

CHRISTMAS 2020 MESSAGE OF HIS HOLY BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III

“The Father was well pleased: the Word is become flesh,
and the Virgin hath given birth unto God become man.
A star is the herald; Magi worship; shepherds marvel;
and creation doth rejoice.”

(Troparion of Christmas praises)

Today, the Church celebrates festively in doxology and thanksgiving God's condensation to man. Today, the Church preaches to its members and proclaims to the world and the whole universe, the bond and the union of heaven with earth, and the meeting of God with man. Today, God's word “I will dwell in them, and walk in them” (Leviticus 26: 11 – 2 Corinthians 6:16) is fulfilled. Today, God's compassion has exceeded His righteousness. Today, God has filled the creation with pardon and redemption. Today, God “hath visited and redeemed his people” (Luke 1:68). Today, God “reconciles the world unto himself, in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19). Today, “the times of ignorance God winked at” (Acts 17:30) along with the times of man's sin, and has visited him in His Only-Begotten Son and Word.

Acting in exceeding philanthropy, God was pleased, in the last ages, that His Word and Only-Begotten Son, the beloved, who is One Essence with the Father and sits along with Him in His Throne, would appear in the world visibly and in bodily form. According to the Evangelist of love, “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Sharing the same will with

the Father, the Son received flesh through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. He received a logical and soulful flesh and was born in the flesh by the Virgin. In this manner, Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14 / Matt. 1:23). As the hymnographer says, "God becomes a man, in order to make man a God". As the established Father of the Church, Saint Athanasios says: "the Word of God became incarnate, so that we may be deified, and He revealed Himself in a bodily form, so that we may receive the nature of the invisible Father" (On the Incarnation, 54). How was this made possible? How was the conception made, without consummation? It was made possible, because as the Angel announced to the Virgin, "that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35), and because it is written: "the order of nature is overruled to those things that God wills". The Virgin gave birth to the Incarnate God, not to the deified man, and is therefore magnified as the Mother of God (Theotokos). This was done for the rebirth, the reformation and the transformation of the whole humankind. Man was received by God in Christ, in order to partake of His deity, as Saint Peter says: "that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter, 1:4), and become "a new creation", according to the Apostle of Nations (2 Cor. 5:17 / Gal. 6:15). This very respectable change of man, namely, his change from earthly to heavenly man, is made possible in a secret manner, with the condensation of man, because the Incarnate Christ has received the whole man – "Thou entirely assumed my whole self in a union without confusion", the Church chants.

This heavenly and God-originated mystery is being witnessed by its descent and manifestation in the course of human history. It is revealed throughout the universe and to the area of the not-in-the-least minimal Holy Bethlehem, at the time of the people's census during the reign of the Roman Emperor Octavian Augustus. The whole creation is being invited to participate

in this event. The heavens guide the Wise Men, the Persian scientists and kings from afar, with a bright star, introducing the Church of the gentiles through them. The Angels from heaven chant "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace", summoning the shepherds who kept the night watch from the nearby Beit Sahour. Wise Men and shepherds together, come and bow down in reverence, to venerate and offer their gifts, because they "recognize the timeless infant lying in the cave".

He, who put on human flesh for us, who became an infant in the flesh, was born in a cave and was placed in a manger, dressed in swaddling clothes, is the One who "began to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23), who was made known and was believed to be Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of man, from Nazareth, the God-man, in One Hypostasis of two natures, wills and actions. He is "anointed by God with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38), and through the Cross, the Resurrection from the dead and His Ascension, He ascended the form of Incarnation that He had received, and made it sit on the right side of the Father and deified it.

Having sat on the right side of the Father, Christ sent to His disciples the Comforter, the Spirit of consolation, the Spirit of enlightenment of the mind and of will-power. His mission of reconciliation of God with man, of peace, of love, even love for one's enemies, of the sanctification and remission of sins, did He hand over to His body the Church, that "Christ also loved, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25), and He is its head. The Church is not only the testimony of Christ's beneficial incarnate presence on earth, but also the continuator of His mission; It receives the man from the beginning of his life until his death; through baptism, it makes man its member, it tames and beautifies his morals; it opposes any kind of violence; it feeds the hungry, liberates the prisoners; it is an oasis of a source of living water in

the desert and loneliness of the people, a place of prayer for the healing of the covid-19 patients, and a provider of support to those affected by the protective measures against this plague.

The Church of Jerusalem and the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, the guardian of the All-holy Shrines, works on this mission in the region of the historic appearance of the Incarnate Christ, and today, in the very place of His Nativity, the humble and God-receiving Cave and the modest manger, in the magnificent Basilica which was built by the Byzantine Emperors Constantine and Justine. Exclaiming in joy “an infant was born unto us, a son was given to us”, it prays for the peace of the Middle East, the prosperity of its flock here and all over the world, and for the coming again of the pious pilgrims, so that they may co-celebrate the Metropolis of the feasts with the Mother of Churches, at the place where the Master of peace was born.

In the Holy City Bethlehem,

CHRISTMAS 2020

Fervent supplicant for all before God,

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

