

TELECONFERENCE OF THE HEADS OF CHURCHES OF JERUSALEM

On Monday morning, 29 December 2020/ 11 January 2021, the annual meeting of the Heads of Churches of Jerusalem on the occasion of the New Year was held through Zoom, due to the covid-19 measures.

In it, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos addressed the participating Heads of the other Churches, the Custos of the Holy Land, the Archbishop of the Anglican Church in Jerusalem, the Archbishop of the Coptic Church in Jerusalem, of the Lutheran Church in Jerusalem and the others, as follows:

“Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

We greet you all with the joyful gladness of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heaven and earth are united today, for Christ is born.

Today God has come upon the earth, and man gone up to heaven...

Therefore, let us also give glory and cry aloud to him:

Glory to God in the highest.

(Entreaty, Tone One, for the Nativity)

The unity of heaven and earth, and of God and humankind, which

we celebrate at this great feast, is of the utmost importance for us, for it is a reminder to us of the unity and togetherness to which we are called in our mission in the Holy Land. We who call the Holy Land our home, join our prayers from Bethlehem, as we have given witness to the mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Logos.

The divine mystery of this season brings the Good News, and it is right, that this Good News is associated with the New Year when the hearts of everyone turn to the future in hope. If the world looks to the future in hope, so much more should we, who know the truth of our sacred history, be hopeful, for we know the culmination of our sacred history in the Incarnation.

As it is written in the Revelation of Saint John:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega", says the Lord God,

Who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8).

Humanity truly experiences trials, pain, suffering, and death. But unto this darkness, desperation, and hopelessness, the true Light has shone in our world and in our hearts; the Light that has come to enlighten everyone. As we read in the Gospel of Saint Luke:

"By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness under the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79).

This is the joy of Christmas. This is the true Light that the New Year brings to us all.

Our mission as Churches and Christian Communities is not for ourselves and our local communities only. It is for the whole world. At this season we are all the more aware of the supreme importance of guarding and serving Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and

all the holy places as the witness of the Divine-human encounter, of the union of earth and the heaven in Jesus Christ. And ours is the duty, entrusted to us by Divine Providence, to maintain the Christian character and the sacredness of his land. For here, the sacred history of the Scriptures is written in the stones, which are the living martyria, and here the faithful are caught up in prayer and worship.

We are especially mindful in this holy season of the ongoing challenge posed to the stability and well-being of the Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, as well as the integrity of the Status Quo, by radical elements in our society. The arson at the Church of the Agony in Gethsemane makes us all the more aware of the necessity of our mission, and we are resolved in our efforts to protect the Holy Places from such actions.

The ongoing COVID pandemic is an invitation to all of us for soul-searching and recollection. The pandemic has forced us to remember those things that are of ultimate importance, and it is a reminder to us, of how urgent our unity of resolve must be. We can never relax our vigilance or our recognition that we must remain united in mission and witness, as Saint Paul says: *"clothing ourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony"* (Col. 3:14).

We welcome the new vaccine, and we look forward in this New Year to the time when our local communities may have their regular life restored to them, and pilgrims may return to us. As we look to this renewed life in our region, we give thanks to Almighty God for the witness and mission that has been entrusted to us, and we pray for the blessing of the new-born Christ for all our peoples.

Thank you."

From Secretariat-General

