

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS OF PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III TO THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND.

29 December 2016

Your Excellency, Father Francesco,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Fraternities

Dear Fathers,

We greet you, Your Excellency, dear Father Francesco, with the joyful words of the much-loved Christmas hymn, **Adeste fideles;**

O come, all ye faithful,

joyful and triumphant,

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;

come and behold him, born the King of angels.

As the eyes of the world are turned to Bethlehem at this holy season, as you celebrate your first Christmas as Custos, may you be encouraged in your ministry by the Light of the Incarnate Logos that shines from the Holy Cave,

We take this opportunity once again to congratulate you on your election, and to *assert the good* relations and co-

operation that exist between our two Fraternities Your predecessor, His Excellency Archbishop Pizzaballa, was instrumental in shaping our common work and witness, and we look forward to continuing this legacy – a legacy that is crucial for the well-being not only of our respective Fraternities and communities, but of the Holy Land, and especially of Jerusalem.

It is precisely this mutual respect and understanding, and our ability to work together, that shows the world that we are worthy of the diakonia of the Holy Places with which Divine Providence has entrusted us.

We rejoice in particular at the good work that we are doing together for the restoration of the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulcher. Our unity of purpose in the restoration of this, the most holy site in the world, is a wonderful witness to our common faith in the Incarnation and the Resurrection, and it shows that we can indeed overcome a long history of suspicion and difficulty for the sake of our spiritual mission. As you yourself have so rightly said in your Christmas message, it is our religious duty to move from the sentiment of the season to action for the sake of those who need the ministry that it is our responsibility to provide.

We look forward to continuing the good work on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher with you, as we move on from the restoration of the Sacred Edicule to the crucial repair and renovation of the underground water and drainage systems beneath the Rotunda.

The Holy Places are not simply stones, or even monuments of historical interest. They are the undeniable, living martyria of sacred history that we acknowledge and proclaim to the world.

As we celebrate this great Feast of the Nativity in our beloved Holy Land, may God strengthen us all to be faithful

witnesses, jubilant in the news of the Birth of the Incarnate Logos and Son of God, who brings healing in his wake, and joy to the world.

May God bless you, Your Excellency, and all the members of your Fraternity, and we wish you all a very happy and holy Christmas, that the peace that passes all understanding may prevail.

Thank you.

Merry Christmas and Blessed New Year!

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.