

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2024



BISHOP EDUARD KHEGAY

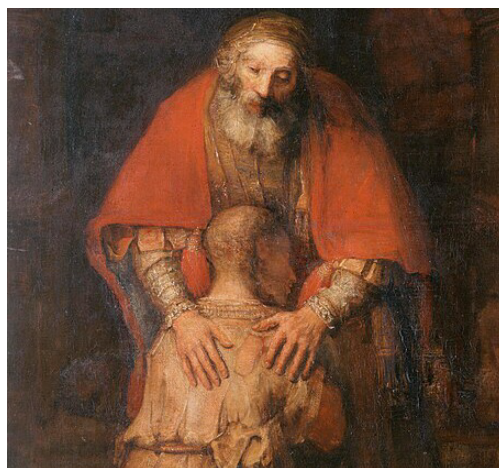
December 18, 2023

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year 2024!

The year 2023 was full of events in the life of our church. I thank God for our ministers and churches who are actively serving the world, meeting at the district and conference levels, strengthening families, and investing in the younger generation. In these challenging times, it is important to continue to be the light and salt of the world, to strengthen the unity of the church, and to encourage one another in our faith.

The events in the world are making us more and more sad. The evil one wants to normalize sin and get us used to murder, wars, lies and selfishness. Many people find a surrogate meaning of life in finding the guilty and demonizing him or her instead of walking the path of Christian perfection themselves. All along many relationships break down, and more and more people live alone, embittered against others. During this season of Christmas and the New Year, I want to remind us all of forgiveness and reconciliation.



A fragment of Rembrandt's painting "Return of the Prodigal Son", State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul writes:

*...be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God
in Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)*

The nature of God is to be a forgiving God. He wants that for you and for me. He sent John the Baptist so that the people would repent of their sins and be forgiven by God. Jesus came into the world to give us salvation and forgiveness.

May a father forgive his son and a daughter forgive her mother. May brother and sister reconcile and celebrate Christmas at the same table. May a husband forgive his wife and both continue to learn to live in love and raise their children. May a Ukrainian and a Russian start talking to each other again, and a Jew and an Arab sit down to dinner at the same table. And let Jesus Christ, Emmanuel - God with us - be invisibly present at every table (Gospel of Matthew 1:23).

It is very important to forgive others and to receive God's forgiveness yourself. Many people live with guilt and do not believe that God can forgive them. The consequence is a life of depression. But the Bible gives us hope and faith in a forgiving God. The prophet Micah encourages us:

*Who is a God like You, who pardons wrongdoing and passes over a rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.
He will again take pity on us; He will trample on our wrongdoings. (Book of Micah 7:18-19)*

Dear brothers and sisters, I wish us all to learn to forgive and accept forgiveness. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2024 to you!

Love in Christ,
Bishop Eduard Khegay

