

# MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III ON THE CHRISTMAS OF 2008

Let us now go even unto Bethlehem

and see this thing which is come to pass,

which the Lord

hath made known unto us (Luke 2:15)

The Church, the body of Christ, which perpetuates His salvific work on earth, to day cries out again to all the people, to those who are near and to those who are afar, to her members as well as the whole world, the saving truth.

It proclaims the fact that the God of our fathers, who in the beginning created man out of love, in His image and likeness, without tolerating the distortion of His image that occurred with the fall, recreated him at the end of times. He recreated and reborn His creature in a way that surpasses human understanding and strength. God achieved this with the incarnation and becoming man of His Only Son through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. "When the time arrived, God sent His Son, who was born of a woman and under the law" (Gal. 4:4). God proceeded in the restoration of man by making man one with Himself. God, Himself became in the person of Jesus Christ the same as His creature, namely man, with all the irreproachable human passions. "He descended to human nature, without losing His attribute that He is God, receiving the human not as foreign, but as truly His", according to Saint Kyrillos of Alexandria (On king Theodosios, PG 76, 1169D). God

appeared in the flesh at a specific time in history. "He came to the world, as man", without however by this losing His divine glory, by His Godbearing Father. (On the true faith, PG 76, 1177). He was born as man, during the time of emperor Caesar Augustus, in Bethlehem of Judea.

This mystery that transcends all understanding was realized far from all evil of this world. Christ "secretly was born in the cave", not powerfully and by force, without possessing any rule or authority, but with baby frailty and weakness, with humility and purity. He was revealed in the cave to pure and clean souls that could apprehend Him and embrace Him. He was visibly revealed first to the Virgin Mary, who admired and was astonished, seeing that in her was performed what the angel had foretold her in Nazareth. She was first to see the Invisible (Lord) lying in the manger and wrap Him in swaddling clothes, Him who cannot be contained. Joseph, her husband, is accompanying the Virgin and the child to Egypt. Simple in heart shepherds at the adjacent village, living in the open, are guided by the angels who sing in heaven the "Glory in the highest", and passing by Bethlehem, they see the baby wrapped and lying in the manger. The Magi coming from the East with gifts, prostrate with reverence before the newly born king.

From these faithful eye witnesses and deacons, this mystery is rendered to the Church. And first to this Church, which guards with the Hagiotaphitic Brotherhood the Holy Places that received the mystery of the divine revelation. This Church erected magnificent and beautiful churches at the Most Holy Shrines, such as the Constantinian and Justinian Basilica of the Greek Orthodox over the Divine Cave. In her the Christians of the Holy Land and all pious pilgrims who flock from the ends of the world, are sanctified through the ages. In her their identity is formed, the ethos of love, of peace, of reconciliation and their harmonious cohabitation with the followers of other religions at the Holy Land. From this Church and from this place the evangelical salvific truth

emanated to the whole world.

The fact of the divine kenosis and condescension the Church cries out today for some 2000 years in remembrance of the Birth of Christ. It proclaims that Christ "emptied" Himself by assuming the form of servant (Phil 2:7), so that man would not remain on earth in his fall, but ascend to heaven. This kenosis starting with the incarnation and through the flesh birth of the Son of God, extends to the Cross and the tomb, from where resurrection occurred.

This divine and philanthropic way, the Church displays as valuable treasure of the truth, as an infallible compass of life even for today's man. She shares with him her experience and certainty that the answer to the question on the matter of life and the resolution of human problems is found in the adoption and application of the philanthropic attitude of life, that was revealed by Christ. That the consequence of the denial of the message of God by the people and of their departure from God is today obvious in humanity as never before. The raging wars, the military and terrorist violence, the destructive rage of the irrational which is unlawfully and unjustly manifested against simple and innocent people, the unequal distribution of physical and social goods and the resulting looming economic crisis, which nations and banks anxiously try to contain.

From this Sacred Cave, and the bosom of the Mother of the Churches, we bless with Patriarchal and Paternal blessings the members of this flock, which have been entrusted to us, at the Holy Land and everywhere and prompt them, to embrace Christ, who became man in the flesh and have Him as life's guide and we direct a plea to the powerful of the world to adopt as their goal the maintenance of peace and justice without force, and the freedom and wellbeing of the people.

In the Holy City of Bethlehem, Christmas 2008.

Ardent blesser in the Lord,

Theophilos 3<sup>rd</sup>

Patriarch of Jerusalem