

Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Winnipeg Вінніпезька Українська Католицька Архиепархія

Pastoral Letter

of the Ukrainian Catholic Bishops of Canada

on the occasion of the Nativity of our Lord

2015/2016

To the Very Reverend Clergy, Monastics and Religious Sisters, Seminarians and Laity of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada:

Christ is Born!

Glorify Him!

The unapproachable God, out of mercy, wished to become visible for us. He comes in the flesh, to be born as a human being of the most pure Virgin, in the city of Bethlehem. Therefore, let us hasten with devotion to receive him. (Sessional hymn, Prefeast of the Nativity)

It is the middle of the night. You are sound asleep in bed. Suddenly you are awakened by knocking at the door. Who could it be at this hour? Could it be refugees from Syria fleeing their war torn homeland? Could it be an ex convict released from the local prison with no place to go? Could it be a stranger from Ukraine claiming to be a long lost relative? Could it be an older man with a young wife about to give birth, but for whom the health care system has no bed?

If we get up and open the door to our home, how will it change our lives?

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus during this Christmas season we find ourselves at the beginning of the Holy Jubilee Year of Mercy initiated by Pope Francis this past December 8th. The purpose of the Holy Jubilee Year, according to Pope Francis, is to encounter the mercy of God. And the primary way we encounter God is through Jesus Christ, the face of the Father's mercy. (Cf. *Misericordiae Vultus 1*)

Our rich and meaningful Ukrainian Christmas traditions call our attention to the birth in Bethlehem of the Son of God. The liturgical texts, the carols and greetings, the special foods and decorations help remind us that "God is with us – Z namy Boh!" With the coming of Jesus Christ onto this earth with a human body, we have been given tangible proof of the love and mercy of our God.

In one liturgical verse we hear Mary speaking to Jesus just after his birth: *Having learned that You were to be born a King, O Son, the kings from the East come to You, bringing gifts of*

gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Behold them standing before the doors; bid them enter to gaze upon You, held in my arms as a child, even though You are older than ancient Adam.
(Aposticha, Prefeast of the Nativity)

One of the important symbols used during the Holy Jubilee Year is that of the holy door. In cathedrals and other appointed churches a door is designated through which the faithful are invited to enter the church. The holy door stands as a symbol of the extraordinary pathway towards salvation that is offered to the believers, through prayer, penitence, and works of mercy. The holy door becomes a door of mercy through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons and instills hope.

At Christmas time the holy doors remind us of the doorway into the stable at Bethlehem whereby the shepherds and magi entered to find the Christ Child, the long awaited Messiah. All were welcome to enter through the door way into the stable: the poor and the rich, peasant and lord, saint and sinner. And so we are challenged by our faith in Jesus Christ to respond to those who stand at the threshold of our homes and of our lives and who seek our mercy and love. Our Christian faith calls upon us to open the doors of our homes and of our lives and welcome them just as Mary and Joseph did in the stable of Bethlehem.

Come and make haste to enter, said the Virgin to the magi, and behold Him who is invisible is now visibly manifest and has become a child. They came eagerly and worshipped Him, bringing gifts in fulfillment of the divine prophecy. (Aposticha, Prefeast of the Nativity)

The Lord Jesus was with us on the earth in human form for only 33 years, before returning to his heavenly Father. And now how is his presence tangible to us? In St. Matthew's gospel Jesus tells us that when we encounter the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, those in prison – we encounter the Lord in these people. (Cf. Mt. 25:31-40)

We do not have to look far to find the Lord Jesus. He is in those around us. When they come to the doors of our lives, we are given the choice to either open our doors of mercy and receive them, or to keep them closed and shuttered, saying there is no room in our inn, just as Mary and Joseph discovered in Bethlehem. (Cf. Lk. 2:7)

This Christmas season, in the spirit of the Holy Jubilee Year of Mercy, let us reach out to the strangers and to those in need, be they from Ukraine or from Syria, be they in prisons or homeless on the streets, be they sick or jobless, be they alone and near death. Let us show by our good deeds and by our love that we share with them the mercy of our Heavenly Father who shares with us his love and goodness. And let us repeat the praise of the angels as they sang at

the birth of Christ: *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.* (Lk. 2:14)

The Blessing of the Lord be upon you!

- +Lawrence Huculak, OSBM, Metropolitan Archbishop of Winnipeg
- +David Motiuk, Eparchial Bishop of Edmonton
- +Stephen Chmilar, Eparchial Bishop of Toronto
- +Ken Nowakowski, Eparchial Bishop of New Westminster
- +Bryan Bayda, CSsR, Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon
- +Michael Wiwchar, CSsR, Eparch Emeritus of Saskatoon
- +Severian Yakymyshyn, OSBM, Eparch Emeritus of New Westminster