

# MESSAGE OF HIS HOLIEST BEATITUDE, THEOPHILOS III, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM, CHRISTMAS 2013

*Behold the Virgin, begetting God in flesh,  
in the city of Bethlehem, inside the Cavern,  
the entire universe has been enriched,*

*rejoice and dance,*

*associate with servants*

– *for the Lord has come near everyone.*

(Matins Oikos 20, December)

The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Orthodox Church of Christ, across the world, celebrates today a miraculous and sublime event which transcends every human intellect and concept.

It celebrates the event of the birth in flesh of the Son and Word of God, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, incarnate and made man from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.

This event, God the Father had wanted since centuries ago and for it He had prepared men through His holy prophets and “*the Law as guardian*” (Gal. 3, 24) in His Holy Scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

“*But when the fullness of time had come*” (Gal.4, 4) during the reign of Caesar Octavius Augustus, he revealed so in this very city, Bethlehem, “*which is by no means least among the rulers*

*of Judah*"(Matt. 2, 6), and in this plain cavern.

Here, in this land, God the Father had deigned that His hitherto fleshless and timeless Son be born in flesh and appear in time. Here came the Magi from the East, led by a bright star, and saw an infant in the arms of the Virgin and worshipped Him, offering Him their presents of *'gold, frankincense and myrrh'*" (Matt. 2, 11). The Shepherds worshipped Him too, those living in the fields near the town of the Shepherds. Here too the angelic hymn of peace was heard from the heavens: *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests"* (Luke 2, 14).

And this happened because God, who had made man, never ceased to love and seek him, even when man was distant from Him. God sought man in his complex, endless and pointless philosophical quests, and in his sinful and pernicious achievements, but He did not decline him; instead, according to the god-bearing saint Cyril, Archbishop of Alexandria, *"He appropriated humanity and, without confusion, incorporated flesh and received man"* (On the Right Faith, PG 76, 1181D) during the mission in the world and the incarnation of His Son.

Willingly executing the will of His Father, Christ, *"though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich"* (II Cor. 8,9). Being a citizen on the earth and associating with men as Theanthropos, God-Man, perfect God and perfect man, he benefited them in many different ways. He offered charity to the needy and the poor. He incorporated our human nature and elevated it to the heavens through the Cross, the Resurrection and the Ascension.

The Church, His holy body, through the effusion of the Holy Spirit, carries on His sanctifying and philanthropic work on earth. Through the centuries, the Church has been endlessly consecrating its members, cultivating, humanizing and adorning the customs of men, supporting the sacred institution of family, feeding the poor; today it sustains in deed the

victims of the financial crisis and invites humanity to resolution and reconciliation, peace and justice, philanthropy, love and benefaction.

Even more so, the Church of Jerusalem, the first to evangelize the birth of Christ, prays from this Cavern and this Constantinian Basilica, of which it has proved a faithful guardian through the centuries, for peace and goodness in the entire world, for the end of acts of violence in the Middle East and elsewhere, for the cessation of terrorist activities, for respect of religious freedom and worship, for the liberation of the abducted hierarchs and nuns of the sister Church of Antioch and for the reconciliation and unification of all.

In the Holy City of Bethlehem, **CHRISTMAS 2013.**

Fervently praying to the Lord,

**THEOPHILOS III**

Patriarch of Jerusalem

