

THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE OF THE PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF LOCAL CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

“But the angel said to them [the shepherds], “Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born...a saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2.10).

At this moment the world's gaze is fixed on Jerusalem, a city that is holy to all Abrahamic faiths. We, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, as we approach the celebration of Christmas, reaffirm our clear position in calling for the preservation of the Status Quo of the Holy City until a just peace agreement has been reached between the Israelis and Palestinians on the bases of negotiations and International law.

The Christians of the Holy Land, know that their presence and witness is strictly related to the holy sites and their accessibility as places of meeting and encounter for unity between peoples of different faiths. It is the holy places that have given the region a meaning.

Any exclusive political approach to Jerusalem will deprive the city of its real essence and characteristics and tramples on the mechanism that has maintained peace throughout the ages. Jerusalem, is a great gift; a tabernacle; hallowed ground to the entire world. Attempting to possess the Holy City Jerusalem, or confine it with terms of exclusivity will lead to a very dark reality.

At this time, we await the coming of the Light, we bring you great tidings of joy, hope and peace from the City of hope and peace, Jerusalem! Year after year we join the Church universal in celebrating the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The incarnation of the Word made flesh continues, after two millennia, to be a source of joy, hope and peace, despite the suffering and affliction of many nations and communities around the globe.

The angelic proclamation to the shepherds in Bethlehem brought good news, great joy, and a promise of peace to all people, especially those who are suffering and live in fear and anxiety of what the future holds for them and their loved ones. The angel appeared to the shepherds who were watching their flock at night, and the glory of the Lord came to dispel the darkness of their night and to announce the new day that had dawned with the birth of Christ. At that moment the shepherds were afraid and could not comprehend the meaning of the angelic proclamation, and how the birth would impact their lives and the life of their community.

These people of Bethlehem who suffered under the Roman occupation and their compatriot Herod, and subjected to the distinctions and exclusions of the socio-political economy, were confronted with a different economy: God's providence. The message of the angels revealed to the shepherds – out of their own context – a new reality, where the concepts of power and authority are transformed by the incarnation of God in a lowly manger.

The shepherds responded immediately to this theophany and went to see the “thing that has taken place which the Lord has made known to [them]”. The world today is confronted once more with the challenge or responding to the angelic proclamation which demands participation in the Divine economy in bringing forth joy, hope and peace to a world torn apart by violence, injustice and greed.

We continue to hold the whole Region of the Middle East in our prayers, and ask the Prince of Peace to inspire the hearts of all those in authority to walk in the path of peace, justice and reconciliation among the nations. As we celebrate the

coming of Christ as the Light of the world, we are inspired by and take comfort in the words of the hymn of Zechariah – “the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”.

We wish you all a happy Christmas and a peaceful new year.

Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem

+Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate

+Patriarch Nourhan Manougian, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate

+Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Apostolic Administrator, Latin Patriarchate

+Fr. Francesco Patton, ofm, Custos of the Holy Land

+Archbishop Anba Antonious, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem

+Archbishop Swerios Malki Murad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate

+Archbishop Aba Embakob, Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate

+Archbishop Joseph-Jules Zerey, Greek-Melkite-Catholic Patriarchate

+Archbishop Mosa El-Hage, Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate

+Archbishop Suheil Dawani, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East

+Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

+Bishop Pierre Malki, Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate

+Msgr. Georges Dankaye' , Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate