

MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE, THEOPHILOS III, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM, FOR CHRISTMAS 2016

It was the good pleasure of the Father:

The Word is made flesh.

The Virgin gives birth to God made man.

A star announces the glad tidings.

Shepherds are amazed, and Wise Men worship

And creation is filled with mighty joy.

(Troparion of Christmas Praises)

The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ jubilantly celebrates today “*a strange and most wonderful mystery*” (Katavasiae of Nativity), evangelizing it “in great joy” across the world. The Church celebrates the supernatural and magnificent event that God the Father, Creator and Ruler of the universe, acting on extreme love and compassion, recreated, revived, and redeemed the corrupt by sin man in the face of the Only-begotten Son and pre-eternal Word (Logos). The Church received by revelation that God’s promise to the Prophets had been fulfilled. That “*when the fullness of the time was come*” (Galatians 4:4), during the reign of Cesar Octavian August (Luke 2:1), the incarnate God-made-man Son and Word of God was born in flesh of Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit in Bethlehem of Judea (Luke 1:34). Jesus Christ “*being in the form of God...made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men*” (Philippians 2:6-7), “*made of a woman, made*

under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4), "to become the sons of God" (John 4:4).

Such was God's providence for the amelioration of mankind. According to the church hymn writer *"How can a womb contain Him whom nothing can contain? How can he remain in His Father's bosom, yet rest in His Mother's arms"*? According to the God-bearer Church Father Athanasius the Great, "the incorporeal and imperishable Word of God came down to us and became incarnate so that we may be deified, He revealed Himself in flesh so that we may partake of the invisible substance of the Father, and He endured the human mockery so that we may inherit eternity". Similarly, according to the God-bearer Father St Cyril of Alexandria, "The Only-Begotten Word of God appeared to us, to Whom the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary gave birth, the life-giving offspring, the God-made-man, the free man in the form of a servant, the One who became incarnate for us – not man – but flesh, that means human, not repudiating his form of God, but even if He took on the human flesh, He remained as He was" (Homily II in Ephesus PG77, 988C-989A), "having taken the logical soul on his one (out of two) Hypostasis of the incarnate Word" (To Nestorius, Epistle XVII, PG.77, 116C).

As the sole beneficiary to this revealed divine mystery, humanity is called as witness, participant and accomplice. Unstudied Shepherds in the fields are called by a legion of angels singing in the sky of Bethlehem *"Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, good will toward men"* (Luke 2:14). They are called to see in their familiar manger of the irrational animals the new-born Christ. But also servants of science, the Persian wise kings are called according to the hymn writer "by a star from heaven and are offered as the beginning of the Church of nations to the Infant laying in a manger, and they were neither astonished by the scepters nor thrones, but by infinite humility, as there is nothing poorer

than a cave, nothing more humble than the swaddling clothes through which the wealth of His Divinity shone forth”.

The incarnation and birth in flesh, kenosis (emptiness) humility and likeness in all things to the humans except sin, did the Lord take upon Him during His life on earth. He identified Himself with all human infirmity, even until death. He escaped the danger of Herod's authoritarian fury neither by his Divine power, nor by the use of violence, but by taking upon Him the power of human infirmity, migrating from Bethlehem to Egypt and from there under an Angel's command to Nazareth, from which He received the name Nazarene and from which having come to adulthood and baptized by John in the river Jordan, He proclaimed the era of God. He marked a new radical inflection in human life and history, that is the new period of grace of the New Testament, when He relieved and healed the sick, resurrected the dead, and offered His human body on the cross to the Father, he was risen from the dead, in order to give rise from the dead to those who believe in Him.

After ascending in Heaven, through the power of the Holy Spirit the Lord assigned His disciples – His body, the Church – with the work of His peace, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, sanctification and salvation. Throughout the ages the Church consists the revelation of the Kingdom of God, introduced to the world by the Lord of peace, the Incarnate Jesus Christ. The Church beautifies the morals of men, proclaims – just as it has been taught by its founder – peace for all people near and far, love for one's neighbor but also for one's enemies, for the transformation of the fallen world into paradise, the return of the deceived man to his original likeness to the Father and his participation in the glory of Christ by God.

The Mother of Churches Jerusalem testifies and serves the sacrament of the angelic hymn “peace on earth and good will towards men” to the very lands this was revealed. On this day

of the feast of Christ's birth in flesh, the Church experiences this event in this modest and God-receiving Cave, and in this built by Constantine and Justinian Basilica, which consists a blessing and protection for all inhabitants of the Holy Land and especially those in Bethlehem.

From this sacred Church monument we denounce every act of terrorism as well as war violence, every act of conquest or usurpation of foreign territory, disrespect to the sacred beliefs of religions, torturing of men and exploiting captives, especially non-combatant women and children and we make an appeal in favor of the Christians of the Holy Land, so that they remain in their ancestral residences in the Middle East. To our pious Christian flock in the Holy Land, and to devout pilgrims from all corners of the earth, we wish the grace, strength, peace and blessing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who became incarnate for our sakes through the Ever Virgin Mary.

In the Holy City of Bethlehem, CHRISTMAS 2016

Fervent Supplicant of all before God

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem