

CHRISTMAS 2022 MESSAGE OF HIS HOLY BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III

*“Let Heaven greatly rejoice, let earth make merry;
the Lamb of God is born upon the earth for our sake,
and He granteth the whole world His divine redemption”.*

(Sessional Hymn, Christmas Matins)

Today, the human race everywhere rejoices and is glad. The whole creation rejoices. The whole world celebrates, because “the unheard has been heard”, the things hushed up for centuries have been revealed. What are these unheard things, for which “the world that has heard them is dancing?” It is the joyful news that God’s promises have been fulfilled. That the visions of the prophets have been openly revealed, and the expectations of the nations have been fulfilled.

Out of extreme philanthropy, God came to earth to raise man to heaven. God in Christ assumed our human nature. He assumed man and made him unmistakably a sharer of His Divinity, “communicant of divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). In unspeakable joy, the Church thankfully sings: “God has sent redemption to His people”. The all-pervading God, “when the fulness of the time was come, 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). He “Who, being in the form of God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2, 6-8) according to the Apostle Paul.

According to Saint Chrysostom (Homily on Matthew 3:13), “He accepted to be conceived in the womb of a virgin and to come

from thence in the form of our nature", and according to Saint Cyril of Alexandria: "the Only Begotten Word of God was communicated in flesh and blood, thus a man who took on flesh and making it His, was born in the flesh through the Holy and Theotokos Mary" (PG 77, 1205A). According to this Father, this whole event, "that is, God emigrated on earth, in order to make man a citizen of heaven and to join him in the heavenly chorea, for this we too must offer to God, Who honoured us, as a just reward the modesty of works, philanthropy, hospitality, love, love towards our brethren" (PG 77, 4690).

This supernatural mystery of the incarnation, and nativity in the flesh of the Son and Word of God, was revealed to people locally and historically, in place and time, in Bethlehem the Holy, in this humble Cave, during the monarchy of Caesar Octavian Augustus. It was not revealed to the then mighty men of the earth, workers of power, violence and impiety, but to simple, without malice people; to the wise explorers of the universe led by a celestial star and to shepherds led by singing angels, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill among men" (Luke 2, 14). Those who were called and came fell down and prostrated themselves, "They saw the One-without-beginning (Anarchus) being an infant in the cave."

The incarnate King in Bethlehem carried on His shoulders and throughout His incarnate life on earth this promise of God, "peace on earth and goodwill among men", which the angels announced from heaven. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, raised the dead. By words and deeds, he taught peace, love even towards the enemies and delivered the Church as a legacy to his apostles, which He redeemed with His own blood on the Cross. Ever since the days of His Resurrection from the dead and His Ascension to heaven, the Church obeying His command preaches His word "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) and reminds people that those alive on earth "have their conversation in heaven" (Phil. 3:20), they are predestined not to fight each other in "chariots and horses", not to shed

blood on the earth killing each other endlessly, but to ascend to heaven.

In this sanctifying ministry to Christ, God and His people, the local Church of Jerusalem is also strengthened from these holy places of His appearance in the flesh, silent but true witnesses of Him as a person and of His work. From this place of His Nativity in the flesh, Bethlehem, from the Holy and God-receiving Cave and the Constantine and Justinian Basilica of this Nativity, it preaches to its Christian congregation in the Holy Land and all over the world, and to the pious pilgrims of the period of the Twelve days, that again, "today the universe is filled with joy, Christ is born of the Virgin."

In the Holy City of Bethlehem, Christmas 2022.

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem