

AN ADDRESS TO THE DELEGATIONS OF THE CHURCHES AFTER THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY.

Holy Jerusalem, 10 January 2012

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christ is born! Let us glorify him!

We welcome you to our Holy Patriarchate in celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and we thank you for your words of greeting. This is the great celebration of God's self-emptying philanthropia – his supreme act of love towards humankind. In this great act of love God makes peace with us, and makes peace possible among us.

It was Saint Athanasius who said that "God took on our human nature so that we might share in God's own divine nature." It is by God's love of humankind that we are glorified.

It is our vocation to live this reality.

We, the Christians of this Holy Land, have been blessed and privileged by God's providence to be the guardians and the servants of the Holy Places down the ages. We bear witness to the truth of sacred history, and to the unique and universal event, the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, that has changed the course of human history.

The Christmas Feast is not simply a celebration of joy and happiness. It is more than just Santa Claus and Christmas trees! These give pleasure and excitement to our children, and this is important. But we are witnesses to a deeper truth that must always shine brighter than the superficial trappings of the season.

The truth of the incarnation is not an abstract idea. Quite the contrary; the divine truth of the Incarnation defines and determines the reality of peace, Justice, reconciliation and forgiveness among us. It is Our Lord himself who embodies these realities and makes them possible for us. We have the moral obligation, as those who dare to call ourselves Christians, so to live, and in our turn to pass on to our fellow citizens of the Middle East in general and of our Holy Land in particular, the message of peace, justice and love as we see them in the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We must be the living example, the chief agents of promoting this divine philanthropia in our hurting world.

For our mission is to stand for

- peace against violence
- love against bigotry and hatred
- justice against injustice
- reconciliation against all forms of antagonism

In all this we must be, first of all, honest with and critical of ourselves. We do not have the luxury of petty differences or disagreements. We are called to a more rigorous discipline of self-emptying, after the manner of God himself. Only in this way shall we know "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). And only in this way shall the world see in us the light of God's love of humankind. For as Our Lord

himself says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt 5: 16).

The eyes of the world are turned to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, especially at this time of the year, and peoples from many lands look to us for the embodiment of the special meaning and message of Christmas and the mystery of the Word made Flesh. We owe it to them, and to the communities in our care in this region, to be true to our mission.

May God bless you, and may we all know the joy of the Prince of Peace and the Sun of Justice in our hearts and in our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.