

# SPEECH OF HIS BEATITUDE TO FELLOW CHURCH LEADERS FOR THE OCCASION OF CHRISTMAS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On January 9, 2024, following the Christmas Feast (according to the Julian Calendar) in Bethlehem, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem exchanged greetings to our Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, where His Beatitude delivered the following speech;

*Beloved Fellow Heads of the Churches,*

*Your Excellencies,*

*Your Eminences,*

*Your Graces,*

*Dear Fathers,*

*Brothers and Sisters,*

*Christ is born!*

*Let us glorify him!*

*We welcome you warmly to our Patriarchate, and we thank you for your expressions of greeting as we keep the feast of the Incarnation of the Divine Logos. If our celebrations are restrained this year, our joy at the birth of our Lord Jesus*

*Christ remains undiminished, and this is why the Church sings:*

*Heaven and earth are united today,*

*for Christ is born...*

*Therefore let us also give glory*

*and cry aloud to him:*

*Glory to God in the highest,*

*and on earth peace,*

*which your coming has bestowed on us, O Saviour.*

*(From Great Compline at Christmas)*

*Our gathering today is of special significance, for we are a witness together of the peace that our Lord Jesus Christ has brought to all humankind. Whatever the circumstances of our life, and especially at this time when our region is engulfed in conflict and so many innocent victims are in danger and displaced, we cannot waver from our resolve. For our mission has been throughout the ages to be a living martyria here in the Holy Land to the unique and great gift of the entrance of the Divine Logos into our human history. As the Lord says, for this I came into the world, to be a witness to the truth (Jn 18:37).*

*We give thanks to Almighty God that the Heads of the Churches and our respective communities are united in this resolve and in this diakonia. Our communities in the Holy Land look to us to provide help to those in the greatest need, and Christians*

*and people of good will the world over*

*look to us for encouragement and hope. Our shared commitment and our shared witness are important ways in which we seek to embody encouragement and hope, for we are instructed by Saint Paul to remember before our God and Father our work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 1:3).*

*This hope is not abstract or moral, but something concrete. Time and again we proclaim the hope that is brought to us by mystery of the Incarnation by our participation in the divine Eucharistic Body, which is continually renewed in the life of the Church for the salvation of the world, because the Church is the incarnate Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Saint Paul says, you are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Cor 12:27).*

*For this reason we remain steadfast in our calls for peace and justice, for this is the message of Christmas. We appeal for a humanitarian ceasefire so that urgent aid may be brought to innocent victims of the conflict, and we repeat our concern at the ongoing unnecessary suffering of so many. We urge the authorities of the region and to the international community to do everything in their power to prevent this conflict from escalating, and we repeat our firm conviction that the solution to the challenges that we face in the Middle East is not in armed conflict, but in a renewed and robust process of disciplined dialogue that is directed to mutual understanding and respect, and focussed on the establishment of true reconciliation, justice, and peace. Only in this way will we be able to ensure the future of our multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious society that has such historic roots here.*

*May this season of light and hope be a season in which we renew our support of our common spiritual mission to proclaim the Gospel message of hope and salvation for all peoples. May*

*nothing undermine this, and may no difficulty or challenge that we face undo the good work of our own mutual understanding. As our Lord assures us, where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them (Mt 18;20). It is in this spirit that we can afford no family disagreements or divisions in the face of the unprecedented challenges with which we are, and have been, confronted, for some time. For the presence of the Church in Jerusalem is the beacon of light that shines before everyone (cf. Mt 5:14). Our very future, and the future of the Christian presence in the Holy Land, is at stake, and nothing can stand in the way of the deepening of our common resolve to face this future together as those to whom Divine Providence has entrusted the pastoral oversight of our respective communities.*

*We wish to take the opportunity of this Christmas gathering to thank all those understand our mission and continue to support a vibrant and flourishing Christian presence in the Holy Land. We are especially grateful to His Majesty King Abdullah of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for his steady leadership and his deep devotion as the Custodian of the Christian and Muslim Holy Places, as well as to His Excellency the President of the Palestinian State, Mr Mahmoud Abas.*

*And not least we wish to acknowledge the ongoing support of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury and other religious leaders around the world who help to keep the plight of our people before the world's attention.*

*We pray that the peace and justice that is brought to us by the newly-born Son of God may prevail over against the forces of darkness, which attempt to deprive the world of the incarnate light of Christ.*

*Christ is born!*

*Let us glorify him!*