

AN ADDRESS TO THE ARMENIAN DELEGATION AFTER THE CHRISTMAS FEAST.

Holy Jerusalem, 10 January 2012

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!” (Lk, 2:14).

In this Christnastide we greet you with the salutation of the heavenly host to the shepherds. This is the season of peace, peace between God and humankind, and peace between all people.

In this joyful season, we have the opportunity to apply to our life the words of Saint Paul: “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14). The Church is the extension in history of the Body of Christ, and ours is a heavenly call. This, and only this, must be our focus.

This season reminds us especially that we are fraternities in charge of the Holy Places, and we share a common mission together with the other Church fraternities and communities of this Holy City. Our common mission is to guard and serve the Holy Places, and ensure that they are places of worship and devotion accessible to the whole world.

As Christians we face many challenges. One of the greatest challenges we face is the cynicism and indifference of the world. This is a cynicism and indifference for which we, in

part, must admit some responsibility. Whenever we fail in our heavenly calling, we undermine the power of the Gospel to transform our troubled and anxious world. We must work all the harder to make possible what others think is impossible, but what we know to be the saving power of God.

We must admit this squarely, and not look for excuses. The current challenges in the social, cultural and political reality of our region are serious, and the future is unpredictable. We face both obvious as well as less evident threats to our very existence and mission, and we are under a more demanding obligation than ever to attend to those actions and circumstances that leave us open to criticism and negative perception. We are only harming the fabric of our historic existence.

We know that genuine dialogue, grounded in the Divine philanthropia of this holy season, is the firm foundation for the solving of family disputes. We must banish enticement, anger and impatience, and keep our eyes firmly on the Star that leads us to worship the Incarnate Logos.

We assure you of our prayers for the health and well-being of His Beatitude Patriarch Tarkom, and we wish you all a blessed Christmas and New Year.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.