

# CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE IN JERUSALEM ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR CHRISTMAS VISIT TO THE PATRIARCHATE.

9th of January 2015

Your Eminence Archbishop Aris Shirvanian,  
Your Eminences,  
Your Graces,  
Beloved Members of our Respective Fraternities,  
Dear Fathers,

We welcome you to our Patriarchate with these joyful words from Matins of the Nativity:

*Come, O faithful,  
let us go to see where Christ was born!  
We shall follow the Wise Men, kings from the East,  
and be led by the guiding star to the place where angels sing  
unceasing praise.  
Shepherds in the fields offer fitting hymns:  
Glory in the highest to him who today was born of the Virgin  
Theotokos in a cave in Bethlehem of Judah!"*

Like the Wise Men and the shepherds of old, we in our turn come to the cave to worship the Incarnate Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose birth restores the dignity of our human nature and signals the dawn of our renewed human destiny. Our Lord's nativity reminds us in unambiguous terms of the divine-human partnership that is the icon for us not just of

our relationship with God, but of our relationship with our fellow human beings. In our region, for centuries we have known the integrity that comes from the diversity of our peoples, cultures, ethnicities, and religions. Without this diversity, the Holy Land in particular and the Middle East in general would be so diminished as to lose an essential element of their identity.

The preservation of this identity depends in large measure on the Church and on the committed co-operation between our various communities, especially those of us to whom God's providence has entrusted the ministry of guarding-and serving the Holy Places. The Holy Places are the guarantee not only of our sacred history, but of the Christian character of the Holy Land, and their well-being must always be a concern that unites us beyond our differences. There is no place for rivalry, ambition, pride, or envy. We all come to the cave at Bethlehem at Christmas as equal suppliants before the throne of God on earth, and we must always outdo one another in the spirit of co-operation and commitment to ensuring that the Holy Places are maintained and preserved.

At this holy season, of course, Bethlehem is the object of our devotion and the object of the devotion of the world. As one of the oldest churches in continuous use in the world, the Basilica of the Nativity has a special call on our attention, especially at this time when our communities must work closely together for its repair and renovation. In this work the Churches are joined by many others in both the civic and religious realm, and our task is to allow nothing to stand between us and the successful completion of the restoration of the Basilica.

Over many centuries we have learnt in our region the power of dialogue. Dialogue deepens respect and understanding, and helps to build partnerships for common work and mission. The health of the dialogue between the Churches of the Holy Land

is a crucial witness both to our local communities as well as to the world, which looks to us, and to Bethlehem in particular at this time of the year, in hope. The eyes of a hurting world are on us.

In this holy season, therefore, we renew our encouragement to all in our respective communities to a committed and fruitful dialogue so that we may serve the Holy Places and those who worship at them more effectively and faithfully. May God bless you, Your Beatitude, in your primatial ministry, and may God bless our respective fraternities and communities, and all the peoples of our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.

His Beatitude  
**THEOPHILOS III**  
Patriarch of Jerusalem.