

ADDRESS OF H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM TO THE HEADS OF CHURCHES AND HEADS OF THE COMMUNITIES OF THE HOLY LAND ON THEIR VISIT FOR THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

9 January 2018

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Churches and Communities,

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are delighted to greet you, dear Friends, at this joyous season, and we thank you for your Christmas greetings. As we sing in our worship

Let the creation rejoice exceedingly:

*for the Creator now makes himself to be created,
and he who was before all things now makes himself
known as God newly revealed.*

(Canticle Nine from Compline of the Forefeast)

As we celebrate the incarnation of the Divine Logos, we

celebrate both the universal and the particular of the divine-human encounter. For by his incarnation, God has taken on our human flesh, and so saved all humanity; and by this same Incarnation, God became a human being in a particular time and place, and made this City and Land holy by his life, by the shedding of his redeeming blood, and by entrusting his body to this earth.

As we keep this great feast of our salvation, we wish to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to our new-born Lord, for, according to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, "he was born in the flesh so that we might be born in his own spirit; the Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of man may become sons of God." It is in this confidence that recently we have stood united as the Heads of the Churches in the face of new and unprecedented challenges, especially related to the Status Quo of Jerusalem and more specifically the Christian Quarter. Our unity of purpose is not for ourselves alone; our unity is our Christian martyria – a sign of hope for our world in which there is so much division and confusion.

The Incarnation of the Divine Logos is the reminder to us of our spiritual mission here in guarding and serving the Holy Places, and in pastoring the Christian community, which has always called this City and region our home. Because the Incarnate Logos has walked on this very ground, we have an enduring commitment to ensure that Jerusalem and the Holy Land remain an inclusive society where there is a vibrant and vital Christian presence.

And we say this because our mission is to spread and proclaim the values of the Gospel of love, forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation.

We have taken our cause to the international forum, and we have received tremendous encouragement and support. This has been deeply moving for us, and we are happy to say that those

who we have met these last several months have a clear understanding of the pressures we are all facing in our pastoral ministries to our respective communities, and many have made strong public statements of support. We take this opportunity to express our thanks to His Excellency Archbishop Pizzaballa, who was instrumental in arranging a historic meeting with His Holiness, Pope Francis, and to His Grace, Archbishop Dawani, who helped set up our meeting with His Grace, Archbishop Welby, as well as with members of the House of Lords.

We must acknowledge the fact that those who we have met have shown to us that they are indeed our brothers and our firm supporters, and that they are deeply concerned for all our respective communities.

We shall continue this work by God's grace, and we wish to take this blessed occasion to emphasize once again the importance of our unity and our mutual respect in this regard. The threats that we face are not against our community only, but against the Christian community of Jerusalem and the Holy Land as a whole; and together we must face these threats to ensure that the framework and structures that have guaranteed our historic and inalienable rights and privileges down the ages remain in place and in force. This is for the good of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious character of Jerusalem.

We thank you for this Christmas gathering and your greetings. Let us congratulate today the new Lutheran Bishop-elect, the Reverend Sani Ibrahim Azhar. We assure you, dear friends, of our prayers this Christmastide as we rejoice with the whole creation that the Creator has been born among us, full of grace and truth, to be the light that enlightens our hearts and minds, who brings hope to the world.

Thank you.