MESSAGE OF H.H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM ON THE OCCASION OF EPIPHANY 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As we approach the Great Feast of Epiphany, the day in which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was baptized in the Jordan River and the Holy Trinity made manifest, we are also thankful that this year, for the first time in more than 50 years, this holy place will be freed from the landmines which have defiled it for so long.

For this, we are grateful for the commitment and meticulous work of the HALO Trust, as well as the cooperation of Israeli and Palestinian authorities together with the Churches. We welcome the coming together of so many people to achieve this clearance as a sign of peace and reconciliation, which We hope can be replicated throughout the Holy Land and in the greater region. We also look forward to continuing to welcome hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year to the Baptism Site, who can now visit our monasteries and appreciate the fuller experience we knew several decades ago.

The Baptism Site, which we also call Qaser al Yahud, or "crossing place of the Jews," is a meeting point between heaven and earth, venerated by followers of the Abrahamic religions around the world. It was here, around the Jordan River, where according to the New Testament, Saint John the Baptist lived, preached, and baptized believers. The submersion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ into those same waters allows us to enter into the spiritual Promised Land, i.e. the Church. It is by Baptism that we are clothed with the Holy Spirit, for according to Saint Paul, "As many of you have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There

is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye all are one in Jesus Christ. And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26).

We pray, that through our human efforts to reconcile ourselves to this consecrated land which we share, stewarding this physical oasis of divine-human encounter, we also reconcile with one another for the sake of peace, love, and the mutual flourishing of all peoples created by God. May the Light of Epiphany warm our hearts and enlighten our minds in this New Year, and always.

With Our Patriarchal blessings and best wishes.

Holy City of Jerusalem January 2019

THEOPHILOS III PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM