

CHRISTMAS 2019 MESSAGE OF HIS HOLY BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III

*"Heaven and earth are made one today,
for Christ is born.*

*Today God is come upon the earth,
and man is gone up into the Heavens.*

*Today He Who by nature is invisible,
for man's sake is seen in the flesh."*

(Sticheron Idiomelo 2 – Christmas Entreaty)

Today the Church all over the world celebrates the Metropolis of the Feasts, the feast of the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ from the Virgin, in fullness of joy, gleefulness, thanksgiving and doxology.

On this feast the Church gives thanks to God, because being faithful, He fulfilled the promises He made to man through the Prophets. "He sent redemption unto his people" (Psalm 111:9). Being merciful and a philanthropist, "the times of ignorance God winked at" (Acts 17:30) and the times of man's apostasy, and "became an emigrant to the land of those who had emigrated from His grace". God sought the runaway man, the man who had runaway from His communion according to St. Cyril of Alexandria (P.G. 75 908 C), found him as a lost sheep, which He reformed, regenerated, vivified, "transformed its elements" and rehabilitated in its former communion with Him in Paradise at the time of creation.

God the Father made this manifest through His Only Begotten Son. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the

adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). The Father found it pleasing that "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14). According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria; "God the Word Who was from the beginning in the bosom of the Father, suffered willingly kenosis for us and was made flesh, namely a man, humbled Himself for our sakes and became son of man, so that we might be rich in God the Father through Him, He received a body from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, not a soulless body, but a body with a logical soul (On incarnation, PG 77, 989D & 1092C), in order to make man "a communicant of the Divine Nature" (2 Peter 1:4). What He received by His Incarnation, namely the whole of humanity, the Lord sanctified with His life, and through the Cross, the Resurrection and His Ascension He raised it to heaven and put it on the right side of God. What a philanthropy! What a favour! What a gift! God came down to earth through Christ and raised man to heaven.

This mystery beyond nature and word took place in a specific time and place, during the reign of Caesar Octavius Augustus in Bethlehem of Judea, in the humble cave therein, with the cooperation and witness of the elements of nature and the Bodiless Hosts. These, according to the, Patriarch of Jerusalem Saint Sophronios, the theologian of the one hypostasis of Christ our God in two natures, wills and actions, were; "the motivated by the stars coming of the Wise Men, the heavenly initiation of the shepherds, the bringing of gifts and the worship" (Synodical Letter PG87, 3176D). Wise Men Kings of Persia guided by a star and shepherds keeping the night watch, invited by Angels with the "Glory to God in the Highest and to earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14), met and fell down in astonishment and worshiped, "for they saw The One without Beginning lying down as a babe in the cave".

This very beginning of Christ's mysteries has been received from the eye and ear witnesses and kept intact throughout the centuries by the Church. Through this mystery, the Church educates, shapes, grants peace, vivifies and sanctifies its

members. This is proclaimed to those near and afar, to the ends of the universe. For this reason, the Church exercises its peace-making mission all over the world, “the ministry of reconciliation” which was given to us by God (2 Cor. 5:18), “reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19) through the Incarnation of His Son.

This transcendental and salvific mystery is being preached by the Church of Jerusalem, the First Church of Christianity, at the place where it happened, the God-receiving Cave and the Basilica above it, which was constructed by the Byzantine Emperors Constantine and Justine, blessing its flock in the Holy Land and at all places around the world, merrily receiving all the pious pilgrims who honour Holy Bethlehem and worship the manger, “where the Uncontainable One hath reclined”, and prays for the prosperity, peace and the good state of the whole world.

In the Holy City of Bethlehem, CHRISTMAS 2019
Fervent Supplicant for all before God,
THEOPHILOS III
Patriarch of Jerusalem