

**STATEMENT OF THE PATRIARCHS
AND HEADS OF CHURCHES OF
JERUSALEM CONCERNING THE
RECENT VIOLENCE IN JERUSALEM**



بطاركة و رؤساء الكنائس في القدس

بيان البطاركة و رؤساء الكنائس القدس بشأن أعمال العنف الأخيرة

9 أيار 2021

نحن البطاركة و رؤساء الكنائس القدس، نشعر بعميقة الحزن وقلق شديد إزاء أحداث العنف الأخيرة في القدس الشرقية. هذه التطورات، المتطرفة، المتعمدة، في المسجد الأقصى أو في التلحح، هزاج القنصلية، حرمه المقدسين و القدس المسببة للدمار، تدعو إلى الأفعال التي تتلخ من ملامحة المسلمين وقرابة الفلسطينيين الذين يتعرضون للإعتداء من منازلهم في أحياء شرق القدس.

المطروح للقدس القدس، المسببة للفساد في ظل الوضع الراهن، يعجز جميع الأطراف، على منطقة على الوضع المستمر في المدينة. كما أن التوتر المتزايد، والمسجون بشكل رئيسي من قبل المصادقات البيئية المتطرفة، يعجز الواقع الهائل في القدس وما حولها المتطرف.

كما ندين المجتمع الدولي وجميع أصحاب القوية المسماة للتدخل الوقت. هذه الأفعال الاستفزازية ودموية المتعمدة من أحياء القدس.

بطاركة و رؤساء الكنائس في القدس

Statement of the patriarchs and Heads of Churches of Jerusalem concerning the recent violence in Jerusalem

May 9, 2021

We the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches of Jerusalem, are profoundly distressed and concerned about the recent violent events in East Jerusalem. These concerning developments, whether at the Al Aqsa Mosque or in Sheikh Jarrah, violate the sanctity of the people of Jerusalem and of Jerusalem as the City of Peace. The actions undermining the safety of worshippers and the dignity of the Palestinians who are subject to evictions are unacceptable.

The special character of Jerusalem, the Holy City, with the existing Status Quo, compels all parties to preserve the already sensitive situation in the Holy City of Jerusalem. The growing tension, backed mainly by right-wing radical groups, endangers the already fragile reality in and around Jerusalem.

We call upon the International Community and all people of good will to intervene in order to put an end to these provocative actions, as well as to continue to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches of Jerusalem

EASTER VISITS OF THE WESTERN CHURCHES AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Tuesday morning of the Bright Week, 21 April/ 4 May 2021, the Western Churches of Jerusalem paid their visit to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem on the occasion of our Pascha.

The first visit we received was that of the Monastic Brotherhood of the Franciscans, under the leadership of their Abbot, the Custos Reverend Francesco Patton.

His Beatitude replied to their address with the following:

“Your Paternity, dear Father Francesco,

Beloved members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers,

Christ is Risen!

We welcome you warmly to our Patriarchate, dear Father Francesco, and we thank you for your Easter greetings. In this joyful season we recall the words of the hymnographer:

Your resurrection, O Christ our Saviour,

The angels praise with song in heaven.

Grant that we too here on earth

may glorify you with a pure heart.

(The Easter Liturgy)

We give thanks that our communities have been able to celebrate Holy Week and Easter with more openness and fewer

restrictions due to the pandemic, and we are especially pleased that so many from our local Christian communities have been able to participate in services this year. After over a year from the tremendous hardship of the pandemic, this has been so important.

The message of the resurrection has universal significance for all humanity, and this universal significance is embodied in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. No other place of worship in the world bears such meaning and importance for humanity. It is for this reason that we are always very clear about the autonomous status and independence of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Far from being a mere set of rules and expectations, the Status Quo functions precisely to guarantee this independence and identity for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and all the Holy Places. For the Holy Places are not our possessions; we are their stewards, and our stewardship and *Diakonia* are for the sake of the life of the world.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre above all testifies to the special character of Jerusalem, and it is a pledge of Jerusalem as the spiritual home of all people without distinction. One should bear in mind that the celebrations which take place in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre are unique celebrations that foster the spirit of unity of all the religious communities here.

The important and ongoing cooperation between our Brotherhoods is a most encouraging sign to all those who look to Jerusalem for hope and spiritual refreshment at this Paschal season, and we are grateful to you personally, dear Father Francesco, for your unwavering leadership in maintaining and deepening the cordial relationships between us. In this way, we can accomplish so much for the well-being of the Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and as we emerge into a new post-pandemic world, our ongoing cooperation will be all the more crucial for the life of our communities.

May God bless you, the members of your Brotherhood, and all those committed to your pastoral care, and may the light of the Resurrection be your inspiration and encouragement.

Christ is Risen!

Thank you.”

The next visit was from the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, under the Latin Patriarch His Beatitude Pierre Battista Pizzaballa and the Heads of the other Churches.

His Beatitude replied to the Latin Patriarch’s address as per below:

“Your Beatitudes,

Your Excellencies,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

We welcome you warmly to our Patriarchate, and we thank you for your Paschal greetings. As we recall the words of an ancient hymn of the early Church:

Lift up your eyes, O Jerusalem, look about you:

see, they come to you,

your children,

like God-kindled stars,

from the west and north,

from sea to east,

praising in you

Christ forever.

(The Easter Canon, Eighth Ode)

Easter is the universal feast, and it is, of course, the feast of feasts for Christianity. And Easter is the feast of the Church of Jerusalem. Easter has cosmic and eternal meaning for all humankind. For the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ gathers up the whole creation in a new life, and none is left in the empty tomb. It is this universal message that we proclaim at Easter, for Christ's death has trampled underfoot the death of corruption. As Saint Paul says, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5).

After more than a year of the pandemic and its economic, social, and moral consequences for our communities in the Holy Land as well as for everyone, it is this message of universal hope and salvation that the world needs to hear from the Holy Land. Just as the Uncreated Light shines forth from the Holy Tomb, so are we all called to shine as lights in the world – a world that is unaware of the invisible powers of darkness that are besting it.

At this holy season in which the peoples of the Holy Land celebrate our most important religious festivals, we look to the new day of a post-pandemic life in which our communities can resume a normal existence and pilgrims may return to the Holy Places for spiritual refreshment.

Our Churches and their leaders have been working tirelessly to secure the vaccine for those who are still awaiting inoculation. In this regard, our mission has become both life-saving and demanding. In the spirit of the words of Saint Paul to Timothy, we are reminded "to fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which we are called and for which we are making a good confession in the presence of many witnesses". Like Timothy, we are charged "to keep the

commandments without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:12, 14).

We take this opportunity to express our sympathy and our condolences to all those communities locally and around the world where tragedies have occurred because of the pandemic or because of human accidents and have claimed many lives and left many bereaved.

Even as we look to emerge from this terrible pandemic and its consequences, we must remain firm in our common purpose to do all in our power, both in our respective communities and our shared mission, to ensure the protection of the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious landscape of Jerusalem in general and its Christian character in particular. This is why we are called to be vigilant, especially in the face of the rise of radicalism, no matter its source, that is targeting places of worship, including churches, church properties, and places of worship in general. Our presence here is a living witness to the sacred history of this land, a history that is shared by the three Abrahamic faiths, and our mission is to guarantee the freedom of accessibility to the Holy Places, which are signs of hope and sources of spiritual refreshment not just for ourselves, but for all people of goodwill who long to come to this region on pilgrimage.

We take this blessed opportunity to wish you all, and the communities that you serve, the abiding joy of this Paschal feast.

Christ is Risen!

Thank you.”

From Secretariat-General

HIS BEATITUDE'S SPEECH AT KING ABDULLAH'S II RECEPTION IN JORDAN

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III met yesterday, April 27, with His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Al Hussein in Jordan, who invited Church leaders in Jerusalem and representatives from the Islamic Endowments to affirm their support for the Jerusalemites in their unwavering efforts to preserve the multicultural identity of the Holy City.

His Beatitude gave a speech at the reception, which reads as follow:

"Your Majesty,

Your Royal Highness,

We greet you, Your Majesty, on behalf of the Christian communities of the Holy Land at this time when we are celebrating the Easter season, and we thank you for your welcome and your good wishes to us.

On behalf of our fellow Heads of the Churches and Christian Communities of the Holy Land, we wish also to extend to Your

Majesty our sincere and heartfelt greetings during this holy season of Ramadan. During this time of fasting, spiritual reflection and prayer, we join with our fellow Muslim brethren in our commitment to the foundation of our common belief, which is a tradition of peace, justice, mutual respect and the shared value of the dignity of human life.

All our traditions value the practice of fasting both for the individual believer and also for the wellbeing of the community as a whole; for fasting is conducive to soul searching which enables examination of one's thoughts and conscience as well as unites us in our complete dependence on Almighty God, reminding us that we share a common humanity and a common human destiny.

In this time, we are firmly reminded of our continuing gratitude to Your Majesty for your faithful custodianship of the Christian and Muslim Holy Places in our beloved Holy Land and particularly in the Holy City of Jerusalem. Your Majesty inherits and guards the Covenant of Omar ibn Al-Khattab to our predecessor Patriarch Sophronios with its' 1,400 years of guardianship of the rights of the churches.

This is the authentic example we have been living, under the Hashemite custodianship in Jerusalem and in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; and is of great encouragement and support to us, especially at a time when the Christian presence in the Holy Land, so vital to the historic peaceful coexistence within our region, is facing new and serious challenges. It is precisely at this time of year, when Christians and Muslims are keeping their holiest seasons, that the Holy Places speak eloquently and provide spiritual refreshment to people of good will both near and far.

We wish you, Your Majesty, the Hashemite Royal Family, and all our Muslim brethren, a peaceful and blessed month of Ramadan. May Almighty God bless you, and all the people of our beloved Holy Land.

Ramadan Mubarak.”

(Photos source: The Royal Hashemite Court Official Website)



ATTEMPT BY ARMENIANS TO INSTALL RAILINGS AT THE TOP OF THE FACADE OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

Shortly before midnight on Wednesday 1/14 April 2021, the workers of the Armenian clergy of Jerusalem climbed inside their window to the narrow balcony of the facade of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where there is a wooden ladder and placed railings.

This was realized by Geronda Sacristan His Eminence Archbishop Isidoros of Hierapolis while he was at his house in the Monastery of Abraham and called out to the workers to stop. As they did not listen to his request, Geronda Sacristan called the Police, informing them of the Hagiotaphite Fathers' intention to come down to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre from the Central Monastery and demolish the railings by force. Then the Police threatened the workers and made them stop their work, before managing to fasten the railings.

This episode occurred because the Armenians deceived the Police, claiming they wanted to go up to lower the scaffolding, which they had placed in order to paint their window, and that was their only right to be at that place. They have been refusing to lower this scaffolding for the last eight months, despite a joint letter from the Jerusalem Patriarchate and the Franciscans to the Israeli Interior Ministry and the Israeli Police in Jerusalem.

On Thursday morning, 2/15 April 2021, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos received at the Patriarchate

the Custos of the Holy Land Reverend Francesco Patton and his colleagues, Fr Dobromiro and Fr Athanasios Makora and jointly protested to the Police, demanding the removal of the railings within the same day, as this act is a blatant violation of the Status Quo and brutal vandalism against the oldest and holiest monument of Christianity.

From Secretariat-General

HIS BEATITUDE JOINS JERUSALEM HEADS OF CHURCHES AT THE HEARING OF THE BRITISH ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP (APPG)

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III joined today, Thursday February 25, along with fellow Holy Land Church leaders, Members of the British Parliament and officers of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), within the initiative dedicated for Christianity in the Holy Land.

The meeting held via Zoom was convened by the Chair of the APPG Steve Double MP, and was joined by 27 people including His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. From Jerusalem, the meeting was attended by His Beatitude the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Pierbattista Pizzaballa, His Grace Archbishop-elect, Hosam Naoum of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, and Reverend Carrie Ballenger, the Pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem.

“Firstly, we would like to thank His Grace, Archbishop Justin, for welcoming us today. Your wise leadership of the worldwide Anglican Communion is an example to us all, and we are truly grateful for your committed support of the churches here in the Holy Land. It is a privilege for us to demonstrate the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ and represent the Christians of the Holy Land together in this Parliament,” His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos said as he opened the hearing session.

“With steadfastness, we as the Christian community of the Holy Land, are working together ever so closely and presenting the much-needed unified voice. Your support is invaluable and has already helped us to resolve a number of challenging issues. With your help, we hope to forge a brighter future for people of all faiths in our beloved Holy Land.”

The Holy Land Heads of Churches each took the opportunity to explain how the pandemic has affected the social and financial situation for their respective communities and institutions. They also welcomed the APPG members to visit the Holy Land for a closer and more realistic experience, after the pandemic ends, where they also invited the MPs to encourage their communities to visit the Holy Land as “pilgrims not only as tourists”.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group or ‘APPG’ is composed of Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom from all political parties who explore and discuss issues and concerns on various relevant topics. This hearing was part of an APPG that was formed with the interest in “Christianity in the Holy Land”. The initiative intends to shed some light to the international community of the different plights and challenges facing local Christians, ways to help maintain that Christian characteristic in the Holy Land and find common ground to empower and strengthen them.

THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM CONDEMNS ISRAELI EXTREMIST ATTACK AGAINST THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Jerusalem 5-2-2021

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem, condemned the attack committed by an Israeli extremist against the Romanian Orthodox Church, which his Beatitude described as a “sister church”, in Jerusalem yesterday.

A statement issued today by the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem expressed the condemnation. The statement also indicated that Israeli extremists’ attacks against churches and mosques in Jerusalem are alarmingly on the rise, and the failure of official authorities to deal with it and their tolerance towards such terrorist acts will definitely lead to more fueling of the conflict in the Holy City, and will keep it further away from achieving peace and stability.

His Beatitude, The Patriarch of Jerusalem, called upon the international community to intervene by opening a dialogue with the Israeli government aiming at putting a stop to these terrorist attacks, and ending the continuous attempts of extremist Israeli groups to change the mosaic character of the city of Jerusalem by force through intimidating Christian and

Muslim worshipers, attacking clerics, writing hate graffiti on walls and doors of churches and mosques, and also their hideous attempts to control Church properties as evident by the attempts of Israeli radical groups to take over Orthodox Church properties in Jerusalem's Jaffa Gate, specifically the Imperial Hotel, Petra Hotel and other real estate, using twisted methods and through corrupt deals filled with bribery, extortion and illegitimate pressure.

His Beatitude, Patriarch Theophilos III, stressed that the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and the Orthodox Church congregation in the Holy Land on both banks of the Jordan River, stand by the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchate, and His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel and fully support them in facing this terrorist act that reflects the extent of the Israeli extremists' hatred for the Christian religion in general, and the Orthodox Church in particular.

THE ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM PAYS MORE THAN \$600,000 TO PROTECT JAFFA GATE PROPERTIES

Jerusalem 1-25-2021

Upon the instructions of His Beatitude Theophilos III, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem deposited this morning the sum of two millions and 100,000 Israeli shekels (more than \$600,000) into the Israeli Jerusalem District Court, to cover the entire rent value of the Jaffa Gate's Imperial Hotel. This comes as part of the

Patriarchate's efforts to protect the Imperial, which is subject of the ongoing court case regarding the suspicious Jaffa Gate deal dispute by the Ateret Cohanim radical organization.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem considered that this deposit is a pre-emptive and preventive measure aimed at countering any allegation by the radical organization against the protected tenants. The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem affirmed that it will not spare any effort or money in protecting the properties of the Jaffa Gate, which is the historical gateway for the pilgrims of the Holy Land to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the rest of the holy sites in Jerusalem.

The Patriarchate also stressed in a statement issued today that the protection of its properties and holy sites needs stability, steadfastness and great financial resources, which is what the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is working to achieve with the aim of preserving the authentic Christian presence in the Holy Land. The Patriarchate emphasized that it will continue its legal and lobbying efforts, locally and internationally, to protect its properties and holy shrines.

THE CUTTING OF THE NEW YEAR CAKE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Wednesday evening, 31 December 2020 /13 January 2021, which is New Year's Eve according to the Julian calendar, the Cutting of the New Year Cake took place at the Patriarchate.

This ceremony is held by the Church, for the beginning of each New Year on 1st January, as we also commemorate Saint Basil, to

whom we owe the custom of the New Year Cake, as he put in it a coin as a token of charity, respecting the dignity of the poor.

This ceremony on New Year's 2021 Eve was led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, who addressed those present with the following:

"For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2), Saint Paul preaches.

The New Year's dawn has shone unto us today, like the light of those under the shadow of death, due to the coronavirus plague; for this reason, our Holy Church of Christ has gathered us all in this holy place of our Venerable Patriarchate, in order to give glory and thank the Holy Trinitarian God, who has given times and seasons in His own power (Acts 1:7). On the commemoration of the circumcision according to the flesh of the Son of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ on the one hand, and on the other, on the co-celebration of the commemoration of our Holy Father among the Saints, Basil the Great, in whose honour we have this ceremony of the cutting of the New Year Cake which bears his name "Vasilopita".

The change of the year is a fact that marks the course of the worldly history of man, and much more of the sacred history, which finds its peak at the mystery of the Divine Providence, namely the Incarnation of God the Word, our Saviour Jesus Christ, during the reign of Caesar Augustus and Cyrenius, the Governor of Syria (Luke 2:1-2). For this reason, our Holy Church, according to the Biblical words: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, ... To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that

mourn; To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4:18-19), does not only celebrate this event but also calls upon the blessing of God the Father "for the year of the Lord", saying: "Thou who art One with the Holy Spirit, Word without beginning and Son, the co-creator of all things visible and invisible, bless the crown of this year, preserving the crowds of the Orthodox faithful in peace, by the intercessions of the Theotokos and of all Thy saints". By the Lord's blessing, the year within the Church is transformed into a time of salvation according to the saying: "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

It is precisely this Biblical, or better say, this redeeming change of the year that we celebrate today. "But though the righteous be prevented with death, yet shall he be in rest. For honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by a number of years" (Wisdom of Solomon 4:7-8).

In other words, the distinguishment of time into the present, past and future, on the one hand, and its counting in years, on the other, is made understood only in Christ our God, according to the witness of Saint John the Theologian: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). And the mental, or philosophical consideration of time, cannot be determined, that is why Saint Peter says: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

This means that time, which becomes a season in the Church of Christ, was given to us, so that we may become through faith "watchers of His majesty", namely to become seers of God's glory in His heavenly Kingdom. And Saint Basil the Great says: "In order that one may not try to find the beginning of the

world and of time by the use of human thoughts, in order that one may not be led astray from the truth, God has put His seal (in the Book of Genesis), to protect the soul of man; God has given His precious Name to protect from such teaching (fallacy), saying that the beginning of the world and of the time was made by God. The blessed nature, the abundant goodness, the beginning of all beings, the source of life, the much-desired beauty, that is beloved by all the logical beings, the water, the light, the incomprehensible wisdom, He (God) made heaven and earth from the beginning”.

These God-inspired words of the established Church Father, Basil the Great, call all those who love “the much-desired beauty, the source of life, the noetic light, and also the unapproachable wisdom”, during this time of the change of the year and with the ongoing deadly plague of coronavirus, to consider, each one of us to himself, to what thing(s) we have gone astray, thus imitating the prodigal son, of the Gospel parable, who having come back to his senses, he thought: “I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son...” (Luke 15:18-21).

Having before us the repentance of the prodigal son and the viewing of time in Christ, who became incarnate through the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Mary the Theotokos, let us entreat the great Hierarch of Cappadocia, Saint Basil, who has decorated the customs of the people, to pray to our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who was circumcised in the flesh, for the salvation of our souls, for the peace of the world, and especially for the peace of the tested Middle East, for the cessation of the schisms and the restoration of the unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church, and for the release of the humankind from the various mutations of the coronavirus plague.

And let us say along with the hymnographer: Saviour of all, and master, creator and sovereign of the whole creation, by

the prayers of the one who gave birth to Thee, grant peace to Thy world, keeping the Church always united. Moreover, Lord, Thou, Who has under Your power the times and the seasons, bless the crown of this year of Your goodness, preserving in peace and health the Venerable Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, our reverend Christian flock, the Holy City of Jerusalem and the noble nation of the Rum Orthodox. Amen.

Have a happy, blessed and healthy New Year 2021.

Many Happy Returns!"

After His Beatitude's address, the Apolytikia of the Feast were sung and then with the wish of "A blessed and Happy New Year", His Beatitude cut the Cake and distributed the pieces to the Hagiotaphite Fathers and to the few guests present, due to the covid-19 measures.

Afterwards, the Patriarchal School's Students sang the carols at the Patriarchate Hall and at the houses of the Hagiotaphite Fathers.

From Secretariat-General

HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM EXCHANGE CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

For the occasion of Christmas, new year and Epiphany, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem gathered via Zoom yesterday morning, 11 January, to greet and wish well for each other, as His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III shared his hopes for a

global relief from the current pandemic.

The gathering which normally takes place at the headquarters of the Patriarchate, was an initiative from His Beatitude who started this custom few years ago. His firm desire to hold on to this tradition, even if it had to be carried out virtually due to the restrictions forced by the widespread of the COVID-19 virus nationwide, was received with appreciative acceptance by the rest of the Church leaders to keep the beautiful spirit of unity and communication between the different Churches in the Holy Land.

His Beatitude Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem was not able to attend, and Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo attended on his behalf, alongside His Paternity Francesco Patton, Custos of the Holy Land, their Graces Archbishop Suheil Dawani and Bishop Hosam Naoum from the Episcopal Church, Bishop Ibrahim Azar from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bishop Yaser Al-Ayyash from the Greek Melkite Catholic Patriarchate, and Bishop Antony from the Coptic Church.

“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,” Patriarch Theophilos said as he started the gathering.

“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 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.”

On his part, Father Francesco Patton welcomed the vaccine as a “human-made cure” and the hope it is bringing to the world, but he affirmed that “the vaccine can only prevent this virus, but it is not salvation, our only salvation is Christ, and through Him we can only heal truly,” he remarked.

Lastly, His Beatitude encouraged his fellow brothers to use the current means of communication and technologies, such as Zoom, to further raise awareness for people in the Holy Land and abroad, that the local Churches are doing their best in running institutions from schools to hospitals despite the financial crisis and tough restrictions. Patriarch Theophilos also called to widen the circle of telecommunications so that it could welcome major Church leaders around the world like His Holiness Pope Francis of Rome and the Most Reverend Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury for similar future gatherings.

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