

MESSAGE OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III ON THE OCCASION OF CHRISTMAS 2018

“Make ready, O Bethlehem, let the manger be prepared,

Let the Cave show its welcome.

The truth is come the shadow is passed away;

God hath appeared from a Virgin unto men,

Formed as we are and deifying that which He hath assumed.”

(Plagal of fourth Tone by Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem)

During the joyful Twelve-day festivities of Christmas, and especially on this day of Christ’s Nativity, primarily the Church, celebrates in doxology and thanksgiving but also the whole of humanity, socially participates in the celebration of a supernatural and extraordinary event, a strange and paradox mystery that surpasses any human reasoning.

This festal event is the incarnation of God the Word. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1,14) according to the Evangelist of love. In the excess of His love towards man, God our Father found it pleasing that His Son would become the Son of man, being incarnate and born in the flesh from the All-holy and pure Virgin. “God was seen in the flesh on earth and consorted with the people”, according to the hymn writer of the Church. “The Son of God”, writes the God-bearing Holy Father John of Damascus, “partakes of the worst, namely, our human nature, so that He may reform man in Himself

according to the image and likeness of the Father and grant us the communion in life, and deliver us from corruption, becoming the First among us to lead our resurrection and thus renew our villainous and crushed body”(Ed. Orthodox Faith, Vol. 77). This philanthropic action of God is called by St. Gregory the Theologian “epidemic of God on earth, so that we humans may emigrate in heaven” (PG 36, 316A).

The incarnation of God the Word by the Ever-Virgin takes place at the time of the world census, during the reign of Caesar Octavian Augustus, when Herod was the King in the town of Bethlehem in Judea (Luke 2,1 & Matt. 2,1). Then, as there was no place for them in the inn (Luke 2,7), Christ “in a hidden way, was born in a cave and laid in a manger”. Nevertheless, the *kenosis* of the Incarnation and the birth in the flesh of God the Word is hidden from the mighty ones of the earth, and it becomes known to people by God in heavens. God summons wise men from the East bearing gifts with a star (Matt. 2,1) and with angels He informs the shepherds who stayed overnight in the fields and sang “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2,14).

This heavenly and divine message of peace from the Master of peace, the Angel of the great Will, namely, of the reconciliation, of God’s condescension towards us men, of the pardon, the ultimate humility, which reached the point of the sacrifice on the Cross, is embraced, appropriated, proclaimed, exercised and preached by the Church which has been founded by the Incarnate Christ, towards all those near and afar, to its members as well as the whole world, regardless of race, religion, nationality, colour and language, calling us and saying just as the Apostle of the nations did, “receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (Romans 15,7). The Church especially projects this message to the powerful ones of the earth, who direct the lives of people and determine the developments in the Middle East and in the Holy Land, so that they may not be

puffed up with pride, but being magnates, they may minister in righteousness and truth, for the prosperity the dignity and the freedom of their people.

The Mother of Churches, having par excellence the privilege among all Churches, of the blessing to minister the Incarnate Christ in the God-receiving Cave and at the Basilica built above it by the Emperors Constantine and Justinian, prays for the peace-making in the Middle East, prosperity of the city of Bethlehem, the unity of the Churches, and wishes to its Christian Congregation within its jurisdiction and all over the world, life, health, peace, prosperity, progress, success, diligence, and salvation, and to the pilgrims, the grace, the power, and the peace and the blessing of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who became an infant for our sake and was born in the flesh from the Ever-Virgin Mary.

In the Holy City of Bethlehem, **CHRISTMAS 2018**

Fervent prayer for all before God,

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem