy Apostle "does not

simply say, 'Rejoice always;' but he adds the cause of the continual joy, saying, 'Rejoice in the Lord always'. He who rejoices in the Lord, cannot be deprived of that joy", clarifies St. John Chrysostom. Let us hope that circumstances preventing us from gathering together in our holy temples will not last long.

In the coming year we hope to celebrate an important historical date: the 100th Anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. A major commemoration was planned for this year, but the Lord decided otherwise. From purely historical point of view this, perhaps, is for the better, since the First All-Diaspora Church Council that marked the birth of our Church Abroad has actually met in 1921, so that the 100th anniversary is still ahead of us.

In these days of joy we wish that your celebrations of Christmas, of coming Theophany, and of the New Year will be peaceful, together with your families, and with expectations of health in soul and body. Let us rejoice in the Infant Christ the Savior, and beseech Him that the deadly pestilence takes leave of us soon.

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Archbishop Gabriel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

GABRIEL
Archbishop of Montreal and Canada

Nativity of Christ, 2020/2021