

The Christmas Declaration of Russian Christian-peacemakers

*«Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among
those with whom he is pleased!»*

(Luke 2:14)

*«The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light
shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they
are glad when they divide the spoil.*

*For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every
garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us
a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be
upon[d] his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful
Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the
increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on
the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to
uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth
and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this».*

(Isaiah 9:2-3, 5-7)

It's Christmas Eve. The streets are brightly lit with decorations; we are preparing for the holiday, buying gifts, drinking hot coffee in our favorite coffee-shops, making plans. It's our ordinary life. We are joking about another hard year coming to an end. Yet in our neighboring country, in Ukraine, the war waged by our government is going on: its people are left without electricity, heating, a large number – without families. They also might have made plans and believed in a miracle. But our country brought war to their homes, and now being able to charge a phone and just get warm is already a holiday for them.

It's impossible to continue being silent. We feel unendurable pain knowing that during these festive days one can hear sirens in Ukraine instead of Christmas carols and see deadly missiles explode instead of fireworks. While we are celebrating here, our brothers and sisters there are perishing and suffering because of our compatriots.

We, Russian Christians of different confessions – lay people, pastors, preachers and priests – are calling on all Christians of Russia: Orthodox, Protestants, Roman Catholics; priests, church leadership; congregations, organization, formal and informal Christian groups with the following declarations:

- We believe that Christ urges us to love everyone. We believe that these commandments – *«You shall not murder» (Ex. 20:13), do not resist evil by evil means (Mathew*

5:39), «*Love your enemies*» (Mathew 5:44) — cannot be ignored and should be observed both on an individual level and in society as a whole.

- We believe that the military aggression of Russia against Ukraine is a violation of God's holy commandments, and its moral justification contradicts Christian teaching since it's poisoned by the desire to dominate at the expense of the other to overcome despair and helplessness. We are convinced that participation in this war on the side of the aggressor is unacceptable for any Christians.
- We believe that imagined or real crimes of other states cannot justify the crimes of our own state. We disagree with the notion that patriotism means blind loyalty and love to the state and its ruler. Instead, we maintain that one of the highest forms of patriotism is the spread of the gospel among your people and that those who aspire to Grace should observe the Lord's Commandments as the New Testament says, «*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*» (Matthew 6:33).
- With great grief we admit that the majority of the Christian congregations in Russia do not consider it necessary or important to lift their voice up for the innocent and to condemn blatant lawlessness. We are terrified by the fact that many church officials and theologians in an attempt to vindicate this invasion are distorting the truth of the Holy Scriptures and reject the commandments from the Sermon on the Mount as something irrelevant; that they interpret Christ's words about love (John 15:13) as a justification for this war; that they disseminate Old Testament ethics («An eye for an eye»; a «tooth for a tooth») forgetting that the Messiah has come, and we are living in the era of the New Testament.
- We know that God urges us to love our «neighbor» and we are certain that the «neighbor» for us Russian Christians is the suffering people of Ukraine whom God calls us to serve in word and in deed: by our prayers, by our solidarity, and by our intervention.

We are calling on all Christians of Russia willing to become peacemakers to undertake the following commitments which we take upon ourselves:

1. **Not to ignore.** To accept the gravity of the situation and responsibly evaluate the current affairs not from the perspective of the worldly values but from the point of view of Christian teaching.
2. **To pray.** To ask our merciful Lord to bring our fellow Russians, our state, and our church leadership to repentance.
3. **To stand up against.** Taking into consideration all the risks involved, we urge you to condemn this evil and call for the immediate withdrawal of Russia's troops from Ukraine and for the end to this war.
4. **To non-violently resist mobilization.** To persuade your relatives and friends not to participate in this war in any way; to help those who are avoiding the draft.

5. **To get involved in humanitarian aid.** To help Ukrainian refugees wherever they are. To help all victims of this war by whatever means available to you.

We are aware how frightening it is to protest this war in Russia. The state and society can declare you a traitor, a “foreign agent”; they can fine you; they can arrest and jail you. We are also aware that in Russia, which claims to be a Christian country, this call for peace is punished by fines and time in jail. But we, as Christians, urge you to do it for the sake of our loving Savior, Jesus Christ, and for the love of your neighbor – the people of Ukraine.

Today the Lord is come – the light has shone in the darkness, and the darkness can not consume Him. We believe that Christ’s light will prevail over the darkness in our state which sows discord, death and devastation in Ukraine and here, in Russia. We believe that Christ’s light will banish hatred and evil from people’s hearts and Love will ascend.

«Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away”».

(Revelation 21:1-4)