

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY OF JERUSALEM

20 January 2016

Your Beatitude Patriarch Nourhan,

Your Eminences,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers,

We greet you today, Your Beatitude, with joyful words from the Liturgy of this Christmas season:

Today heaven and earth are united, for Christ is born.

Today God has come to earth, and man ascends to heaven.

Today God, who by nature cannot be seen,

Is seen in the flesh for our sake.

Let us glorify Him, crying:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace!

Your coming has brought peace to us.

Glory to You, O our Savior!"

It is in this same spirit of the peace that the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ brings to the World that we wish you, the Brotherhood, and the Armenian community of the Holy Land,

the blessings of this Christmas Feast. This is the peace that "passes all understanding." and that is promised to the whole world.

This same peace must also exist in the heart of every Christian. Ours is a spiritual mission that is born of the Prince of Peace, and we are called to deepen this true ecumenical spirit of peace and goodwill among ourselves and among all those entrusted to our pastoral care.

Divine Providence has made us the guardians and the servants of the Holy Sites, and this places on our shoulders a tremendous responsibility. We are called to ensure that the Holy Places, which have been down the ages the guarantee of the Christian presence in the Holy Land, remain primarily places of worship that are open and accessible to all without distinction. This is our common heritage.

As those to whom such a great privilege and responsibility has been entrusted, we must also be committed to solving any problems and disagreements that may arise from time to time in our common mission. This is our work to do between ourselves, without recourse to the civil authorities. The Status Quo, which has served our communities well in securing our rights and duties, remains sufficient to support us and to resolve any challenges that may from time to time arise.

In this time of war, violence, and persecution in our region of the Middle East, when the Christian community is under renewed pressure in many places, Jerusalem remains a beacon of hope, and we, to whom the pastoral mission of the Church has been entrusted, have a special obligation to keep our focus on our primary mission. Our unresolved differences only weaken us and the witness of the Holy Places, and this witness requires of us our most energetic attention.

May the peace which the Incarnate Logos brings to us this Christmas renew in all of us the true ecumenical spirit, so

that together we may be a light to the world.

We wish you, Your Beatitude, your Brotherhood, and all the Armenian community of the Holy Land, a blessed and joyous Christmas Feast.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem