

THE CUTTING OF THE NEW YEAR CAKE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

At 6.00 p.m. of the last day of the year, December 31, 2019/January 13, 2020, the ceremony of the cutting of the New Year Cake was held at the Reception Hall of the Patriarchate.

Present at the ceremony were the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos, Hagiotaphite Archbishops and other Hagiotaphite Fathers, Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, the Priests and Stewards of St. James' Cathedral, local members of the Community of Jerusalem, Monks and many pilgrims, who filled the Hall.

In the beginning of the ceremony, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem addressed those present as follows;

“But hath [God] in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour” (Titus 1:3), Saint Paul says. “In due times manifested it, meaning the eternal life; for the Gospel encompasses all things, what is given to us in the present time...and those of the future, which lead to eternal life” Saint Theophylaktos says, interpreting Paul's words.

The grace of the God-receiving Cave in Bethlehem, where we recently celebrated the great mystery of the Incarnation of God the Word and our Saviour Jesus Christ from the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Mary, has gathered us all in the Sacred Seat of our Venerable Patriarchate of Jerusalem, in order to thank once more the Holy Trinitarian God for the beginning of the New Year of His Goodness.

We say “the entrance of the New Year, of His Goodness”, because according to wise Paul, “according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the

Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour” (Titus 3:5-6).

This means that the Holy Church of Christ, which is His mystical God-human body, comprehends and interprets the meaning of the historic Time, which is in accordance to the earthly life of the man in Christ and for Christ, as St. Paul preaches: “But when the fullness of the time was come, God 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).

In other words, our historic Time as the completion, namely, the decision of the wisdom of God on the one hand, and as a reward – according to Ecumenios – of our adoption from on high and by promise, as it was owed on the other, becomes fully comprehensive as the beginning, the middle and the end. And this is because – according to Paul – “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

The Incarnate God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, being without beginning and through His Incarnation with a beginning, He is the present time in His Church, in Whom the past and the future of the current time is made obvious; “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Through these words of Paul, it is made clear that the Church introduces the eternity in Christ within our historic and worldly reality and is being expanded towards it. And within the Church, where as we mentioned before, the time becomes season (kairos), namely the quantity becomes quality, according to Ammonios, the memory of the past becomes memory in Christ. And the hope in the future becomes hope in Christ. For this reason St. Paul preaches and calls upon the words of Prophet Isaiah (49:8): “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).

This "accepted time and the day of salvation" refers to both the liturgical time of the commemoration and condescension of our Saviour Jesus Christ in our humankind, namely in His circumcision in the flesh, which is held in the passing of the time in a circle, and to the commemoration of our Father among the Saints Basil the Great Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, to whose honour we have the tradition in the Church to cut the New Year Cake, which bears his name in Greek (Vasilopita).

This festal, modest and joyful reception calls us to hear St. Paul's advice: "And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:23-24).

Behold, my dear brothers and sisters the way by which we are called to celebrate the entrance of the New Year, bearing in mind "that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Considering the notion of time rotation in Christ our God, let us entreat the Theotokos and Mother of God, the Ever-Virgin Mary, along with our Father among the Saints Basil, who beautified the morals of the people, to intercede to our Saviour and God Who was circumcised in the flesh, for the peace of the world and especially for the Middle East which has suffered much under the threat of war in our region. And with the hymn writer let us say: "all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, God the Word, Who formed all things with ineffable wisdom, and brought them into being out of nothing" (Matins January 1st, Ode 8 Heirmos).

Have a good, happy, blessed and peaceful New Year 2020.

Many happy returns!”

Then, once the apolytikion of Christ’s circumcision “ Our human form hast Thou taken on Thyself without change...” and that of St. Basil “Thou sound hast gone forth into all the earth...” were chanted, His Beatitude cut the New Year Cake wishing “a blessed and peaceful New Year 2020”, and distributed the pieces to those present.

At that time the Patriarchal School of Zion students were singing the Christmas and New Year carols.

After the ceremony the students went around the Patriarchate and the Monasteries to sing the carols.

The ceremony of the cutting of the New Year Cake was also held at the Epitropikon, after Matins and the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great on Tuesday morning, January 1/14, 2020, which is the first day of the New Year for the Hagiotaphite Fathers, as well as another cake was cut during lunch time at the refectory of the Patriarchate.

From Secretariat-General

VISITS OF THE CHURCHES AT THE PATRIARCHATE ON THE OCCASION OF CHRISTMAS

On Thursday morning, December 27, 2019/January 9, 2020, the members of the Christian Churches of Jerusalem visited the Patriarchate on the occasion of Christmas. The mutual festal visits have long been established, as they contribute to the creation of a peaceful atmosphere for the good co-operation in order to safeguard the All-holy Shrines and the protection of the Christians of the Holy Land.

The first visit was from the Custodia Terrae Sanctae, the Brotherhood of the Franciscans. Its Hegoumen Rev. Fr. Francesco Paton congratulated H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem for the excellent co-operation they keep in order to safeguard and preserve the Holy Shrines and because He raises His voice for the protection of the Christians of the Holy Land.

His Beatitude replied as follows;

“Your Paternity, dear Father Francesco,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers,

We welcome you, dear Father Francesco, and the members of your Brotherhood, to our Patriarchate, and we thank you for your kind greetings to us as we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our joy finds expression in our worship, as we sing;

Make glad, O ye righteous; greatly rejoice, O ye heavens; ye mountains dance of joy, Christ is born!

(Nativity Matins, Tone 4)

Our joy at this Christmas season is grounded in the faithfulness of God the Logos made flesh, "who has visited us from on high" (Exapostilarion from Nativity Matins). Our joy is made complete in this divine-human encounter, and it is in this joy that we seek to be faithful to the mission that has been entrusted to us by Divine Providence.

Our fraternal gathering in joy today, calls to mind the significance of our united witness that we have made in our diakonia in guarding and serving the Holy Places.

As it has been mentioned, we have accomplished much, and our working together has proved immensely effective. This has been demonstrated in our historic agreement to restore the foundation of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and to restore the Grotto of the Nativity. While to some these may seem simple the care of ancient monuments, we know full well that the significance of the Holy Places goes well beyond bricks and mortar.

In joining together to restore the foundation of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Grotto of the Nativity, we are declaring our absolute commitment to the essential spiritual character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, of which these two magnificent Churches and all the Holy Places are living testimony. And they are a living testimony precisely because they are places of worship and sources of refreshment, nourishment, and consolation that strengthen the Christian faith of the believer, both near and far.

We have also borne collective witness to the historic and sacred rights and privileges of the Christian communities here. Our united voice in opposition to radical elements that threaten the fundamental character of Jerusalem and the Holy

Land as a truly multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society has sounded abroad, and we have the support of governmental and religious leaders around the world. We continue to face huge threats, especially to the Christian Quarter and access to many of our respective administrative centres, as well as to the Holy Sepulchre and the Churches and Monasteries in the Old City, but in our standing together we have sent a clear message that we shall be faithful in our God-given mission.

All this is a sign of great hope to the world. For we are charged in the Holy Land of keeping alive the flame of the Gospel and the values of the Bible in a world that is torn by confusion and destructive activity that is so contrary to the Christmas message of peace and reconciliation that we confess. As Saint Paul says in the First Letter to the Corinthians; "It is to peace that God has called you...for God is a God not of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor. 7:15, 14:33).

As we keep this joyous Christmas feast, let us pray for strength and inspiration from the true Light, who is the Sun of righteousness and the Prince of Peace who has come into the world, and assumed our common human nature from the pure flesh of the Virgin Mary. For "this Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (cf. John 1).

MAY God bless you, dear Father Francesco, the members of your Brotherhood, and the communities committed to your pastoral and spiritual care.

Thank you."

Visits of the other Churches followed, from the Latin Patriarchate, Syrians, Ethiopians, Lutherans and others, who wished His Beatitude peaceful Christmas and a blessed New Year.

The response of His Beatitude to all visitors follows below;

“Beloved Fellow Heads of the Churches,

Your Excellences,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Brothers and Sisters,

Christ is born!

Let us glorify Him!

We welcome you warmly to our Patriarchate in this Christmas season, and we thank you for your greetings to us for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice together in the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, as we say in one of our Orthodox services this time;

How shall I tell of this great mystery?

He who is without flesh becomes incarnate;

The Word puts on a body; the invisible is seen;

He whom no hand can touch is handled;

and He who knows no beginning now begins to be.

(Vespers of the Synaxis of the Theotokos)

Our gatherings on these occasions are more than casual acts of public courtesy. In this holy season, when we visit each other in celebration of the Nativity, and exchange greetings, we are actually doing two things.

First of all, we are showing to the world that, while we do not share a Eucharistic and doctrinal unity, we do share a Christian fellowship in the common mission of our martyria –

our witness – to sacred history and to the life of the Christian communities of the Holy Land. As this common mission has drawn us closer, we have experienced the fruits of this in many ways. We have worked together successfully in the care and renovation of the Holy Places – especially the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We have common cause in the preservation of the historic and sacred rights and privileges of the Churches. We are united in safeguarding our places of worship and sacred properties. We are committed together to ensure the well-being of the Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. And we are never reluctant in affirming the Christian character of Jerusalem. For Jerusalem we shall not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake we shall not rest.

Our gatherings, however, have a deeper significance even than this. For when we come together in such fraternal ways, we are showing to the world the eternal truth that the Incarnation of the Divine Logos transcends all human categories. When we confess the name of our Lord Jesus, He is in the midst of us, as He promises. For our Lord Jesus Christ has assumed our common human nature and revealed our common human destiny, and this message of hope for the world is of paramount importance. Christ is the revelation of divine justice in all its fullness – justice that is united in mercy and love – that goes beyond our human reason. At this Christmas, with our hearts we cry out for justice and peace, and it is God's justice and peace we long for.

Our mission, dear brothers and sisters, is not for ourselves. Our rootedness in the Holy Land is not to promote narrowly parochial or confessional interests. Our rootedness ensure that the Christian presence in the Holy Land is a living and active community, and that the Holy Places are not just relics of the past, but sources of real spiritual nourishment and refreshment.

If we were not here, who would come here? When we think of other ancient Christian places, now bereft of a living

Christian community, places like Cappadocia and Ephesus, for example, while the relics of these places remain, their soul is gone. It is because of our Christian presence here that Jerusalem and the Holy Land are a living place, and not simply a tourist attraction.

The Incarnation of the Divine Logos is our common ground, our shared identity as the Christian Churches and Communities of the Holy Land, and it is all this that we show to the world when we gather as we do today. Let us never, tire in building up this fellowship beyond these ceremonial occasions, so that we may continue to grow in faithfulness to our common mission in maintaining the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

We wish to express our gratitude to you for our work together in the past, and we look forward to extending this work in the years to come.

May God bless you and the communities you serve, and may we all enjoy the blessings of this Holy Christmas season and the promises of the New Year.

Thank you."

A delegation under Geronda Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina visited the Churches of the Syrians, Copts and Ethiopians.

From Secretariat-General

THE FEAST OF CHRISTMAS AT THE

PATRIARCHATE

On the night of Christmas Eve, December 24, 2019/ January 6, 2020, the Episcopal Entourage came down in the Basilica through the Baptisery Gate, led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Methodios of Tabor, for the beginning of Christmas Matins.

During the Service of Matins, around 23.00 p.m. H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos came to the Altar from St. Nikolaos' chapel and started the procedure of "taking the blessing", the Priests followed, and they all put on their liturgical vestments.

Immediately afterward, as the kathisma "Come all ye faithful and see where Christ was born" the formal litany began to the Cave from the Main Gate of the Holy Altar, as His Beatitude was escorted on the right side by Dr. Mohammad Shtayyeh, Prime Minister of the Palestinian Autonomy and on the left by the Greek Consul General, by Mr. Sami Daud, Prime Minister of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and representative of His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan and other representatives of the Palestinian State.

In the Cave, the Gospel of the Nativity was read according to St. Luke: "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus..." (Luke 2:1-20) by His Beatitude in Greek and by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias in Arabic.

This was followed by a prayer and then His Eminence the Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina read His Beatitude's Christmas message in Greek as per below;

"Heaven and earth are made one today,

for Christ is born.

Today God is come upon the earth,

and man is gone up into the Heavens.

Today He Who by nature is invisible,

for man's sake is seen in the flesh."

(Sticheron Idiomelo 2 – Christmas Entreaty)

Today the Church all over the world celebrates the Metropolis of the Feasts, the feast of the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ from the Virgin, in fullness of joy, gleefulness, thanksgiving and doxology.

On this feast the Church gives thanks to God, because being faithful, He fulfilled the promises He made to man through the Prophets. "He sent redemption unto his people" (Psalm 111:9). Being merciful and a philanthropist, "the times of ignorance God winked at" (Acts 17:30) and the times of man's apostasy, and "became an emigrant to the land of those who had emigrated from His grace". God sought the runaway man, the man who had run away from His communion according to St. Cyril of Alexandria (P.G. 75 908 C), found him as a lost sheep, which He reformed, regenerated, vivified, "transformed its elements" and rehabilitated in its former communion with Him in Paradise at the time of creation.

God the Father made this manifest through His Only Begotten Son. "But when the fulness of the time was come, God 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). The Father found it pleasing that "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14). According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria; "God the Word Who was from the beginning in the bosom of the Father, suffered willingly kenosis for us and was made flesh, namely a man, humbled Himself for our sakes and became son of man, so that we might be rich in God the Father through Him, He received a body from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, not a soulless body, but a body with a logical soul (On incarnation, PG 77, 989D & 1092C), in

order to make man “a communicant of the Divine Nature” (2 Peter 1:4). What He received by His Incarnation, namely the whole of humanity, the Lord sanctified with His life, and through the Cross, the Resurrection and His Ascension He raised it to heaven and put it on the right side of God. What a philanthropy! What a favour! What a gift! God came down to earth through Christ and raised man to heaven.

This mystery beyond nature and word took place in a specific time and place, during the reign of Caesar Octavius Augustus in Bethlehem of Judea, in the humble cave therein, with the cooperation and witness of the elements of nature and the Bodiless Hosts. These, according to the, Patriarch of Jerusalem Saint Sophronios, the theologian of the one hypostasis of Christ our God in two natures, wills and actions, were; “the motivated by the stars coming of the Wise Men, the heavenly initiation of the shepherds, the bringing of gifts and the worship” (Synodical Letter PG87, 3176D). Wise Men Kings of Persia guided by a star and shepherds keeping the night watch, invited by Angels with the “Glory to God in the Highest and to earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14), met and fell down in astonishment and worshiped, “for they saw The One without Beginning lying down as a babe in the cave”.

This very beginning of Christ’s mysteries has been received from the eye and ear witnesses and kept intact throughout the centuries by the Church. Through this mystery, the Church educates, shapes, grants peace, vivifies and sanctifies its members. This is proclaimed to those near and afar, to the ends of the universe. For this reason, the Church exercises its peace-making mission all over the world, “the ministry of reconciliation” which was given to us by God (2 Cor. 5:18), “reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Cor. 5:19) through the Incarnation of His Son.

This transcendental and salvific mystery is being preached by the Church of Jerusalem, the First Church of Christianity, at the place where it happened, the God-receiving Cave and the

Basilica above it, which was constructed by the Byzantine Emperors Constantine and Justine, blessing its flock in the Holy Land and at all places around the world, merrily receiving all the pious pilgrims who honour Holy Bethlehem and worship the manger, "where the Uncontainable One hath reclined", and prays for the prosperity, peace and the good state of the whole world.

And for His Excellency the President of the Palestinian State Mr. Mahmoud Abas Abu-Mazen, who honours the Feast, we wish health, strength and longevity, in order to lead His State to the gaining of all His aims, the allotment of all His rights in His native land".

The Representative of the M.M. of the Patriarchate Priest Issa Mousleh read the Christmas message in Arabic. Then His Beatitude, the Archbishops the Priests and the Consul General venerated the star and the manger.

They all went up from the North Gate of the Cave for the litany three times around the five-aisled Basilica, chanting the Christmas Katavasias: "Christ is born give Him glory...", concluding in the middle of the Church for a prayer.

Matins and the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom followed at the Catholicon of the Monastery, led by His Beatitude with co-celebrants the Archbishops of the Patriarchate; Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Methodios of Tabor, Demetrios of Lydda, Aristovoulos of Madaba, and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Paul of Drama from the Church of Greece, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, Priests and Deacons, and the Divine Liturgy at the God-receiving Cave, led by His Eminence Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis. The dismissal of the Divine Liturgy according to the Status Quo was at 3.30 a.m.

A reception followed, with the Patriarchal School Students singing the Christmas carols, and then a festal meal at the

Hegoumeneion, offered by the renovator of the Monastery the Patriarchal Representative Most Reverend Archbishop Theophylaktos of Jordan.

In the morning of Christmas Day, around 9.00 a.m. according to the Status Quo, the Dragouman Archimandrite Mattheos went down to the Cave for veneration.

From Secretariat-General

CHRISTMAS EVE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

The Feast of Christmas, the Metropolis of the Feasts according to the Church Fathers, was celebrated by the Patriarchate according to the old tradition in Bethlehem and at the place of Christ's Nativity in the flesh.

1. On Christmas Eve

On Christmas Eve, Monday morning, December 24, 2019/ January 6, 2020, the Patriarchal Hagiotaphite Entourage marched from the Patriarchate to Jaffa Gate, bells tolling, got on the cars and reached the Holy Monastery of Prophet Elijah which is located midway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos was welcomed there by the Hegoumen of the Monastery Archimandrite Paissios, the customary Israeli State officials of the Political Civil Administration of Bethlehem and Hebron district, by the representatives of the Palestinian State and by the representatives of the flock of the Patriarchate from

Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jalla.

After the veneration at the Church of the Monastery, the prayer and the reception at the Hegoumeneion, the Patriarchal Entourage left, led by the customary five Israeli Police horsemen and reached the check point at Rachel's Tomb.

There, Palestinian Police motorcyclists received the Patriarchal Entourage while on either side of the road faithful Christians, old and young people, children and infants were waiting to receive His Beatitude's blessing. The Patriarchal Entourage reached Bethlehem Square, was received by the Patriarchal Representative Most Reverend Archbishop Theophylaktos of Jordan, the representatives of the Municipality and Prefectures, Hieromonks, and the married parish clergy of the Patriarchate and by many people, while the Byzantine choirs with Mr. Vasilios Gotsopoulos in Greek and Mr. Samour Lawrence in Arabic were chanting the Christmas apolytikion on the way to the humble door of the Basilica.

Upon entering the Basilica, they were welcomed by the Greek Consul General on the right and the Mayor of the town on the left, and marched through the middle of the Basilica, which is a unique right of the the Rum Orthodox, and going up to the ikonostasion, they turned on the right, through St. Nikolaos' chapel and went down to the God-receiving Cave for veneration.

Going up through the north gate of the Cave, the Royal Hours of Christmas were read at the Catholicon, officiated by His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos. The service was completed with the incense offering, and was followed by Vespers and the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, with the dismissal at 3.30 p.m. according to the Status Quo.

This was followed by the marching to the Monastery from the Baptisery Gate, where a festal meal was offered.

In the evening, around 6.00 p.m., with the hospitality of the

renovator of the Monastery, Patriarchal Representative Most Reverend Archbishop Theophylaktos of Jordan, His Beatitude hosted a reception for the Palestinian President His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abas- Abu-Mazen, His Excellency Minister Sami Daoud the representative of His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan the Hashemite Custodian of Christian and Muslim holy sites, His Excellency the Palestinian Prime Minister Dr. Ramzi Khouri Palestinian Minister and Chairman of the Supreme Presidential Committee for Church Affairs as well as many other officials and diplomats.

In addition to wished of a blessed Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year, His Beatitude assured the audience that "In addition to our active local role, and efforts to relay the voice of Jerusalem to the world, the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is exercising its historic role at the international level as well". His Beatitude further stressed that we must view in the strength of Orthodox Unity as the strengthening of the Orthodox faith, and in its weakness, a weakening of our faith.

The complete text of His Beatitude's address is found below;

"Mr. President Mahmoud Abbas

Mr. Prime Minister Dr. Mohammad Shtayyeh

Representative of His Majesty King Abdullah II, Mr. Sami Dawood

Chairman of the Supreme Presidential Committee for Church Affairs, Dr. Ramzi Khoury

Ladies and gentlemen,

We gather today in the birthplace of Christ, the source of light that reached out to the world, the land of the Redeemer, to celebrate the birth of the Messenger of Love and Peace, in

a land that longs for peace, and under a leadership of which the main concern is to achieve peace to ensure a bright future for its people. People that have long sacrificed for their dignity, freedom and the realization of their legitimate dream of independence and self-determination.

We believe that we are able to make peace and live up to its requirements, no matter how difficult it may be. This demands that we transcend ourselves above our own limits, so that we can look at others as God sees them, and accept others as God accepts them, so that we can realize and achieve righteousness and truth for us and others.

This year's Christmas comes, and the Middle East region is overwhelmed by regional tensions and conflicts. In Lebanon, the Lebanese are protesting against the country's worsening economy, in Syria Christmas still holds hope that the country will see a way out of the current impasse, and hopefully this new year will be a year of security for Syrians of all political, ethnic and religious affiliations. Yemen continues its internal war, which we pray to end as soon as possible, and we pray to the Creator to give Iraq and Libya the stability they have lost years ago.

On the bright side, in the Holy Land, we celebrate the legal victory of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in our battle for the defense of Jaffa Gate properties in the Holy City as part of the consecutive battles fought by the "Mother of All Churches" to preserve its heritage, and the authentic Christian presence in the Holy Land, especially in the city of Jerusalem, which God has blessed. In addition to practicing our duty in protecting the "pilgrim route" between the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Church of the Nativity, between the place of Christ's birth and the place of his crucifixion.

We are also celebrating the birth of Christ today as we have completed important housing projects in Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala. In 2020, we are looking forward to executing a

project of 400 apartment and a commercial center in Beit Hanina, Jerusalem, where we have been working on obtaining the necessary licenses for years. This huge project will reduce immigration from the Holy City and contribute to strengthen the resolve of its people. In the same context, we are preparing this year for the restoration of St. Dimitri's School Building in the Old City, to provide a comfortable atmosphere for students and to preserve this historic building; in addition to dozens of charitable projects which our Patriarchate is implementing with the support of its flock in particular and the community in general. And the doors of the Patriarchate shall always remain open for the flock of our community and all the Palestinian and Jordanian peoples Christians be it or Muslim.

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In addition to our active local role, and efforts to relay the voice of Jerusalem to the world, the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is exercising its historic role at the international Orthodox level as well. Our Patriarchate has opened its doors to host our brothers, the heads of the world's Orthodox churches, to meet at our second home in Amman under the Auspices of The Hashemite Custodian of Islamic and Christian Holy Places, your brother Mr. President, His Majesty King Abdullah II, to discuss issues of global Orthodox unity; that in its' strength we view a strengthening to our faith, and in its' weakness, a weakening of our faith.

Your Excellency Mr. President.

Ladies and gentlemen

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14), let us rejoice and pray "This is a great mystery" (Ephesians 5:32) which appeared among us. The message of Christmas is a message of love, humility, peace and a meeting

of hearts. Living the love and its consequences becomes permanent through a true relationship and reconciliation between man and God, between man and his/her fellow man, through a relationship of reconciliation and openness between man and himself/herself. This reconciliation in its three dimensions fills the human heart with peace, the peace of God coming from the highest, which helps people to deal with the daily living pressures and difficulties of life, and to meet the challenges with wisdom and love. The heavenly peace, which we all desire, enables believers, with the support of divine grace, to deal properly with economic, political and social difficulties.

Christmas is the feast of joy. Joy is to find power through forgiveness and love in tears, to reap success from failure, and to achieve ascension through humility and holiness. Christmas is the feast of joy built on the rock of faith.

Your Excellency,

In the name of the "Mother of all churches" and its community, we wish you a glorious Christmas filled with holiness and love, and a blessed new year full of goodness, blessings and peace; and we thank Your Excellency for your heartfelt Christmas message.

We lastly take this opportunity to give thanks to the Supreme Presidential Committee for Church Affairs and its' Chairman, His Excellency Minister Dr. Ramzi Khoury. As well as the Head of the Presidential Bureau Her Excellency Ms. Intisar Amarah, Presidential Protocol Department and the Heads, Generals and Officers of the different Palestinian Security bodies for their tireless efforts and contribution to the success of this year's Christmas processions.

Along with the angels, we pray to God, " Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth ..." (Luke 2:14)."

With the above the Feast of Christmas Eve in Bethlehem ended.

THE ADDRESS OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM AT THE RECEPTION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

The annual New Year reception of the Heads of the Christian Churches and their respective accompanying parties, withheld by the President of the State of Israel, took place at the Presidential Residence on Monday morning, December 17/30, 2019.

The President Mr. Reuben Rivlin and the Minister of Economy and Minister of Development of the Negev and Galilee Mr. Arye Deri welcomed the Heads of the Churches and assured them of their continuous efforts to uphold and encourage the peaceful co-existence of the followers of all religions and ethnicities in Israel. They further highlighted their endeavours for the restoration works and projects around the Baptism Site. Best wishes were extended for a merry Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year 2020.

In accordance to the established customs, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III addressed the President on behalf of all the Christian Churches as follows;

“Your Excellency, Mr. President,

Your Excellency, Rabbi Machluf Deri,

Your Beatitude,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for us, Mr. President, to offer greetings to you on behalf of the Christian communities in this holiday season. At this special time of the year, the whole world looks to the Holy Land in hope and expectation, and we are keenly aware of the responsibilities that we all bear in this land of the divine-human encounter.

As we greet you with the blessings of this season, we wish to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to you for the strong and unwavering support that you give to the integrity of the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

We are particularly thankful for your special efforts in supporting the renovation work at Qasr al-Yahud and around the Baptism Site, for protecting and promoting its restoration, and for upholding the sanctity of this holy place. The Baptism Site continues to be a beacon of peace and a spiritual oasis that embraces the various faith traditions and national identities which make up our beloved Holy Land.

Our work together is crucial, for it enables our Christian communities to welcome pilgrims there without distinction and to nourish their spiritual aspirations. We continue to make incremental progress on the restoration of the site, and look forward to the day when the goodness of peace (to agathon tis Irinis) can be celebrated by all; for as we read in Psalms;

Mercy and truth are met together;

righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth shall spring out of the earth;

and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

(Ps. 85:10-11)

The dynamics of the Holy Land and its Holy Places, which of course includes the Holy City of Jerusalem, also lay upon us various challenges. For instance, the well-known case of Jaffa Gate continues to be a source of anguish to all of us, for it is endangering the unique and sacred character of our Christian Quarter. It jeopardises access to our Churches' headquarters, schools, health facilities and places of worship. In addition, it threatens to restrict and diminish the opportunities for pilgrims to walk the "pilgrim way" to the holy sites and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

We remain steadfast in our resolve to maintain our historic and sacred rights and we acknowledge all the valuable support accorded to us, locally and globally, from those people of good will who uphold the spiritual significance of our beloved Jerusalem and Holy Land.

In our recent gathering with the Minister of Tourism, we recalled the acknowledgement of the Minister that the commitment of the Churches in encouraging pilgrimages has resulted in the significant increase of the number of pilgrims in recent years. This is a matter not just of the economy; more importantly, pilgrimages build stability and help to ensure peaceful co-existence and mutual witness. In this regard we continue to look to the Government of Israel to take into fuller consideration our request to ensure that the Holy Places can provide essential services, like a water supply to Mount Tabor, which is one of the major destinations for the many thousands of pilgrims who visit our Holy Places on a daily basis. We are committed to this common enterprise, and we look forward to the implementation of this matter.

Mr. President, your recent intervention in facilitating the movement of Christians who live in Gaza to visit Bethlehem for the celebration of the Christmas Feast is highly commendable. This has been a matter of pastoral concern to us all, and we are glad that provisions have been made for this.

As we look to the New Year, and the hope of peace that it brings, we recall the words of the Psalmist about Jerusalem:

You will bless the crown of the year because of your goodness; and your fields will be filled with your richness.

(Ps. 65[65]:12)

Please allow us to express our thanks for the teamwork of Mr. Yacoub Salameh and Mr. Sezar Mrarjleh of the Office for Christian Communities, who have worked above and beyond the call of duty to help facilitate our common life.

We wish you, Mr. President, and your family all the blessings of this season of peace. We pray that the New Year will be a year of progress and deepening reconciliation. MAY God bless you in your high responsibilities on behalf of all of us.

Hag Sarameach.

Thank you."

From Secretariat-General

ADDRESS OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM AT THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM OF ISRAEL

On Tuesday evening, December 4/17, 2019, the Ministry of Tourism of Israel held a reception for Christmas and The New Year, given by the Minister of Tourism Mr. Yariv Levi at David Citadel hotel. Invited at the reception were the Heads and members of the Religious Communities in Israel.

H.H. Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos addressed those present as follows;

Mr. Levin,

Mr. Halevi,

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Leaders of the Jewish and Muslim Communities of Jerusalem,

Distinguished Civic Leaders,

Ladies and Gentlemen

As we gather once again in this holiday season, which is bright with light for our three Abrahamic traditions, please allow us to express our greetings to you all on behalf of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The three Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam recognise the importance of Holy Places to the life of faith. And the Holy Land embraces both Holy Places that are

significant to our respective traditions, as well as Holy Places that are venerated by us all. No other religion in the world is infused with such universal religious and spiritual significance as the Holy Land, and especially this Holy City of Jerusalem. We understand that the Holy Places are places of worship and prayer not just for those who come here from around the world as pilgrims, but also for our local communities of faith.

With respect to the Holy Places in general, we know that they are significant not just from a commercial point of view. While the pilgrimage industry is important both for the national and the local economy, this is not its chief value. The chief value of pilgrimage and the Holy Places lies in the fact that they are conducive to peaceful co-existence in our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious landscape. This is especially true of the Holy Places that are common to the Abrahamic traditions, but it is also the case with those places that are uniquely sacred to each one of those traditions.

Holy Places have profound and often ineffable spiritual meaning and significance for all people. Frequently they return again and again over a lifetime to drink of the deep spiritual wells that they find in the Holy Land. The Holy Places make us understand that, whatever our particular religious affiliations, in our common humanity we share the same spiritual longings, the same spiritual needs, the same spiritual aspirations.

Churches around the world accept our role in promoting pilgrimages and devotion to the Holy Places. We encourage devotion both among our local communities and the Churches around the world from which pilgrims come. This role must be taken seriously as a crucial element in the well-being of building and maintaining our peaceful co-existence and mutual witness.

Yet the Churches and Christian communities for the Holy Land cannot do this work alone. We have been trying our best to guarantee that the Holy Places function properly, not only to receive worshipers, but also to provide essential services, such as sufficient drinking water and other amenities that are provided by Ministry of Tourism.

In this spirit please allow us to remind you of the challenges that the monasteries of both the Greek Orthodox and Franciscan Fraternities are facing on Mount Tabor with respect to the supply of water. As you know, this is one of the major pilgrimage destinations.

There has already been an agreement between the Fraternities and the Government to undertake a shared project of a complete renovation of the water system that supplies both monasteries. We urge all those who are responsible for this matter to take this into serious consideration, and we repeat our commitment as partners, in this project.

We are grateful for the support and understanding that the Ministry of Tourism provides in encouraging pilgrimages and assisting in their smooth running, and we look forward to a deepening partnership with you in ensuring that the Holy Places have what they need in essential services to be able to serve the many thousands of pilgrims and locals who visit them throughout the year.

As we look forward to another season in which the eyes of the world will be focused on this Holy City and on the Holy Places of our region, we wish to take this opportunity to express to you Minister, and to all who support you in your work, our very best wishes for this holiday season.

May God bless you and may God bless all the peoples of our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you."

DEACON'S ORDINATION AT THE PATRIARCHATE

The ordination to Deacon of Monk Simeon Spyropoulos who has recently been tonsured and joined the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood was held on Thursday night, November 29/ December 12, 2019, towards Friday November 30/ December 13, day of the commemoration of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-called at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Hierodeacon Simeon is a graduate of the School of Theology of Athens, the Byzantine Choir Leader at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and a teacher at the Patriarchal School of the Holy Zion.

Monk Simeon was ordained by the Most Reverend Archbishop Methodios of Tabor, who admonished the ordained with fatherly words regarding the significance of the sacrament of Priesthood and of the degree of the Deacon as follows;

“Most devout Sub-Deacon Simeon,

The Holy and Sacred Synod on its last meeting chaired by His Holy Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, after your voluntary wish, has decided to join you in the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and promote you to Deacon.

Therefore , by the will of the Almighty and Omnipotent Great God, with the agreement, care and providence of His Holy Beatitude, along with the decision of the Holy and Sacred Synod, you are called today, to receive the first degree of

Priesthood, that of the Deacon, by the placing of the hands of our mediocrity and through the coming down of the All-holy and Ceremonial Spirit, so that from this position you may serve the Church of Christ and its congregation, from your place as a member of our Venerable Hagiotaphite Brotherhood.

This is a great honour for you, as it is for every member of the Brotherhood, but not only this, even more greater are the responsibilities stemming from this position; you are called to deny the world and all worldly things, so that you may become a servant of the ministers of the Sacraments of the Church of Christ, namely of the Bishops and the Priests, according to the commands of the Apostles.

In the course of his life, man has very few days in which he experiences happiness, and one of these days for sure for you, is today. There is a saying that the position one holds does not highlight the man, but on the contrary, man highlights the position. By saying this, I mean that you will fail in your life if you do not believe and serve properly and consciously the One to Whom you have dedicated your life, and if you serve him frivolously.

On the contrary, you will advance and most of all you will be beloved and respected by all, if you believe and confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God, and if you respect yourself first of all, and the ministry you will take on your shoulders, along with the One you will serve.

Saints Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius say that "you are a Theologian if you pray in truth, and if you pray in truth, you are a Theologian", which means, that we only become right Theologians and in truth, when we pray correctly, so that we may benefit ourselves and the others; of course it is then that we are correct and true Theologians.

You see my dear ones, how great an importance the Holy Fathers attribute to the correct manner of prayer, otherwise we strive

in vain, and we do not benefit our listeners in the least, so you should try to be perfect, as much as it can be possible, irreproachable and holy by Grace, before your God, to walk in the path of His commandments all the days of your life, become a bee in collecting what is best and sweetest and reject whatever is harmful.

St. Paul, the Apostle of the Nations says: "if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully" (2 Tim. 2:5), consequently our lives, of both clergy and laity, is a struggle enflamed by the flashing arrows of the devil, in order to succeed in the purpose pursued, that of the salvation of our souls.

Certainly you will face difficulties; do not startle, do not flinch; with your bodily eyes and the eyes of your soul gaze towards the Horrendous Golgotha and look at the crucified love, our Lord Jesus Christ, and then you will realize for which reason they put a crown of thorns on His head, but through His sacrifice on the Cross, His three-day burial and finally with His Resurrection from the dead He was justified and managed to put to shame His crucifiers and accusers.

Most devout sub-Deacon Simeon,

As a Hagiotaphite and guardian of the Holy Places which have been sanctified by the Nativity in the flesh, teaching, Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, you are called to be a depositary of the Sacred Consignment in this citadel of Christianity, of whose rampart you owe to be a sleepless guard and ready for any sacrifice, in order to hand it in to the next generation intact, unscathed and unalterable.

As you stand before the gate of this Holy Altar, before you receive this awesome ministry and the heavenly powers, which according to St. Paul "is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Romans 9:16),

kneel in humility and entreat the Almighty God, the only One who can remit sins, that He may look favourably upon your weaknesses and send down His All-holy Spirit, just like the day of Pentecost, on you, His humble servant.

Always commemorate your parents in the flesh, who stand by your side at this hour and are surely praying for you and rejoice with your happiness and promotion. Commemorate your relatives, teachers, friends, and if you have any, your enemies. Commemorate also our Father and Patriarch Theophilos III, who has benefited you with much love, and of our Hagiotaphite Brotherhood.

And now, the time has come, that you may come forth with a pure heart and a humble spirit, to receive the grace of the All-holy and Ceremonial Spirit through the placing of hands of our mediocrity; therefore enter into the Holy of Holies, into the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, from which the Light of Life gushes out.

Therefore, rejoicing, enter in your Lord's joy.

On 30-11-2019, Feast of the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-called".

The ordination was performed with the invocation of the Divine Grace through the placing of the Archbishop's hands.

At that time and with the exclamation "Axios" by the Archbishop, the Hagiotaphite Fathers, the students of the School of Zion, Monks and Nuns along with his family and friends, who honoured the ordained also exclaimed "Axios, Axios".

After the Divine Liturgy, the ordained offered a reception to the ordaining Archbishop and all who honoured him at the Office of Geronda Sacristan, Most Reverend Archbishop Isidoros of Hierapolis.

The following morning, the ordained came to the Patriarchate, thanked His Beatitude and received His blessing.

From Secretariat-General

MONK'S TONSURE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Friday morning, November 23/ December 6, 2019, the tonsure of the Byzantine Choir Leader of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Novice Monk Constantine Spyropoulos took place at the Patriarchate and in the Pentecost chapel by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos. The tonsure was held after the approval of the Novice's application by the Holy and Sacred Synod.

His Beatitude named the tonsured Monk Simeon. The change of the name in the monastic tonsure denotes the change of the manner of living of the tonsured ones.

After the tonsure His Beatitude praised the new Monk Simeon for his zeal over the last two years in his service at the choir of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and in his teaching as a Theology teacher and Manager at the Patriarchal Boarding School of Zion, and admonished him in order to continue and fulfill his ministry serving as a Hagiotaphite Monk and shortly as a Deacon at the Patriarchate and the All-holy Shrines.

From Secretariat-General

CHRISTMAS BAZAAR IN QATAR

The Christmas Bazaar with an artistic program from various local traditions was held at the courtyard between the Bishop's residence and the Holy Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Qatar on Friday, November 29, 2019.

The artistic program included Christmas chants by the children of the Orthodox Arabic-speaking Sunday Schools, the Greek-speaking Sunday School from the Russian-speaking, the mixed Choir the Community of Philippines, the Dancing Association of the Greeks living in Qatar, who danced traditional dances wearing Greek costumes and the Association of the Arab-speaking Community of the H. Archdiocese, who danced traditional dances and sang traditional songs wearing traditional costumes.

The Orthodox Associations of the Ladies, Youth, and other members of the flock prepared handmade Christmas ornaments, gifts and merchandise which were offered for sale in aid of the mission of the Archdiocese. The event also featured a wide variety of Arabic, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Moldavian, Russian and Ukrainian cuisine, offering a variety of dishes, a donation of various companies and ladies of the flock.

The event was honored by the presence of the Ambassadors in Qatar, of Romania Mrs. Anka Michai, of Moldova Mr. Valentin Makari and the Consuls of Greece Mr. Ioannis Zelomosidis, of Serbia Mr. Bojan Novakovic and of Georgia Mrs. Aleksandra Jiskaviani, as well as representatives of other doctrines in Doha.

The high turnout of the Orthodox in Qatar and other Christian Communities' members confirmed the success of this event.

THE 14TH ENTHRONEMENT ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS

On Friday, November 9/22, 2019, a Doxology took place at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for the 14th Election and Enthronement Anniversary of His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

The Doxology was officiated by H.H.B. with co-celebrants the Hagiotaphite Archbishops and Hieromonks, Arab-speaking Priests, Deacons and Monks of all the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate, at the presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos and with the participation of a noble congregation from Jerusalem, other Communities of the Arab-speaking flock of the Patriarchate and pilgrims.

After the Doxology, bells tolling, the Patriarchal Entourage returned to the Patriarchate Headquarters.

Geronda Secretary-General, His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina addressed His Beatitude as follows;

“Your Beatitude Father and Master,

The Mother of Churches is rejoicing today in gleefulness on the quite important and happy occasion of Your Beatitude's Enthronement at the glorious Throne of St. James the Brother of God and First Hierarch of Jerusalem.

This was accomplished through the devoted endeavours of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood for the preservation of the Status Quo of the Holy Land and of course of the Old City of Jerusalem, which had been undermined by the illegal agreements of mortgaging its land property of incalculable value. With these endeavours, fourteen years ago, in 2005, the Brotherhood through its representative the Holy and Sacred Synod, unanimously and by normal voting "placed up on the lamppost" Your Beatitude as the worthy Shepherd and navigator of the Primeval Church of Jerusalem. The election of Your Beatitude and the subsequent Enthronement with the participation of all Orthodox Churches and with the recognition of all local governments, dispelled the vortex which severely shook but did not submerge the vessel of the Church of Jerusalem and tightened the joints of its mystical body in the bond of peace.

This event was celebrated today as it should, with the festive thanksgiving Doxology in full participation of Monks, clergy and laity at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. And now, in this historic reception hall of the Patriarchate, we rend Your Beatitude the worthy praise for all the "pious, righteous and just things" You have accomplished for the All-holy Shrines, the Brotherhood and the flock.

First of all, as far as the Shrines are concerned, Your Beatitude at all times both in words and in actions and toward all directions has underlined that they are a special blessing, the special and characteristic feature and the irrefutable privilege of the Church of Jerusalem as places of the Divine appearance of Christ, and for this reason, the mission of the Brotherhood is to preserve and serve them as living liturgical places for the teaching and the

sanctification of the many noble pilgrims who visit them. Considering the All-holy Shrines a heritage not only of the Brotherhood but of our nation, they have been renovated, as the Sacred Edicule, the roof of the Basilica of Bethlehem, the Holy Monastery of St. John the Baptist by the river Jordan, the current renovation of the God-receiving Cave, and our rights toward them have bravely been protected, such as the right of the presence of the second guard in the interior of the Edicule of the All-holy Tomb for the reception of the Coptic and Syrian Communities after the Divine Liturgy on the Vigil of Easter and the right of the Elevation of the Holy Cross at the place of its finding, by the against the Status Quo treacherous manner of the Armenians.

The vivid interest of Your Beatitude for the Rum Orthodox Arab-speaking flock and the detailed watch over its related issues has been noted over this period, through the frequent significant funding of the Patriarchate for the completion of the Holy Church of the Nativity of Theotokos in the Community of Sahnin, through the offering of a wood-carved ikonostasion made in Cyprus as well as of the Holy Church of Saints Constantine and Helen in Koufr Smea in the district of Acre, of the recently consecrated Holy Church of St. Savvas the Sanctified in Yafat Nasra near Nazareth, and of the Holy Church of St. Moses the Ethiopian in Rafidia of Nablus, in Samaria.

Along with the other brotherly Orthodox Churches, Your Beatitude has made many efforts to keep the cooperation determined by the tradition of our Orthodox Church for the unity in Christ, projecting the dialogue in wisdom and mediocrity as the solution for the occasionally arising Inter-Orthodox issues. Appreciating this attitude of Yours, our Brotherly Church of Russia has offered You the prize Alexei II for the year 2018, "for outstanding activities in strengthening the unity of the Orthodox Christian nations and for upholding and promoting Christian values in the life of

society". This happened only yesterday in Your visit to Moscow, where You also met with His Excellency the President of Russia Mr. Putin and requested His support for the Christians of the Holy Land and of the Middle East.

Since the beginning of Your Patriarchal Office, the epicenter of the efforts and actions of Your Beatitude has undoubtedly been the by all means preservation of the Biblically established and internationally recognized Status Quo of the Old City of Jerusalem. This Status Quo is being violated and distorted in the case of the prevailing as legitimate of the long-term leases of the Jaffa Gate Hotels of the Patriarchate, which lack transparency and justice and are full of financial corruption. For the abolishment of these agreements, Your Beatitude has energetically worked toward the awareness and mobility of people and organizations, members of influence abroad, as well as within this country. Worth saying is the initiative of Your Beatitude last July this year, to organize a peaceful march of all the local Churches from our Patriarchate to Jaffa Gate in front of the Imperial and Petra hotels, and the subsequent prayer with the reading of a Message conveying internationally our request to preserve Jaffa Gate as the Gate for the entrance of the Heads of Churches of the Old City of Jerusalem to their Seats and as the natural access point of the Christian pilgrims to the Holy Sepulchre, as it has been for centuries.

Encouraged with these accomplished things, Your Beatitude, and warmly congratulating You, the Hagiotaphite Fathers join You in the good fight for the success and the help of God for all initiatives You undertake, and the materialization of all Your aims for the good of our Brotherhood and of the Church of Holy Jerusalem.

Raising my glass in a toast, Your Beatitude, on behalf of the Holy and Sacred Synod and all Hagiotaphite Fathers, I wish You many happy returns, in health, gleefulness, peace and stability, full of Divine strength and enforcement, so that

You may increase and enrich Your Patriarchal Office that has been entrusted to You by the Divine Providence, for the benefit and the praise of the blessed nation of the Rum Orthodox and for the Glory of our Trinitarian God.”

Likewise, the Consul General of Greece Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos and the representatives of the Orthodox Churches of the Patriarchate of Moscow and the Patriarchate of Romania addressed His Beatitude.

His Beatitude replied to all with the following words;

“Your Excellency Mr. Consul General of Greece,

Reverend Holy Fathers and Brothers,

Beloved Christians,

Noble pilgrims

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

The appearing Church of the incarnate God Word in the place of His “provision” (Psalm 132:15) and “of habitation” (Psalm 132:13), our Holy Church of Jerusalem, rejoices today on the completion of the fourteen-year-old ministerial navigation of Our Mediocrity since the taking over of the lot of the ministry (Acts 1:25)] of the Apostolic and Patriarchal Throne of St. James the Brother of God and First Hierarch of Jerusalem.

This sacred and ecclesiastical event possesses a special meaningful significance for the centuries-old expanding mystical body of Christ, the Church, on the one hand, and for its life in the world on the other. And it should be noted that according to St. Paul, the faithful members of the Church are called “fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19) and that “they dwell on earth

but actually live in heaven” according to the epistle to Diognitos(Vol. 2, p. 253).

Because of these, we went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, escorted by the Reverend members of our Venerable Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, where we rendered a thanksgiving Doxology to our Holy Trinitarian God, Who has been glorified “through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever” (1 Peter 4:11).

Today’s celebrated fourteen-year-old enthronement anniversary does not refer to Our unworthiness, but to the established institution of the Church which has been founded by the redeeming blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, on which foundation “other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11) as St. Paul preaches. And according to St. Ignatios of Antioch; “the apostolic” and “episcopal” throne of the Church encompasses a place of God; “Heads of the Bishops in the place of God, and of the Priests in the place of the synod of the apostles and of the deacons...who have been entrusted the ministry of Jesus Christ” (Epistle to Magnesians 6).

Our Patriarchal, monastic and Pastoral ministry so far, on the Hierarchic and Apostolic throne of St. James the Brother of God, of the Church of Jerusalem, has only one sole purpose, the preservation of the consignment of the healthy faith that has been handed over to Us by the Apostolic succession, and the upholding of the word of truth, and especially of the care of the Christian flock that has been entrusted to us, according to the teaching of St. Paul; “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). Moreover, the preservation of the All-holy Shrines as places of the logic worship and a source of healing, where pilgrims flock from all ends of the earth for their spiritual refreshment, hearkening to the psalmist

saying; "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:1-2).

Needless to say that the privileges and sovereign rights of the noble and royal nation of the "Rum Orthodox" Christians on the All-holy Shrines, is a sacred duty in its "ab antiquo" mission in the Holy Land. Therefore, every effort is made to all directions, political and diplomatic, local and international governments to respect the existing multi-cultural and inter-religious Status Quo which has been established by international treaties, for both the biblical shrines and the Holy City of Jerusalem (which on itself is a universal pilgrimage).

Nevertheless, we submit to the advice of the God-inspired Paul; "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3), we have not wasted any time working in all humility for the keeping of the unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church of ours, "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Tim. 3:9).

And we say this because Jerusalem, and therefore the Church of Jerusalem, being the primeval and inexhaustible source of the blood of righteousness, of peace and of eternal life, namely of Christ, is the point of reference of reconciliation of all of us, as St. Paul preaches by saying: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10).

This fourteenth enthronement anniversary of our Mediocrity calls us not to the boast of the things of our own, but that we "may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God" (Romans 15:17). "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience" (2 Cor. 1:120. Calling upon this testimony of our conscience, we shall not cease to strive for the good fight in the vineyard of our God and Saviour

Jesus Christ, namely in His Church, hearkening to the Lord's words: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

Co-witnesses to this annunciation of the testimony of Christ's light and of the glory of God the Father are our co-workers the reverend and dearest Hagiotaphite Fathers and Brothers, Archbishops, Hieromonks, Deacons and Monks, who are devoted body and soul to our sacred mission.

Let us therefore entreat God the Father of lights and of truth "to guide our steps to the working of His commandments" through the intercessions of our Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and through the intercessions of our Holy Father Nectarios of Pentapolis. May the Grace of the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb of our Resurrected Saviour Christ fortify all of us who serve in the ministry of the All-holy shrines and in the pastoring of our Christian flock.

With all these, we call upon all who prayed along with us and honoured us with their presence in this festive enthronement anniversary, wishing them strength from on high, the grace of the All-holy Tomb, patience and every blessing from God, expressing our warm thanks to all who addressed us; Geronda Secretary-General, Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, who spoke on behalf of the members of the Holy and Sacred Synod and our Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, His Excellency the Consul General of Greece Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos, Reverend Archimandrite Dometianos, representative of our Holy Brotherly Church of Russia, who conveyed the wishes of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Moscow Cyril, Reverend Archimandrite Theophilos, representative of the Holy Church of Romania, who conveyed the wished of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Romania Daniel, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, who spoke on behalf of our flock in Nazareth, the Most Reverend Archbishop Damascene of Joppa, who spoke on behalf of our flock in Joppa, Reverend Fr.

Charalambos Bandour, who spoke on behalf of St. James Cathedral, Reverend Archimandrite Artemios and Fr. Alexander and Fr. Igor who spoke on behalf of the Russian-speaking Community in Ber-Sheba, the Most Reverend Archbishop Christophoros of Kyriakoypolis, who spoke on behalf of our flock in Jordan and on behalf of the Respected Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Mr. Ode Kawas, General Magager of the Education Committee in Palestine, Reverend Fr. Boulos, who spoke on behalf of the Community of Beit Jalla and our dearest Steward Fr. Savvas, who spoke on behalf of Beit Sahour, Mr. Abu Aeta and Mr. Yousef Nasser, and all participating in this festivity of the Enthronement anniversary.

To the health of all of you!"

From Secretariat-General