

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM ADDRESS TO THE ARMENIAN BROTHERHOOD OF SAINT JAMES .

9 January 2016

Your Beatitude Patriarch Nourhan,

Your Eminences,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Friends,

We welcome you today to the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and we thank you for your greetings to us on the occasion of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One. Angels with shepherds glorify him; the Wise Men journey with the star,

Since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little Child!

In this mystery of the Incarnate Logos made flesh for our salvation, the course of human history was changed and our human destiny to union with God was restored.

Our spiritual mission is to be a living witness to this truth, so that the world may be renewed in hope. Ours is the responsibility to do everything in our power to join forces,

especially in the current for Christians and all others in our region who face persecution and violence, to exercise our ministry as spiritual leaders and as the guardians and servants of the Holy Places.

In this respect we wish to mention the preliminary report that we have all received on the restoration of the Edicule of the Tomb of Christ, and which is a project of the utmost importance. Our respectful and effective collaboration is crucial if we are to be worthy of the responsibility that Divine Providence has entrusted to us.

As servants and guardians of the Holy Places, we remember that one of our great responsibilities is to safeguard and help our congregations. Our people look to us for leadership, especially in times of crisis, and we always must recall that the enemies of Christ have never discriminated among our Churches and denominations.

Another of our great responsibilities is not simply to keep the expectations of the Status Quo, but also to maintain our independence in overseeing the Holy Places and not to allow third parties to interfere in matters that are proper to our jurisdiction. We share in the duty to see that our rights and privileges in, and sovereignty over, the Holy Places are not violated in any way by those who have no role in this respect.

In these ways we shall continue to be faithful to the charge that we have been given, and the Holy Places will continue to shine with the Divine Light of the Transcendent, Unapproachable One.

May God strengthen us all in this spiritual mission, and may God bless you, Your Beatitude, the members of your Brotherhood, and all the Armenian community of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, as you prepare in these next days to celebrate the Nativity in your own tradition. Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem