Archpastoral Epistle of His Grace, Bishop ALEXIS for the 2020 celebration of the Great Feast of Nativity in the flesh of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ

Prot. No. 1

To the Honorable Clergy, Venerable Monastics, and Pious Faithful of the Sacred and God-protected Diocese of Sitka and Alaska:

Dear Christ-loving flock, beloved of our Lord,

**Christ is Born! Glorify Him!**

Χριστός χάριστα! Αγαλλιάζετε του!  

Kristusaaq Yuurtuq! Nanrarciu!

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy."¹

And when the spiritual children of our venerable Father Herman of Alaska go starring from home to home, they like the magi rejoice exceedingly with great joy in the light of Christ that knows no evening. The star over Bethlehem that encouraged the hearts of the magi continues to encourage us by filling our hearts with the quiet joy of Emmanuel, God is with us. Saint Ephraim the Syrian teaches that although the sun has brighter visible light than that star, the star over Bethlehem had incomparably greater spiritual light and power, for it revealed to us that the young child born of Most Pure Virgin on earth is the pre-eternal Son of the unoriginate Father in heaven.

For us the faithful, there is no pandemic that can prevent that holy star from also rising in our hearts,² just as there is no situation that can “separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”³ The only restrictions that can keep us from spiritually celebrating our Savior’s incarnation in the flesh are those of our sins, our selfishness, and our stubborn will. If we try to bring to our Lord just some of the humility that He demonstrated in being placed in a manager, if we try to bring to our Lord just some of the acceptance that He demonstrated

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¹ Matthew 2:10.  
² 2 Peter 1:19.  
³ Romans 8:39
when there was no room in the inn, our offering these gifts will enable us to spiritually hear what the Shepherd’s heard and to spiritually see what the Magi saw. And even if we are unable to celebrate now as we could in years past, I ask that you please try to not become discouraged. Instead, patiently accept whatever providence brings your way, “little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

No matter what limits this pandemic places on us during the feast, we can always celebrate our Lord’s incarnation by embracing the holy virtues of the Gospel and letting them take flesh in our every thought, word, and deed. Christ-like humility, peace, and love in the human soul shine like a bright star in this darkened world. When we are humble, peaceful, and loving, we become like a holy star “to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.”

Over a thousand years before our venerable father, Saint Herman, went to be a hermit on Spruce island, the hermit bishop, Saint Isaac the Syrian is said to have written the following words of counsel on Christmas eve:

This Christmas night, Christ bestowed peace on the whole world, so let no one threaten another. This is the night of the most-gentle One, so let no one be cruel. This is the night of the humble One, so let no one be proud. Today is a day of joy, so let us not seek revenge. Today is a day of good will, so let us not be mean. Today is a day of peace, so let us not be conquered by anger. Today He who is rich became poor for our sakes, so let us invite those in need to our table. Today we receive such a Gift without asking for it, so let us give alms to those who ask for our help. This present day opens wide heaven’s gates to our prayers, so let us open our door to those who ask our forgiveness.

Beloved, with peaceful hearts, let us celebrate Christ’s Nativity by being kind to everyone with whom we come in contact. Let us look upon the greatness of Christ’s humility, meekness, and love in the way He chose to be born for us and to be born for them. It is only right that we be humble, meek, and loving in our brothers’ presence and in our sisters’ presence. Our Lord has given us everything. Of us, He only asks, “My son, [my daughter], give me thine heart.” May we all give Him our hearts this Christmas.

In closing, I also would also like to thank you for the gift and blessing of being able to be your shepherd at this time. I pray that God richly bless your homes on the sacred feast of our Lord’s Nativity in the flesh. And I also humbly ask that you also remember me in your precious prayers.

With fatherly love in our Christ, born as a little child for our salvation,

++ALEXIS++ Bishop of Bethesda

Logan Temple of the Diocese of Sitka and Alaska.

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