

ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO THE HEADS OF CHURCHES ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR PASCHAL VISIT.

Holy City of Jerusalem, 7 May 2013

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed? Al-Masiach qam! Hakken qam!

We welcome you today with the Paschal greeting that echoes down the ages and is the great affirmation of the victory of God over our human death. This is the heart of our Christian faith, that for love of us God the Father raised our Lord Jesus Christ from death, and destroyed the power of death for ever.

At this solemn and joyful time, the Church proclaims that by descending into Hades, our Lord Jesus Christ despoiled death and darkness. In vanquishing Hades, our Lord won great spoils – we and all humanity arte the inestimable and precious spoils that he won. In the light of the resurrection, God has opened the gates of heaven to all, and claimed the whole creation for Himself. As we read in the Gospel of Saint John, our Lord affirms “this is the will of [the Father] who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it

up at the last day", (Jn- 6:39).

It is God's love for the world that lies at the heart of our mission as Churches and Christian communities in the Holy Land. We have been entrusted with the care not just of our own communities, but of all peoples, regardless of ethnic, cultural, and religious affiliation, and our mission is to ensure the diversity that has always marked the civilization of this region. The Holy Land is a beacon for Christians of the Middle East and therefore must be also a beacon to the world of genuine co-existence and mutual respect. Throughout the turbulent history of our region, Jerusalem and the Holy Land have remained an anchor for all.

Despite many difficulties, ours is also the mission to ensure the ongoing presence of the Christian communities of our region, and to guarantee the essential Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. The Holy Places are a unique focus of sacred history, and we have a moral obligation to live the sacrificial, cruciform life of those to whom this great gift and mission have been given. For we are both the people of the cross and also the people of the resurrection. This is our heritage and our life, and we are experiencing each year a growing number of pilgrims who long for the spiritual benefits that the Holy Places make tangible for them.

We can never rest from this mission, especially at this time when our region is under particular pressure and when we are facing unprecedented challenge and uncertainty. Our prayers at this season of light and hope are especially with the two bishops in Syria who are being held hostage, His Eminence Metropolitan Paul Yazigi of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, and His Eminence Mar Gregorios Ibrahim, the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo. Allow us now to express our sympathy especially to you, Archbishop Sewerios, on this terrible act against your brother Archbishop of Aleppo. As we all know, their kidnapping represents a serious threat to the

well-being of our Christian communities and our co-existence, and we make an appeal to their kidnappers to release the bishops quickly and unharmed.

In spite of the challenges that we face, in the words of Saint Paul, "we do not lose heart" ,(2 Cor. 4:16). Ours must always be a message of hope over despair, joy over sadness, light over darkness, life over death. For we are "convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in ail creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord", (Rom. 8:38-39).

For "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and giving life to those in the tomb", (Paschal Troparion). This is our message of hope at this glorious Feast of Feasts, and this is the ground of our confidence in our mission in Jerusalem and our entire region.

May we, on whom so great responsibility has been laid, always be mindful of the mission that is ours, to proclaim the life-giving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead. This is the hope of our region, and of our world.

Thank you again for the greetings you have expressed. May the peace and joy of this Paschal Feast fill our hearts.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Al-Masiach qam! Hakken qam!

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem