

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS TO THE APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR OF THE LATIN PATRIARCHATE IN JERUSALEM

Your Excellency, dear Archbishop Pizzaballa, Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

The whole creation rejoices at the birth of the incarnate Logos, as we hear in a beautiful hymn in the Orthodox tradition

*Let the creation now cast off all things old,
beholding you, our Creator, made a child;
for by your birth you shaped all things afresh,
making them new once more
and leading them back to their first beauty.*

In union with this cosmic rejoicing we greet you, Your Excellency, and your community as you celebrate the Christmas feast.

The mystery of the incarnation of the Divine Logos has made this Holy Land unique. Here in the divine-human encounter, God has restored us to our first beauty and has made all things new. The sacred history of this land, and the witness of our communities down the ages, are a living testimony to this great act of the new creation in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We take this opportunity to mark once again the importance during this last year of our co-operation in the restoration of the Sacred Edicule, the significance of which cannot be overstated. Not only have we preserved the holiest of all Sites for generations to come, but we have also understood afresh the testimony of sacred history in this land. Archaeology has confirmed what faith has affirmed. We wish to express once again our gratitude to you for the leadership that you have shown in this entire endeavor.

The investigations of the Edicule strengthen us in our resolve in the ministry that has been entrusted to us by Divine Providence to continue not only in our guardianship of the Holy Places, but also in our Pastoral leadership in the face of assaults on the traditional rights and privileges of the Churches enshrined in the Status Quo and the ongoing vitality of the Christian presence in the Holy Land and in our region.

As we co-operated in the restoration of the Sacred Edicule, so we recognize the common challenges we face, most notably with respect to the proposed bill circulating in the Knesset that would significantly alter the provisions of the Status Quo, as well as the unacceptable attack of the radical settlers on "Jaffa Gate", who unfortunately won a wrongful court judgment against us.

We cannot but thank you for the instrumental assistance you gave in arranging our recent meeting in the Vatican with His Holiness Pope Francis, where we discussed our common interests regarding the status of Jerusalem and displacement so much of the Christian population and others from their ancient homes

in the Holy Land and the Middle East.

We have been moved by the support that we have received not only for us, but for all the Churches and communities in the Holy Land. The world community recognizes that the Holy Land is a unique testimony to the divine-human encounter; the world community also understands that the integrity of Jerusalem and the Holy Land depend on the well-being of the Christian presence here, a presence that is guaranteed by the Status Quo.

As we join with you in your celebrations of the Nativity, we re-commit ourselves with you to the urgent work before us. The Divine Logos took on our human flesh in Bethlehem so that hope might be restored to the human family. Our pastoral mission is to keep this same hope alive, so that the Christian communities who live here in the Holy Land, as well as the many thousands of pilgrims who come here every month, may be renewed and refreshed.

May God bless you, Your Excellency, your bishops, your clergy, and your communities as you celebrate Christmas, and may God strengthen you in your pastoral ministry in the New Year.

Thank you.