



## **Christmas Epistle of His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion of Eastern America and New York, First Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad**

Most Reverend fellow archpastors, most honorable fathers—concelebrants, reverent diaconate in Christ, beloved in the Lord monastics, laboring in our monasteries; brothers and sisters, faithful children of the Russian Church Abroad, spread as God's grains of wheat across the face of the entire earth!

From the depth of my heart, filled with joy, I greet all of you with the Nativity of the God of peace and love, who became a live Human Being, one of us! Contemplating the manger of Christ, I offer the gift of fervent prayer for the establishment of a deep and inalienable peace in the hearts of all men, all peoples, in my heart and in your hearts—that compunctious peace which was brought to the city of Bethlehem by that great chorus of angels, which proclaimed: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Today the Holy Church represents Bethlehem in each of Her temples. She desires that each heart be a pure manger for God... What is necessary for this? It is necessary for each of us to become a child. From His manger the Lord proclaims: look at Me, the Creator of the world, I have become a child for your sake. If you do not change and do not become like children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 18:3); you will not be capable of and worthy of receiving Me into your hearts.

Having been cleansed in the fount of Holy Baptism, the Holy Great Prince Vladimir, the enlightener of Rus', who died exactly 1000 years ago, became such a child. In the upcoming 2015 New Year this momentous date will be widely celebrated by our beloved and great Mother – the Russian Orthodox Church. Let us note that the famous historian of Russian Church history and architecture, Yevgeny Golubinsky wrote in the early twentieth century about St. Vladimir, that his very name contains the concept of possessing peace, amity, harmony. Sadly, at this time there is no such concord and peace in our common font, the kind our enlightener Vladimir (whom we call “our beautiful Sun”) possessed...

Everyone longs for peace and demands peace for the entire world. Where can that peace be found? It is in the preservation and cultivation of our common Orthodox Christian roots. In 1988, my predecessor, Metropolitan Laurus of blessed memory (who at the time was the Archbishop of Syracuse and Holy Trinity Monastery) wrote: “What will befall our nation in the future is fully known only by the Lord our God. Yet that which constituted its strength in the past—only that can make us strong now and at all times. Therefore, let us firmly enshrine and staunchly protect the testament of our fathers from whom we inherited the Orthodox faith as the true power, greater than that which can be found in this world.”

Let us humbly beseech the God Child that He grant our people spiritual strength for the overcoming of fraternal strife, that through the prayers of the right-believing, equal to the apostles Great Prince Vladimir peace be restored in the God-preserved lands of Rus', having been cleansed through repentant tears as through a second baptism. May we uphold the way of St. Vladimir which alone can save us and our historic native land, and with it the entire world. And then the promise of the luminary John (Maximovitch), the great archpastor of the Russian diaspora, will come to pass: “Blessed are you, the land



of Russia, which is being purified by the fire of suffering! You passed through the waters of baptism, and now through the fire of suffering, and will enter into your rest” (from his Homily on the 950th Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus’, 1938).

Once again I greet all the beloved children of the Russian Church Abroad with the joyous and world-saving Feast of the Nativity of Christ! Through this greeting, I would like to underline the spiritual loftiness of this good and luminous celebration. May the Son of God enlighten our hearts with the quiet light of the star of Bethlehem. To Him is due glory and thanksgiving unto the ages of ages. Amen!

With love in Christ Who is born,

†Hilarion,  
Metropolitan of New York & Eastern America,  
First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia

Nativity of Christ  
2014 / 2015