

# CRHISTMAS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Thursday, 25 December 2020 / 7 January 2021, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem celebrated the Feast of the Nativity of Christ at the place of Christ's Nativity in the flesh, in Bethlehem, according to the Typikon Order of the Church and the Status Quo.

## 1. Christmas Eve

The Christmas celebration began of Christmas Eve, Wednesday 24 December 2020/ 6 January 2021.

On this day's morning, the Patriarchal Entourage marched from the Patriarchate Headquarters to Jaffa Gate. There, His Beatitude and the few members of His Entourage this year, due to the covid-19 measures, got on the vehicles and went to the Monastery of Prophet Elijah.

At the Monastery, the Caretaker Monk Achilios and the sisters under his obedience welcomed His Beatitude and hosted a reception at the Hegoumeneion, at the presence of the Mayor of Beit Jala, the Israeli Military Authorities and Mr Caesar Marjie.

From there the Patriarchal Entourage was escorted by five Israeli horsemen, who headed the procession until Rachel's tomb. From that point, the Palestinian motorcyclists escorted the Patriarchal Entourage until the square of the Basilica of the Nativity.

At the square, His Beatitude was welcomed by the Sacristan of the Shrine of Bethlehem, Archimandrite Polykarpos, on behalf of the Patriarchal Representative in Bethlehem, His Eminence Archbishop Theophylaktos of Jordan, delivering an address, along with representatives of the Palestinian Authority, the Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and the Arab-speaking clergy.

Consequently, the procession of the entrance of the Basilica began, under the chanting of the Christmas hymns. The Patriarchal Entourage stood at the middle of the Basilica, which is a right that belongs solely to the Orthodox, reached the Catholicon and from there went down to the God-receiving cave through the south gate for veneration, as the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras was standing on the right side of the entrance. The Service of the Royal Hours of Christmas followed Vespers and the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great, at the presence of only a few faithful Christians, according to the restrictive covid-19 measures. The service finished at 3:30 pm according to the Status Quo.

A reception was offered by the Hegoumen, His Eminence Archbishop Theophylaktos of Jordan after the service.

## 2. Christmas Day Festivities

The celebration for Christmas day began at the night of the Christmas Eve.

At 22: 30 pm of Christmas Eve the officiating Metropolitan, Most Reverend Isychios of Kapitolias, came down from the Monastery through the entrance of the Baptism area and led Matins at the Catholicon, standing at the throne since the time of the Six Psalms.

Around the time of the Katavasie (11:30 pm), His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos came to the Holy Altar and gave the blessing to the Archbishops and the Priests to start the Service.

When all the clergy were dressed in their liturgical vestments, they started the litany, as His Beatitude had on His right side the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras. With the Christmas hymns being chanted they went down to the God-receiving Cave, where the Son and Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ was born in the flesh, He who was

immaterial before.

After the Gospel according to Saint Luke "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed..." (Luke 2:1-20), His Beatitude's Christmas message was read by His Eminence, Geronda Secretary-General, Aristarchos of Constantina in Greek (see video) and by the representative of the Patriarchate in the Arabic media Fr Issa Mousleh in Arabic.

After the veneration at the Star and the Manger, the procession began, three times around the five aisles of the Basilica interiorly, while the Canons of Christmas were chanted by Hierodeacon Simeon and Mr Vasilios Gotsopoulos on the right in Greek, and by the Bethlehem community choir on the left in Arabic.

Matins continued after the procession with the 9th Ode, the Praises and the Doxology and after Matins, the Liturgy of Saint Chrysostom was led at the Holy Altar of Bethlehem by His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with co-celebrants their Eminences the Archbishops; Theophanes of Gerassa, Aristarchos of Constantina, Philoumenos of Pella and Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Deacons. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and Mr Vasilios Gotsopoulos on the right in Greek, and by the Bethlehem community choir on the left in Arabic. The Service was attended by the Consul General of Greece and his relatives.

Simultaneously to the Divine Liturgy in the Catholicon, another Liturgy was celebrated at the Cave of the Lord's Nativity by His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias.

After the Divine Liturgy, a modest reception was offered at the hegoumeneion.

**From Secretariat-General**

