

## NATIVITY EPISTLE TO THE GOD-LOVING FLOCK OF THE TRENTON DIOCESE

25 December 2017 / 7 January 2018

*“And the angel said unto them (the shepherds)... For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” (Lk 2:10-12)*

And so yet once more, by God’s volition, we have been vouchsafed to hear these words concerning the wondrous event, the incarnation of the Son of God. The King of Glory, the Creator of heaven and earth became the Son of Man. The long-awaited and promised Messiah Saviour is born, as it was foretold, in Bethlehem of Judea, in the city of David, among His chosen people. It would seem that this grandiose and joyous event would be celebrated with great enthusiasm by all the people of Israel in the same way as the royal courts and citizens of a nation celebrate when they learn that unto their king a son and heir has been born.

But in this case, according to the will of God, it turned out on the contrary: besides the royal veneration of the wise men before the Infant King, only a small group of people were vouchsafed worthy to hear the marvelous and joyous tidings of the birth of the Infant Christ. And these tidings were not accompanied by loud sounds of cymbals, harps, horns or other musical instruments; nor by the songs and hymns of the Israelites, but on the contrary, in the silence of the night the heavens opened and mankind heard for the first time the singing of a MULTITUDE of Angels, offering up praise to the King and God: *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Lk 2:14)*. And who are these fortunate ones who were vouchsafed to hear this angelic singing?

The Holy Fathers of the Church write that it was namely the simple-hearted and pious youths – the shepherds who were vouchsafed worthy; who kept vigilant during their nocturnal watch. What a small audience of those born on earth heard the heavenly tidings that for the sake of our salvation the Heavenly King had descended from the heavens! According to the example of those keeping nocturnal vigil, the Church exhorts us to be spiritually vigilant: *“Behold the Bridegroom cometh at midnight and blessed is the servant whom He shall find watching”*.

What can we extract from all of this? The Fathers of the Church foretell that at the Second Coming of Christ there will hardly be any faith on earth. Possibly there will only be a “handful” of believers who have not sold their souls, have not accepted the

stamp for the sake of earthly well-being and have not worshipped the anti-Christ. Today we observe with sorrow how this weakening of the faith is already occurring. Our souls are burdened with sorrow when we see around us not unification in the Truth, but splintering. But take courage, Brothers and Sisters: The Lord speaks specifically concerning this: *“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division.” (Lk 12:51).*

But the Power of God and *“all of His works”* is not measured in any numbers. Just as it was in Bethlehem at the Nativity of the Messiah Christ, so will it be also at His Second Coming. *“Fear not, small flock,”* says the Lord, *“for your Father was well-pleased to give you the Kingdom” (Lk 12:32).* These comforting words should gladden us and give each of us the courage to continue with humility to follow our Lord. *“Maranatha, come quickly Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” (Rev.22:20,21).*

I greet all my fellow bishops, clergy of the Trenton diocese and Faithful sons and daughters of the Church Abroad on the joyous feast of the Nativity of Christ.

*+Bishop Stefan of Trenton and North America*