

# MESSAGE OF H.B. THEOPHILOS III, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM, ON CHRISTMAS 2014

Monday, 22 December 2014.

*Today the angels in the sky dance  
and rejoice.*

*And the whole universe delights  
in the birth of the Lord and Saviour in Bethlehem.*

*Because every fallacy of idols now ceases  
and Christ shall rule for all time.*

(Nativity Verses for Christmas Procession)

The Orthodox Church of Christ celebrates, today and for all twelve merry days of the *Dodekaorton*, an event miraculous and sublime, mystic and paradoxical, an event transcending every human sense and perception. It experiences, asserts and proclaims for its members and the entire world to hear an event initiated by God in heaven and offering great joy to men on earth.

This event rests on the choice of the benign and beneficent God to reunite Himself with His creation, man: man deceived by the devil and drawn away from Him through sin, misled and wandering, lethally wounded and damaged.

For this divine and salvaging work, according to the Apostle

Paul, *"when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship"*. (Gal., 4, 4). God sent forth His Son and "accepted man" (Rom., 15-7). Upon the choice of God the Father, His Age-Old Logos and Son was incarnate, became human through the Holy Spirit and the Ever-Virgin Mary. According to the Evangelist of love, *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us"* (John 1, 14). The fleshless Logos was incarnate. The ever-virgin Mary bore God in the flesh. God in His power elevated her to Theotokos, Mother of God. Through His incarnation, the Son of God also became the Son of man and revealed himself to us not as god-bearing man but as flesh-bearing God, as Theanthropos, as the new Adam of grace, carrying within Him His dual nature, both divine and human, in a single hypostasis. This, according to Father Cyril of Alexandria, does not mean that *"the nature of the Word was transformed into flesh, nor that the Word was made human of soul and body, but that the Word united Himself as flesh carrying soul and mind, thus indescribably became man and served as Son of man"*.

This mystery of man's reception by God did not happen seemingly but truly. Christ received the human nature in its entirety, humanity in all its poorness and weakness. Christ marked the beginning of time. He was born as man of the ever-virgin Mary *"when the days were accomplished that she should be delivered"* (Luke 2, 6) during the rule of Ceasar Octavian Augustus in Bethlehem, Judea (Luke 2, 1-4).

Taking share in every human manifestation, even following death by the cross, through which He reached the Resurrection, Christ was born in a cavern, lay in a manger and was wrapped in cloth, guarded from Herod's murderous mania not by force but through escape to Egypt.

In his single hypostasis and dual nature, Christ was glorified by angels in the sky of the blessed Village of the Shepherds, with the hymn *"Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth*

peace" (Luke 2, 14). He was venerated by shepherds and the wise men but He was also persecuted by Herod and fled to Egypt.

Today, just like then, men's attitude towards Jesus Christ differs. By some, as were the angels, shepherds and the wise men, Christ is believed, venerated and glorified; by others, as was Herod, He is rejected and hunted. Christ is persecuted, His message on earth reproached – the message of mutual friendship, peace and reconciliation. Those believing in Him are persecuted too, Christians and other innocent men, all those, regardless of faith, called by Christ "the least of His brothers". Denial of Christ's figure and work is the cause of violent and hideous crimes in various regions of the earth, Syria, Iraq, Gaza and elsewhere in the Middle East.

From the holy Cavern where Christ was born, and from the manger where he lay, and from the Basilica of the Nativity, guarded through the centuries by the Church of Sion as the apple of the eye, we send forth festive greetings for the Dodekaorton, the gospels of joy and peace of the Lord of peace, to the flock entrusted by God to us, the flock residing in the Holy Land and everywhere across the earth, and to pious pilgrims visiting the holy shrines, wishing for everyone the blessing, grace and reinforcement of God Incarnate, born in the flesh by the Ever-Virgin.

In the Holy City of Bethlehem, CHRISTMAS 2014

Ardently Blesser in the Lord,

**THEOPHILOS III**

Patriarch of Jerusalem