

CHRISTMAS ADDRESS OF H.B. PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS TO ALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES, ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR VISIT TO THE ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE.

Jerusalem, 9 of January 2014

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Reverend Fathers,

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14).

It is this glory of the begotten Son of God in which we now rejoice at the time of this Christmas season. We have been blessed and privileged to celebrate God’s full manifestation into our human history in the very place where the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, i.e. the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, took place in the cave of Bethlehem, where the magnificent Constantinian basilica continues to stand as a beacon of the divine light since the early years of Christianity.

The city of Bethlehem, crowned by this basilica, has become the physical and spiritual symbol of God’s philanthropy, that is to say, of His peace and justice on earth and of course of hope to all men and all nations, especially to those who are enduring injustice, inequality, persecution, slavery, starvation, humiliation, displacement from their homelands,

and from all contemporary Herods, that is, “all workers of iniquity” (Luke 13:27).

The Holy Ecumenical Church of God and particularly the local Church of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, which are in fact the body of Christ, who is extended into the ages, bears witness to the Incarnate Hope and Justice that was born from the pure blood of the all blessed Virgin Mary, the Theotokos of Nazareth.

It is precisely this witness that the “Holy Jerusalem” i.e. the mother of all Churches, has been called by the Holy Spirit to evangelize, as Saint Paul says, “And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom. 9:30).

Dear brothers and sisters, our gathering today here at the Patriarchate adds to our celebration of the Christmas feast and the new year, as the Psalmist says, “Behold now, what is so good or so pleasant as for brothers to dwell together in unity,” [Ps. 132 (133):3]. For according to the Lord, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

Furthermore, this Christmas celebration is also a reminder of our pastoral care and responsibility as spiritual Shepherds in encouraging and leading our respective flocks, especially in our Middle East region, who are being “snatched and scattered by the wolves” of the darkness of this world. For our common shepherd, Jesus Christ says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

Indeed, today Christ, our Shepherd, is born. And indeed, He is the good Shepherd who does not abandon His own and those who know him, and even those who are aspiring to Him.

Let us pray to the newly born Son of God, and together with our Church Father Saint John Chrysostom:

Christ our God, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, you have fulfilled all the Father's dispensation. Fill our hearts with joy and gladness, always, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Blessed Christmas and a peaceful new year. Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem