

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR CHRISTMAS VISIT TO THE PATRIARCHATE.

9th of January 2015

Your Beatitudes,
Your Eminences,
Your Graces,
Beloved Members of our Respective Fraternities,
Dear Fathers,

We greet you with joy on this glorious Feast of the Nativity,

*Today He, who holds the whole creation "in his hand is born of
a Virgin,*

*He, whose essence none can touch is bound in swaddling clothes
as a mortal man.*

*God, who in the beginning fashioned the heavens, lies in a
manger.*

*He who rained manna on his people in the wilderness is fed on
milk from*

*His Mother's breast. The Bridegroom of the Church summons the
Wise Men;*

*The Son of the Virgin accepts their gifts. We worship your
birth, O Christ,*

(Stichera Tone 6 from the Royal Hours of Christmas Eve)

And as we greet you and enjoy the warmth of this celebration, we remember that in this great mystery of the Incarnation of the Logos, God has united earth and heaven, and restored to humanity our eternal destiny. In this act of love, God has begun a new dialogue between the human and the divine, a dialogue that finds its highest and clearest testimony in the Holy Places. Here, in the Holy Land, God and humanity have enjoyed a unique intimacy, and this intimacy finds its most obvious manifestation in the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

On this great feast, our region remains in grave difficulty. There is violence, persecution, and the displacement of large populations on a vast scale, and ancient communities are under threat- Our long history of co-existence and that diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious landscape that give to the Middle East its essential integrity are under threat as never before in modern times. As we celebrate the nativity of the Prince of Peace, we affirm again in the strongest possible terms the condemnation by the Churches of the Holy Land of all forms of violence, terrorism, intimidation, and prejudice.

The eternal and harmonious dialogue between God and humanity that is inaugurated by the Incarnation must find expression in our own life in the Holy Land. Over time, we have come to understand that true dialogue bears the fruit of compassion, deeper mutual understanding, and effective co-operation. Perhaps the most visible fruit of our common dialogue as Churches was the meeting here in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher of His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew and His Holiness Pope Francis last May. We cannot, we must not, underestimate the power of such demonstrations of the fruit of dialogue in a world that is torn by divisions and despair.

Our chief responsibility as the spiritual leaders of the Churches of the Holy Land is to ensure the integrity of the Christian character of the Holy Land and of the Holy Cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and to build up the vitality of the

Christian presence here. In this essential mission, dialogue must play a major role. And the results of our fraternal dialogue must be visible for all to see. For then the world will see, in the words of the Psalmist, that

*Mercy and truth will meet together;
Righteousness and peace will kiss each other.*

(Psalm 84 [85]: 11 [10])

As we keep this holy season in our Churches, let us keep before us always the divine-human dialogue that calls us all into a new relationship with God and with each other. The eyes of the world are always on the Holy Land at this time of the year, and the world must see among us the image of the heavenly Jerusalem and the living example of peace, reconciliation, and mutual respect.

Thank you for your Christmas greetings. May God grant to all the peoples of our region his deep and abiding peace! May God strengthen in the political leaders of our region and the world the commitment to peace. And may God nurture in the hearts of all of us the love of that "peace that passes all understanding" (Phil. 4:7).

Thank you.

His Beatitude
THEOPHILOS III
Patriarch of Jerusalem.