

HIS BEATITUDE SPEECH AT THE CHRISTMAS RECEPTION HOSTED BY H. M. KING ABDULLAH II IN AMMAN.

18 December 2016

Your Majesty.

Your Royal Highnesses,

Esteemed Members of the Government,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this season, as we prepare for the great Feast of the Nativity, we gather here under the auspices of Your Majesty to mark this holy occasion for so many of us and to stand united in our efforts to bring hope to the neediest in our midst. The words of the prophet Isaiah speak clearly to us:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness -on them light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

The Christmas Feast is a significant celebration for the Holy Land and indeed for the entire region of the Middle East. Far

here the events of our sacred history unfolded; here the divine-human encounter was made manifest in our life: here we have been the witnesses of this sacred history for millennia.

This Feast is significant also for our many peoples who live in the diaspora, and whose hearts turn to this, their homeland, at this season especially. As we express our Christmas greetings to you, Your Majesty, we express them also to all our peoples, at home and abroad, that we may always remember that we are united in the rich heritage that is our common possession here in Jordan and throughout our region.

In this time of joy, let us not forget those who are displaced in our midst from Syria, Iraq, and other countries around us, who have been living and walking in darkness for some time now, to so many of whom the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has given a place of refuge, and who look to God for the hope that the Light of the Incarnate Logos brings to the world. They look also to all of us to be agents of that same hope, and for the very practical assistance that they need to overcome the horrors of war, persecution, violence, and exile from their ancestral homes.

Let us dedicate this time that we are together here at this celebration as a prayer and a commitment, that God may, with our co-operation, bestow upon all those who are suffering, as well as upon us, his bountiful love, mercy, and deliverance.

We all bear testimony to the significant labours and efforts that, under Your Majesty's careful guidance and wisdom, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is expending as we cope with this anguished situation, and we thank you for your vision that, time and again, is showing to the world that the Kingdom is a shining beacon of tolerance and true symbiosis – true co-existence. A tangible example is your Majesty's contribution for the restoration of the Holy Sepulcher.

We also express our gratitude to you, Your Majesty, for this

celebration, which builds on your Hashemite heritage and your keen understanding of the natural fabric of our common humanity and our shared society. Please allow us to say again what we have often said, that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is proud to exercise our service under your gracious Custodianship, as are all those who serve the Holy Places, whether they be Christian or Muslim.

As we keep this festive season, we assure you, Your Majesty, of our prayers for you and all the Royal Family, for the well-being and flourishing of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and we ask God to bless all the peoples of our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem