

CHRISTMAS EVE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Monday, December 25, 2018/ January 7, 2019, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Virgin, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Caesar Octavian Augustus, at the place where this event actually happened, in Bethlehem.

1. On Christmas Eve

According to the order of the Church of Jerusalem, the feast began on Christmas Eve, on Sunday 24th December 2018/ 6th January 2019.

At 11:15 a.m. of this day, according to the program of the Status Quo, the Entourage of the Orthodox Hagiotaphite Fathers under H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos departed from the Patriarchate towards Jaffa Gate, and from there to the Holy Monastery of Prophet Elias. After a small stopover there, the Patriarchal Entourage headed towards Bethlehem through the gate of Rachel's tomb, while Israeli horsemen marched ahead of the procession.

Upon arrival at Bethlehem Square, H.H.B. and His Entourage were welcomed by the Patriarchal Representative in Bethlehem, Most Reverend Archbishop Theophylactos of Jordan, many Priests dressed in their liturgical vestments and a large crowd of faithful, under the chanting of the troparia of the Nativity in Greek by Mr. Constantinos Spyropoulos and the Choir "Tropos", who came from Greece escorted by the Exarch of Athens Archimandrite Damianos, and in Arabic by Mr. Lawrence Samour. The Patriarchal Entourage entered the Basilica of the Nativity and went to the Cave for veneration through the wood carved ikonostasion and St. Nikolaos' chapel.

Then the Patriarchal Entourage exited the Cave from its north

gate and marching through the chapel which is being used by the Armenians turned left towards the area before the ikonostasion.

Vespers was held at this place, according to the typicon order and the Status Quo, with the incense procedure and the blessing of bread.

After Dismissal, around 3:30 p.m., there was a meal offered by the Patriarchal Representative Archbishop Theophylactos of Jordan, and in the evening there was the welcoming reception of the representative of His Excellency the President of the Palestinian State Mr. Mahmoud Abbas Abu-Mazen, and the representative of the King of Jordan His Majesty Abdullah Ibn Hussein, by His Beatitude, who addressed all present as follows;

“His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas “Abu Mazen”, President of the State of Palestine Represented by H.E. Dr. Rami Al-Hamdallah, Palestinian prime minister

His Excellency Samir Mbaidien, Jordanian Minister of Interior representative of His Majesty King Abdullah bin Al-Husseini.

Dear brothers and sisters,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we have the honour to celebrate the birth of our Lord Christ, in your presence, in the same city, the city of peace, where Jesus was born nearly two thousand years ago. This great event is a witness to the sanctity of this land.

The birth of Christ is not like any other birth, it is an eternal birth. It is the birth of love and peace, and the beginning of the Charter of Reconciliation between Heaven and Earth. To celebrate the birth of Christ is to emphasize the value of humanity, because there is no real worship of the Creator, if we don't respect the Creature, and no sincere

faith if we do not respect life.

Honourable present,

With the birth of Christ, humanity began a new journey embodied in happiness, love and respect between all of humanity. With that God set an example and showed us how he loved the world so that everyone loves his or her world and society, as God honoured the person over the rest of the creatures to declare the elevation of humans and the elevation of the humanitarian message.

In the Anthem of the Angels: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace" (Luke 2:14). The peace praised by the angels is not just a social peace, but it is also the embodiment of Christ and His presence. Thus, the angels celebrated the peace that came with the birth of Christ. Christ, by His incarnation, gave humanity peace with God and amongst the people and with oneself. What happened to Adam in Paradise when he sinned is that he and his descendants lost peace with God. When Cain killed his brother Abel, humanity lost peace amongst the people, this peace returned to humanity by the birth of our Lord Christ.

Honourable present,

Every year as we celebrate the Birth of Christ, people are attracted to the spirit of happiness, children are waiting for the holiday gifts and the world is full of joy, despite the hardships we face caused by instability. This feast comes to embody the happiness, joy and pleasure that the Palestinian people deserve and have been striving to attain to live in peace, dignity, stability, independence and happiness like the rest of the peoples of the world. Christmas is also a national holiday that adds a special joy to its religious holiness. A national holiday the joy of which is lived together by Muslims and Christians. This is because, the mutual flourishing of Muslims and Christians in this Holy Land has been a historical

fact that has been experienced by citizens of our various lands ever since the treaty between the Caliph Omar bin Al-Khattab and our predecessor Patriarch Sophronius and until our present day.

We have had a difficult year, with many challenges, many of which are the result of aspirations for political gains by politicians attempting to strengthen their political positions at the expense of our churches, in addition to attempts to undermine our churches and our inherent Christian presence in this holy land to which the birth of Christ is witness to our roots within. H.E. President Abbas and His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al-Hussein, the custodian of the Christian and Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem, stood by us and we all succeeded in confronting the attempts to undermine our rights with the blessing of our Lord Christ and our unity on the basis of truth and justice.

Your Excellency the Prime Minister,

We take the opportunity of Christmas to wish everyone a blessed and prosperous year, full of good and happiness and crowned with peace, tranquillity, stability and security.

We ask our Lord Christ, to bless everyone with a rich flood of grace, to bless everyone with his heavenly blessings and to cause everyone to enjoy health, well-being and to heal the sick, to comfort the needy, and to protect everyone from all harm.

We also ask our Saviour, Jesus Christ, to provide us the means to enjoy peace and security in the Holy Land and all over the world, and to guard our society from all evil. We also pray to the Lord to protect our leadership under President Mahmoud Abbas, The President of the State of Palestine.

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests”

Merry Christmas and MAY you all enjoy Bliss, Love and Peace”.

From Secretariat-General