

## The Nativity Encyclical of the Serbian Orthodox Church 2024



The Serbian Orthodox Church  
to her spiritual children at Christmas, 2024

### **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!***

Our dear spiritual children,

Today, gathered at the Divine Liturgy, we celebrate the Birth of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ, the One who "for us and our salvation came down from heaven, incarnated of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became a man." With spiritual joy we are celebrating an Event that is so great that it has divided the history of the human race into two parts! Saint Maximus the Confessor calls this Event the goal of God's creative act, - The mystery of Christ, the union of God and creation in the Person of the Son of God Who became man - which we can understand only if we keep in mind that the created world cannot exist eternally without unity with God the Creator. Why? Foremost, because, according to Saint Athanasius the Great, the nature of creation is that at some point it did not exist, that is, that it is mortal. For created nature to transcend death and exist eternally, it must be in communion with the very Source of life, with the Triune God, uniquely by nature Eternal and Uncreated.

We all were brought into this union, once and for all twenty centuries ago, when by the grace of God the Father and with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, the Only Begotten Son of God descended into human history, into the "valley of tears," and in an act of extreme humility became human, born as a Child in a small Bethlehem cave. He bowed the heavens to the earth and gave us unbreakable communion with God. The beginningless, immortal, and perfect God humbles Himself and identifies with us, His creation, and in taking on what is incomparably less than what He is, He gives to us that which is incomparably higher and more perfect than us. The love of God, which is above the mind's comprehension, reflecting on man's eternal selection, by the grace of the Holy Trinity wanted the created world to be healed and saved in the God-Man Christ. Oh, the depth of wealth and wisdom of God! Eternity embraced the transient; the uncreated became inseparably united with the created, and immortality healed mortality. In other words, God became man for man to become divine, to become a God-Man by grace.

Let each of us, brothers and sisters, warm our hearts today with the flame that warmed the newborn Divine Infant, and make his own home, through the joy of family gathering, the cave of Bethlehem! At the same time we, who celebrate in peace, must not forget those who suffer in these days of joy, who spend their time exiled from their homes, thus repeating the fate of the Divine Christ Child, Who already in earliest childhood was an exile, Who together with His Most Holy and Most Pure Mother and righteous Joseph the Betrothed had to flee to Egypt before the tyrant Herod.

Even today, the same Divine Child, not only metaphorically but actually, being the bearer of complete human nature, shares the exile, sorrow, and suffering of all distressed people in the world. We see how, in many parts of the world, mothers and fathers, with children in their arms, run away from contemporary Herods

experiencing, even in the 21st century, the fate of the children of Bethlehem from the time of the Nativity of Christ. In the regions where Christ was born, we now hear "lamentation, weeping, and great mourning" (Matthew 2:18). There, as also in the neighboring countries of Syria and Lebanon, the number of human victims of the unrest is multiplying, while the number of killed children, which is the most terrible, many times exceeded the number of children who suffered at the hands of Herod. With prayerful cries to God to grant peace to the whole world, we are also looking at the terrible fratricidal war between Ukraine and Russia, brothers in one faith, which, unfortunately for all of us, is already entering its fourth year.

We cry out in prayer to God that the innocent ones who also perished in the fall of the building awning at the Novi Sad railway station be embraced in His loving arms. We look into our hearts, and we look at each other, praying to the Lord to give us the strength to overcome this and other mentioned and unmentioned tragic events in the country and the world, constantly drawing a cautionary lesson that we must be brothers to each other, be human, Christ like, sincere, fundamentally sound and good.

We feel the paternal need to send our voice this Christmas first of all to our spiritual children in Kosovo and Metohija, and also to all whom this appeal of the Church of Saint Sava reaches. The Serbian nation in its ago-old homeland has been for the past quarter-century the most threatened and unprotected people in Europe. Exposed to pressure, arrests, violent hijacking of municipal self-governments, shutting down of local health services, land grabbing and other private property theft, and demolition of cemeteries and cultural monuments, Serbian people are continuously intimidated and persecuted. Our brothers and sisters in Kosovo and Metohija, we look upon you with love, respect, and gratitude. We admire your faith, heroism, patience, and suffering. As we believe the words of the Lord, yes, "blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." In the same way, we believe that the day will dawn when both for you and all our people the Sun of justice, Christ our God, will shine forth, and that you will be satisfied with His justice.

The greatest blessing of the year that is beginning brings us the celebration of the 850th anniversary of the birth of the most important Person in our nation's history —Saint Sava. On this occasion, deeply concerned about the current events in our nation, we want to point out two facts from his life, praying that they will be a sign of the lesson that springs from them for the year ahead of us.

First, with his departure to Mount Athos, young Rastko, like the young man from the Gospel story who asked the Christ the most radical question: *Good teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?* confirmed the fact that youth is hungry and thirsty for eternity, that is, for fullness, truth, justice, goodness, love, beauty, and meaning in general. However, unlike the young man mentioned in the Gospel story, Saint Sava voluntarily and joyfully followed Christ. In his example and that of many young people throughout history, we see that it is not enough only to be hungry and thirsty for the meaning of life. Transformation is needed, coming out of oneself, living in virtue, and living according to the Gospel of Christ and His Word.

An ascetic struggle of love for God is needed, but also of love for each person as one's eternal brother. And that love is listening, understanding, embracing, and accepting the other as a neighbor in forgiveness, compassion, mercy, sacrifice, in every Christ-like virtue. They are all works of love that Saint Sava, our Enlightener and Teacher forever, following Christ, himself did and manifested, transformed and sanctified by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Precisely because he was transfigured and enlightened by God, as a saint of God, he became a role model and example for everyone, even to his own father. In light of his example, we are called to listen carefully to the youth, respect and protect them, and strengthen them in all that is good and virtuous.

At the same time, in addition to caring for young people with words and deeds of love, and with our whole lives, it is our duty to testify that the fullness they are looking for is found in Christ the Lord, that Christ is the meaning of everything, and that yes, if Christ is the first place, everything will then fall into place.

Another instructive fact for the year before us is the reconciliation of the quarreling brothers that Saint Sava executed over the relics of their father, Saint Simeon the Myrrh-gusher, in the year 1207 in Studenica monastery. His prayer and his effort by themselves were not enough, though the reconciliation would not have happened without them. It was also necessary for both brothers to extend a hand to each other, to embrace and forgive each other. It was the only real evangelical way to achieve peace among the brothers, the state, and the people. Inspired by the Gospel of Christ, Saint Sava has in this way bequeathed to us the model for the Church's acts of reconciliation.

The Church does not judge, divide, or differentiate between brothers; rather, it reminds us that we all need each other and that everything calls for peace and a community of love. Let's not forget that the multitude

of accidents, conflicts, and wars begin with the dehumanization of the neighbor by suppressing the humanity of another human being. That is why it is crucial that all of us, as many as there are, stop using a lexicon in which the other is first called a foreigner, then an opponent, then an enemy, and, at the very end, an inhuman being. Let's remember the fatal consequences of such actions in the history of the human race which, unfortunately, are numerous! Let's remember our past and the divisions that still exist today so we can recover! Let us be worthy heirs of Saint Sava, the peacemaker, and his brothers, not the heirs of Cain, the first fratricide, who directed the most terrible words to the Lord God Himself: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9).

Therefore, brothers and sisters, wherever we live, let us bridge the mutual gaps, listen to each other, and respect each other's views and opinions, especially when they are different from ours! Let's give up aggression and violence as solutions to problems and disagreements! We build bridges of understanding, love, and peace at any cost, although we know very well that the builders of bridges are often stoned from both sides.

In the Joy of Christmas, the only truly new thing under the Sun, when God was forever reconciled with man, let us embrace Christ and each other, singing the Christmas hymn:

"Christ is born, glorify Him!  
Here is Christ come from heaven - go out to meet him!"

Our dear spiritual children, Orthodox Christians, children of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the homeland and diaspora, we, your spiritual shepherds, pray that the Christ-child of God will take up abode in everyone's heart and that, having peace with Him, we reconcile and "pray for peace" among ourselves, so that, in peace and love, together with the angels, with one mouth and one heart, they rejoice and sing:

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will among men!"

**PEACE FROM GOD - CHRIST IS BORN!**

Given at the Serbian Patriarchate in Belgrade on Christmas 2024.

Your intercessors before the cradle of the divine Christ-Child:

Archbishop of Pec, Metropolitan of Belgrade-Karlovci, and Serbian Patriarch PORFIRIJE  
Archbishop of Sarajevo and Metropolitan of Dabro-Bosna CHRYSOSTOM  
Archbishop of Cetinje and Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Coastlands JOANIKIJE  
Archbishop of Sirmija and Metropolitan of Srem VASILIJE  
Archbishop and Metropolitan of Banja Luka JEFREM  
Archbishop and Metropolitan of Budim LUKIJAN  
Archbishop of Vrsac and Metropolitan of Banat NIKANOR  
Archbishop of New Gracanica and Chicago and Metropolitan of Midwestern America LONGIN  
Archbishop of Toronto and Metropolitan of Canada MITROPHAN  
Archbishop of Novi Sad and Metropolitan of Backa IRINEJ  
Archbishop of Stockholm and Metropolitan of Scandinavia DOSITEJ  
Archbishop and Metropolitan of Zicha JUSTIN  
Archbishop and Metropolitan of Vranje PAHOMIJE  
Archbishop of Kragujevac and Metropolitan of Sumadija JOVAN  
Archbishop of Pozarevac and Metropolitan of Branicevo IGNATIJE  
Archbishop and Metropolitan of Zvornik-Tuzla FOTIJE  
Archbishop and Metropolitan of Mileseva ATANASIJE  
Archbishop of Düsseldorf-Berlin and Metropolitan of Germany GRIGORIJE  
Archbishop and Metropolitan of Ras and Prizren TEODOSIJE  
Archbishop and Metropolitan of Krusevac DAVID  
Archbishop of Romul-Zajecar and Metropolitan of Timok ILARION

Archbishop and Metropolitan of Nis ARSENIJE  
Archbishop of Sydney-Wellington and Metropolitan of Australia-New Zealand SILUAN  
Archbishop Zadar-Sibenik and Metropolitan of Dalmatia NIKODIM  
Archbishop of Mostar-Trebinje and Metropolitan of Zahum-Herzegovina and Ston-Coastland DIMITRIJE  
Archbishop of Los Angeles and Western America MAXIM  
Archbishop of Gornji Karlovac GERASIM  
Bishop of Washington-New York and Eastern America IRINEJ  
Bishop of Pakrac and Slavonia JOVAN  
Bishop of Switzerland ANDREJ  
Bishop of Bihac-Petrovac SERGIJE  
Bishop of Buenos Aires and South-Central America KIRILO  
Bishop of Osek-Polje and Baranja HERUVIM  
Bishop of Valjevo ISIHUJE  
Bishop of Budimlje and Niksic METODIJE  
Bishop of Sabac JEROTEJ  
Bishop of Paris and Western Europe JUSTIN  
Bishop of London and Great Britain-Ireland NEKTARIJE

Retired Bishop of Zvornik-Tuzla VASILIJE  
Retired Bishop of Canada GEORGIJE  
Retired Bishop of Central Europe KONSTANTIN  
Retired Bishop of Slavonija SAVA  
Retired Bishop of Mileseva FILARET  
Retired Bishop of Nis JOVAN

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 Lipljane DOSITEJ  
Vicar Bishop of Toplica PETAR  
Vicar Bishop of Jenopolje NIKON  
Vicar Bishop of Moravica TIHON  
Vicar Bishop of Dioklia PAJSIJE  
Vicar Bishop of Kostajnica SERAFIM

*[Path of Orthodoxy Translation]*