



## **Nativity Peace** (by *St. John Maximovitch—Shanghai 1935*)

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men, sang once the angels of God in heaven.*

Almost 2000 years have passed since then, and on earth there continue to be discords, wars, robberies, quarrels, and licentious deeds. And to many it seems as if the angelic hymn had never resounded in heaven, but was invented by men who inserted their own hopes into it; for there is no peace on earth, there is no good will in men, and, consequently, there is likewise no glory of God, there are no angels, there is no God.

But those who think thus are cruelly mistaken, as well in their conclusions as in their understanding of that which the angels glorified. For although the angels, singing a hymn of praise, used words which are often heard on earth, they did not speak of anything earthly. Men desire glory and peace here, on earth—they desire every good for themselves here, in this earthly life. But it was not of earthly glory and not of ordinary peace that the angels sang.

There is not and there will never be on earth either eternal glory or lasting peace. Glorious alone is the Blessed and Only Mighty King of those who reign and Lord of those who rule: His Kingdom is an eternal Kingdom and His dominion is unto ages and ages. Desiring to make other beings also participants of His glory and blessedness, the Lord created angels and men, that they in union with God might have true joy and blessedness. But when one of the first angels wished to become equal to God and to have glory and power identical to His, evil entered the world, for evil is everything opposed to God. He who fell away from God became His eternal adversary—satan—for evil and good are incompatible. Those who followed him were deprived of glory and blessedness and became enemies of God.

From that time until now the implacable battle of the devil with God, of falsehood with Truth, of evil with Good, continues. Man, created by God, deceived by the devil, went at first with him, but he could not find life and peace without God. All mankind was tormented, but it still went the way of evil and could not break the chains of sin, if the Son of God Himself had not come to earth to those who had fallen away from Him. Having put on our nature, He united in Himself God and man and thus *the bar of enmity was thrown down*. The Lord by His Coming drew near to Himself men who had gone away from God; He illumined by His light their sinful darkness, and by His love He melted their frozen hearts.

Christ calls all to Himself, but not all respond to His voice. Whoever opens his heart to Him becomes His temple. The Lord comes to him and dwells in him. The heart then is filled with peace, and the soul with inexpressible blessedness and love; the will is strengthened in goodness, and the mouth glorifies God in heaven. And it is this interior peace of man that the angels announced to the shepherds of Bethlehem, the peace of a man who has made peace with God and become His dwelling. Nothing is fearful to such a man; there is no power capable of overcoming him; there is no storm that can shake him; for with him is He Who is more powerful than anything.

The battle between good and evil continues yet longer; it continues with yet greater force than before the Coming of Christ. There is no agreement between Christ and Belial, no communion between light and darkness. The light has been divided between truth and falsehood, and the devil through the sons of darkness wishes to conquer those who have become sons of light. And the longer the battle continues, the fiercer it is.

Sensing the approach of the eternal Kingdom of God, the devil bends all his efforts to continue his reign. But the storm which he has raised cannot sink the Ship of Christ. Let the waves roar: they do not frighten those who hope in Him Who walked on the waves. The power of God strengthens ascetics and martyrs for the name of Christ. During ascetic labors painful for the body, and even the most terrible tortures, they sense a profound peace in their hearts: the body is tormented, but the soul rejoices; evil is done them, but they render good in return, and to hatred reply with love. Eternal blessedness in the Mansions of God awaits them; there together with the angels they will eternally glorify God, themselves becoming participants of that Glory.

Let us not fear, brethren, the battle with evil! Let us uproot it from our hearts and souls, let us drive out of them ill-will and hatred, let us plant in them love toward God and neighbors. Let us not fear labors for the sake of God and toil for the sake of our neighbors! Let us not be shaken in heart, seeing how the godless tear to pieces those faithful to Christ! Let us turn our gaze to much-suffering Russia, waging a battle for Truth, and let us cry out: *Re*

send you our greetings of the Nativity, our suffering brethren! Let us pray to Christ being born, for our brethren: Strengthen O Lord, those who suffer from the enslavers of Holy Russia, those who are deprived of the possibility of visiting Thy Temple, those whom they wish to compel to bow down to the devil! Confirm in the Orthodox Faith those also of our brothers who are being deceived into falling away from it for the sake of earthly gain! Preserve us all from the tempter and gather into one Thy flock, who with a single peace-making and loving heart and with one mouth sing: Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards men. I invoke the blessing of God on you all and on all whom this epistle reaches, and I greet you on the Nativity of Christ!

*(Note: Archbishop John wrote this in 1935 when the Communist government was persecuting Christians in Russia)*