

ADDRESS OF H.B. THEOFILOS III TO THE HEADS OF THE CHURCHES ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR VISIT TO THE PATRIARCHATE FOR CHRISTMAS

Your Beatitude,

Your Eminences,

Your Excellencies,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

“Christ is born! Let us glorify Him!

Christ descends from the heavens! Let us welcome Him!”

With this jubilant hymn, the Church welcomes the incarnate Logos, the One who was in the beginning with the Father, the One who contains earth and heaven and yet who deigns to be contained in the womb of the Theotokos.

Christ is born! Let us glorify Him!

We greet you in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we celebrate in this happy season as Emmanuel, God-with-us, and we thank you for coming to the Patriarchate and for your kind Christmas greetings. We remember you always in our prayers, as we pray every day for the unity of all believers in Christ.

The Feast of the Nativity according to the flesh of Our Lord Jesus Christ is for all of us the assurance that heaven has come down to earth. By becoming a human being for our sake in Jesus Christ, God shows us the way to full union with him, the

way of *theosis*, the journey to the divine life which is the gift to all who believe.

The presence of the Church in the Holy Land from the very beginning of the Christian era is an eloquent and tangible witness to this truth of history and of faith. As the Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land, we share a common witness to the One who has come among us as incarnate Peace and Justice.

But the message of the Nativity is not directed simply to Christians. It is a message of hope for the world. We Christians proclaim that hope has a face – the face of Jesus Christ – and that this hope has consequences for the way in which we order our life as the human family. For 2000 years the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has given itself in witness to this apostolic message of the Gospel, and we celebrate with you the ministry that we share in announcing to the world that God has broken into human history in this Holy Land. May our proclamation of the saving Gospel be always our primary mission and evidenced in our common witness.

In this time of rejoicing, let us not neglect to repent of those times when we have neglected to show forth in our lives what we proclaim with our lips. Let this Feast be a time of re-commitment to that mutual respect that must exist between the Churches, so that those who see us may rejoice with us. It is not enough to pay lip service to common witness and proclamation: **we must live the Gospel in our relationships with each other, and translate it into action even among ourselves. It is unacceptable for the Holy Places to be the theatre of the acting out of our differences.** May the One who is Incarnate Peace and reconciliation give us the grace to make that peace and reconciliation real among ourselves.

With this renewed commitment, we shall live more worthily into our inheritance as those to whom great riches have been entrusted. And our witness to a hurting world that longs to

hear the message of the Prince of Peace will be strong and vital. And we shall be able to say in the strength of unity and mutual respect:

"Today Christ is born in Bethlehem of the Virgin.

Today He who is without a beginning begins,

And the Word is made flesh.

The powers of Heaven rejoice,

The earth and her people are jubilant;

The Wise Men bring gifts to the Lord,

The shepherds marvel at the One who is born;

And we sing without ceasing:

Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward all people".

We wish all of you, your communities, and your families, a blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.

HIS BEATITUDE THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

9 JANUARY 2010