

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE

On Saturday morning, January 20, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III led a delegation from the Jerusalem Orthodox Patriarchate to the Armenian Patriarchate, to exchange Christmas greetings. His Beatitude's speech was as follow:

*Your Beatitude, dear Archbishop Nourhan,
Your Eminences,
Your Graces,
Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,
Dear Fathers,*

*Christ is born!
Glorify him!*

We greet you warmly, Your Beatitude, and the members of your Brotherhood, as you celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Divine Logos in the Church of the Nativity. This is a time of deep joy, and we recall the words of the hymnographer:

*O Bethlehem, receive the Mother of God:
for she has come to you to give birth to the Light that never
sets.*

*Let everything that has breath praise the Maker of all.
(From Mattins of the Forefeast of the Nativity)*

As we keep the Christmas feast of joy, hope, and light in this time of darkness in our region and in our world, we must not refrain from appropriate rejoicing. For the Light that

the darkness can never overcome has come into the world (cf. Jn 1:5), and this great feast renews our faith and trust in the God who comes to share our humanity in all its fullness.

Our spiritual mission that has been entrusted to us by Divine providence is to remain focussed always on this message of hope, especially when hope seems elusive. There is no doubt that at this present time in human history the human family is facing some of its greatest challenges, and our region is no exception. For we are under particular pressure here in the Holy Land, where so many innocent victims suffer and where so many are displaced from their homes and their lands. As we are fully aware, the Christian community is also confronted by the impact of the conflict, and there has never been a time when our shared commitment to our spiritual mission here has been more urgent.

Just as we are keeping the Christmas feast, which is the feast of God's solidarity with us, we wish to take this opportunity to express our solidarity as well with you and your community in the face of the pressures you are bearing. The situation that you face is not simply an issue for the Armenian community alone; indeed it is an issue for the whole Christian community. We recall the words of Saint Paul, If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it (1 Cor. 12:26). We are committed to remain united in our resolve to defend the integrity of the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

We assure you, Your Beatitude, of our firm support in your endeavours to protect the patrimony of the Armenian patriarchate. As Saint Paul encourages us, we are to bear one another's burdens, and in this way...fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). We are deeply concerned at the ongoing harassment that the Armenian community is experiencing in the matter of the Cow's Garden, and we pray for a swift resolution to these problems and the restoration of normal life for the Armenian

community.

On this occasion we would like to offer our congratulations for your newly ordained bishops, and we also wish to express once again our condolences at the recent passing away of the late Archbishop Aris, who was a faithful servant of the Armenian Church and of the Christian community of the Holy Land. May his memory be eternal.

In this difficult season for the world and for our region, we must renew our resolve not to let anything distract us from our pastoral and spiritual mission to guard and protect the Holy Places and to serve and support the Christian presence here. Nothing is more important than this. We are to be vigilant for those who cause divisions among us and put obstacles in our way that are contrary to the Gospel (cf. Rom. 16:17). Let this be our special care so that we may always join our efforts and maintain our united front against those who wish to rend the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious fabric of our society.

In this blessed season of the Prince of Peace, we renew our appeal for peace and for a humanitarian ceasefire so that the innocent victims of the present conflict may receive the essential help and care that they so desperately need. And we encourage the authorities of our region and of the world to do all in their power to bring a swift end to this conflict, prevent any escalation, and engage in a process of dialogue that will lead to lasting and robust peace and security for all our peoples.

As we keep this holy season, Your Beatitude, we pray that the Light that shines from the Holy Grotto of Bethlehem will illumine the darkness of this present time, and enlighten the hearts and minds of all to seek peace and pursue it (Ps. 34:14).

Christ is born!

Glorify him!



