

HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS' ADDRESS AT THE TOWN HALL OF JERUSALEM

On Wednesday evening 12th/25th January 2017, a reception by the Mayoralty of Jerusalem took place at the Town Hall, on the occasion of the Civic New Year 2017.

At this reception, the Mayor of Jerusalem Mr. Nir Barkat addressed the guests, Leaders of the Christian Churches of Jerusalem or their representatives, Diplomats, Rabbis, Sheikhs, Mukhtars, representatives of the Police, etc., saying that Jerusalem is a Holy City for the three monotheistic religions, in which the followers of the three monotheistic religions have the right to live a peaceful religious co-existence without any phenomena of any form of violence.

To his address, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos replied on behalf of the Christian Churches with the following:

25 January 2017

“Your Excellency, Mr Mayor,

Respected Members of the Municipality,

Fellow leaders of our Religious Communities,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once again we gather with the civic and religious leaders of Jerusalem to welcome the New Year, and we are grateful to you,

Mr Mayor, for your gracious invitation. We are deeply conscious that, at this time of the year, when the Abrahamic faiths that were born in this region celebrate ancient feasts of light and hope, the eyes of the world are turned to Jerusalem, and we remember the words of the Psalmist:

I was glad when they said unto me,

We will go into the house of the Lord.

Our feet shall stand in thy gates, oh Jerusalem.

(Psalm 122)

No other place has the spiritual or emotional impact on the human soul and imagination as Jerusalem does. Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike have been deeply formed by our devotion to Jerusalem, and even those with no particular religious faith understand the significance of this holy place. It is the focus of deep religious longing both for those who are native to this Holy Land as well as for those who may never be able to come here.

Throughout the world, Jerusalem has found a home. From Ethiopia to Russia, to Europe, there are many little Jerusalems – churches and monasteries that bear the name of Jerusalem or the Holy Sepulchre. There is nowhere where the great Abrahamic faiths have spread where Jerusalem is not celebrated.

We who call this earthly city our home cannot forget the profound place that Jerusalem has in the human spirit as it has shaped religious traditions, national identities, the great heritage of art and music and the literatures of many cultures.

Nor can we ignore the spiritual power of Jerusalem to gather the human family. We need consider only the most recent feast of the Theophany as a prime example, which every year brings

together locals and pilgrims, and not just Christians, but members of all the Abrahamic faiths and a variety of nationalities.

This is the capacity of Jerusalem to be a sign of the unity of the human community, across every division. Jerusalem knows no distinctions and is the spiritual home of all people of good will. Recently a young woman pilgrim was returning to Jerusalem, and when asked why she was coming, replied that she loves Jerusalem because it is a holy place. This is the universal human response to this City.

We as civic and spiritual leaders living in Jerusalem must remember this. We can never be so focussed on the temporal management of Jerusalem that we lose sight that Jerusalem is first and foremost a holy place for all of us – Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. This is the mission not just of religious leadership; the civic leadership has a responsibility to ensure that the religious communities of the City are respected and valued.

We know from long experience that when pilgrims are received well, they return to their homes as good ambassadors. It is not enough that pilgrims come here from other countries; they must be made to feel welcome among us. And equal responsibility falls upon us all for the integrity of the indigenous religious communities of our City. The well-being of each depends directly on the well-being of all, and Jerusalem's spiritual embrace is wide enough for everyone.

Therefore as we celebrate this New Year, Mr. Mayor, we are reminded of this great responsibility that we all share, whether we are civic, religious, or business leaders. May this New Year be a year of a renewed commitment of peace, reconciliation, and co-existence. May God bless you and your colleagues in the municipality in your efforts on behalf of all, and may God bless all the peoples of our beloved Holy City and Holy Land.

Happy New Year!

Thank you.”

From Secretariat-General