

CHRISTMAS DAY VISITS OF THE WESTERN AND PRE-CHALCEDONIAN CHURCHES

On Tuesday, December 27/ the feast day of Saint Stephen the First Martyr (Old Calendar: January 9, 2024) the following Churches visited our Patriarchate for the celebration of our Christmas to relay modest holiday greetings:

1. The Franciscan Brotherhood – Custody of the Holy Land
2. The Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem
3. The Coptic Church in Jerusalem
4. The Syrian Church in Jerusalem
5. The Ethiopian Church in Jerusalem
6. The Anglican Church in Jerusalem
7. The Lutheran Church
8. The Brotherhood of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

All these representatives of our churches, around one hundred, were received by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, Who thanked them for their visit on our Christmas Feast, saying that this visit is also held in memory of the very important event of the meeting of Pope Paul VI with the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, in Jerusalem in 1964. Continuing in the spirit of the beginning of this Theological Dialogue, we, the local churches in Jerusalem, give a common witness against the various challenges and especially against the victims of the Christian flock and every suffering soul from the ongoing war in Gaza.

From Secretariat-General

MONK'S TONSURE AND NOVICES' CASSOCK BLESSING AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On the 13th/26th of December 2023, in the chapel of the Holy Pentecost in the hall of the Patriarchate, H.H.B our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos held a monk's tonsure for novice Andreas Hatzistabulidis, giving him the name Alexander. The new monk has ministered successfully in Praetorium, Gethsemane and Bethlehem. At the same time, His Beatitude blessed the monastic cassocks for novices Alexander and Christos who have been serving at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

His Beatitude addressed the new monk and the cassock-clad novices with words of encouragement, underlining the honour and the responsibility of a monk's membership in the Order of the "Spoudaioi" (Studios) of the Holy Sepulchre.

In the spirit of these words and in view of the Christmas Feast, His Beatitude wished the monk and the novices for strength from above for a worthy Holy Sepulchre witness to this thirsty world, inspired by the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ.

From Secretariat-General

**PATRIARCHS AND CHURCH LEADERS
STATEMENT REGARDING MEETING
WITH HERZOG**



PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF LOCAL CHURCHES OF JERUSALEM

Press Release: Patriarchs and Church Leaders in Jerusalem Issue Clarification Regarding Meeting with Herzog

**Jerusalem
23-12-2023**

Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem have issued a clarification statement regarding their recent meeting with Israeli President Isaac Herzog two days ago. The statement emphasized that the meeting was not a mere exchange of Holiday Season pleasantries but aimed at conveying the global ecclesiastical stance, demanding, on behalf of Christians worldwide, an immediate cessation of the bloodshed in Gaza. Additionally, it addressed the plight of civilians, the restrictions on movement imposed in the West Bank, especially those around Bethlehem during the holiday season.

The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches highlighted that they promptly issued a statement upon the conclusion of the meeting with President Herzog to outline its objectives and proceedings. However, certain Israeli media outlets, driven by political motivations, chose to focus on marginal aspects of the meeting, neglecting the core of the meeting and the unified statement released by the Church Leaders on the matter. Unfortunately, some social media influencers adopted the distorted narrative presented by these Israeli media outlets, leading to a complete misrepresentation of the meeting and its goals.

The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches reiterated that their consistent message since the beginning of the war on Gaza is: an immediate and permanent humanitarian ceasefire, the protection of civilians, and the safeguarding of institutions providing services to them. They emphasized that this stance was at the core of the meeting, and anything discussed outside this framework aims to tarnish the image of the Christians and the Churches, serving political agendas that the churches abstain from engaging in or addressing.

+++ Patriarchs and Heads of Churches of Jerusalem

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF THE HOLY LAND CHURCHES UNITE IN URGENT PLEA FOR PERMANENT HUMANITARIAN CEASEFIRE IN GAZA

Jerusalem, The Holy Land

21-12-2023

In a powerful demonstration of unity and Christian values, His Beatitude Theophilos III, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, delivered a compelling speech on behalf of all the Patriarchs and Heads of churches in the Holy Land, during the annual holiday meeting with President Isaac Herzog of Israel, demanding an immediate cessation of military activity in Gaza.

Addressing the critical issues facing the Holy Land, the Patriarch of Jerusalem emphasized the common moral values inherent in the great monotheistic faiths. He underscored the sanctity of every human life, the imperative for dignity, and the pursuit of freedom, safety, and security for all residents of the diverse Holy Land.

At the heart of the Patriarch's address was a poignant call to action – an urgent plea for an immediate permanent humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza. The leaders of the Holy Land Churches, united in their commitment to peace, recognize the deepening humanitarian crisis and the suffering of innocent civilians caught in the midst of conflict. Their appeal resonates as a compassionate response to the ongoing violence

that plagues the region.

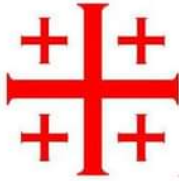
Rejecting the notion of a military solution, the Heads of Churches advocated for dialogue and reconciliation as the only sustainable paths to peace. The call for a permanent ceasefire is not only an expression of moral values but a collective rejection of cycles of violence that have proven ineffective in bringing lasting peace.

Amidst the challenges posed by the ongoing conflict, the leaders of the churches of the Holy Land stress the importance of acting swiftly, urging that no more innocent lives be lost. His Beatitude's speech embraces the season of light and hope, expressing a collective aspiration for a better future where shared moral and spiritual values foster prosperity for all.

As the Holy Land enters the holiday season, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem extend warm wishes for peace and goodwill. Their collective hope is for a workable and lasting peace to be realized in the coming New Year, bringing solace to the Holy Land.

From Secretariat-General

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM THE PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM 2023



PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE OF THE PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM 2023

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."
(Isaiah 9:6)*

We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, convey our Christmas greetings to the faithful around the world in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, born here in Bethlehem more than two-thousand years ago.

In extending these greetings, we are well aware that we do so during a time of great calamity in the land of our Lord's birth. For over the past two-and-a-half months, the violence of warfare has led to unimaginable suffering for literally millions in our beloved Holy Land. Its ongoing horrors have brought misery and inconsolable sorrow to countless families throughout our region, evoking empathetic cries of anguish from all quarters of the earth. For those caught in the midst of such dire circumstances, hope seems distant and beyond reach.

Yet it was into such a world that our Lord himself was born in order to give us hope. Here, we must remember that during the first Christmas, the situation was not far removed from that of today. Thus the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph had difficulty finding a place for their son's birth. There was the killing of children. There was military occupation. And there was the Holy Family becoming displaced as refugees. Outwardly, there was no reason for celebration other than the birth of the Lord Jesus.

Nevertheless, in the midst of such sin and sorrow, the Angel appeared to the shepherds announcing a message of hope and joy for all the world: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11).

In Christ's Incarnation, the Almighty came to us as Immanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23), in order to save, redeem, and transform us. This was to fulfill the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "The LORD has anointed me . . . to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor" (Isaiah 61:1–2a; Luke 4:18–19).

This is the divine message of hope and peace that Christ's Nativity inspires within us, even in the midst of suffering. For Christ himself was born and lived amid great suffering. Indeed, he suffered for our sake, even unto death upon a cross, in order that the light of hope would shine into the world, overcoming the darkness (John 1:5).

It is in this spirit of Christmas that We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, denounce all violent actions and call for their end. We likewise call upon the people of this land and around the globe to seek the graces of God so that we might learn to walk with each other in the paths of justice, mercy, and peace. Finally, we bid the faithful and all those of goodwill to work tirelessly for the relief of the afflicted and towards a just and lasting peace in this land that is equally sacred to the three Monotheistic Faiths.

In these ways, the hope of Christmas will indeed be born once again, beginning in Bethlehem and extending from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth—thus realizing the comforting words of Zechariah, that "the dawn from on high will break upon us to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, guiding our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78–79).

—The Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem

JERUSALEM HEADS OF CHURCHES JOIN THEIR VOICES WITH KING OF JORDAN FOR THE NECESSITY OF A CEASEFIRE AND ENDING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, along with His Excellency Sheikh Azzam Al-Khatib the Head of the Muslim Waqf, led a delegation of Jerusalem and Jordan religious leaders in a meeting with His Majesty King Abdulla II of Jordan at the Al-Husseiniya Palace, yesterday, Wednesday.

In the meeting, His Majesty affirmed the position of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan expressing their firm and clear stance towards the Palestinian issue and the aggression against the people of the Gaza Strip as well as stressing that “there is no retreat from the Kingdom’s positions on the necessity of standing united” in defending the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem.

In this context, His Majesty expressed his rejection and condemnation of the military targeting of places of worship, including mosques and churches in Gaza, noting that there are vast numbers of civilians who have sought refuge there for protection, and they need assistance that Jordan seeks to deliver in every way possible. He also warned of the seriousness of the repercussions of the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip because of the Israeli military assault.

For his part, Patriarch Theophilos praised the Hashemite

Custodianship of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, as well as His Majesty's continued efforts to preserve the existing historical and legal Status Quo in the Holy City. His Beatitude further stressed the importance of protecting the historical coexistence between Muslims and Christians in the Holy Land, pointing out the great progress in the second phase of the comprehensive restoration project for the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, within the Hashemite reconstruction of Christian sanctities.

Regarding the humanitarian crisis that continues to deepen on a daily basis in Gaza, His Beatitude stressed that the Heads of Churches in the Holy Land are calling for an immediate ceasefire to mitigate the effects of the deteriorating humanitarian catastrophe in the Strip and ensure the delivery of vital aid to innocent people who today lack the most basic necessities of life.

Patriarch Theophilos also called for ending the cycle of violence and building on the common values and aspirations among peoples, to reach a future in which the Palestinian people live in dignity like other peoples of the world.

With the advent of the glorious Christmas season, His Majesty warned against restrictions on Christians in the Holy Land during the Christmas services in Bethlehem, stressing that Jordan will make efforts with the international community to enable them to carry out their prayers with the freedom and dignity that the community deserves.

The meeting was attended by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah, and His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed, Chief Advisor to His Majesty the King for Religious and Cultural Affairs and His Majesty's Personal Envoy. The delegation also included His Beatitude's Card. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, who in his address to His Majesty said that: we, with you, seek by all means to encourage the world and society. The international community

calls for an immediate halt to the war. It is certain that the intervention of the international community will be necessary to help create a new and realistic perspective for the future of Gaza and the Palestinians. This perspective cannot be achieved without the central role of Jordan and His Majesty. For his part, the Director General of the Endowments, Sheikh Muhammad Azzam Al-Khatib, addressed His Majesty, saying, "You are the custodians of the Islamic and Christian sanctities, and you have proven to all that you are protectors of the nation. Your positions are characterized by clarity, firmness, and consistency in your concern for its interests and Islamic and Christian sanctities, and you considered that to be red lines that cannot be crossed."

In addition, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and Expatriate Affairs, Ayman Al-Safadi, said that Jordan submitted a comprehensive plea to the International Court of Justice that dealt with what is happening in Jerusalem, including attempts to violate the historical and legal Status Quo in Islamic and Christian holy sites, and attempts to displace Palestinian Jerusalemites from their homes.

From Secretariat-General



Photo credit: The Royal Hashemite Court



photo credit: The Royal Hashemite Court



photo credit: The Royal Hashemite Court



photo credit: The Royal Hashemite Court

THE CELEBRATION OF THE 18TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ELECTION AND ENTHRONEMENT OF HIS BEATITUDE OUR FATHER AND PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

THEOPHILOS III

On Wednesday, November 9/22, 2023, at 10:30 p.m. The 18th anniversary of the election and enthronement of His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III was celebrated.

Due to this event, a Doxology was performed in the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, presided over by H.H.B. with the co-celebration of the High Priests of the Throne, Holy Sepulchre Hieromonks, Elders from the parishes of Israel and from Palestine, Archdeacon Mark and other deacons. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon on the right and Mr Angelos Yiannopoulos on the left, in the presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem, Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos and members of the Greek community.

After the Doxology, the whole congregation went to the Patriarchate Reception Hall, where the Geronda Chief Secretary, His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina addressed His Beatitude as follows:

“Your Beatitude Father and Master,

The city of Gaza is honoured by its mention in the book of the Acts of the Apostles of the early Church. ” A man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians” was headed to Gaza, when the Spirit of the Lord informed the apostle Philip to approach his chariot, preach to him and baptize him when they found water (c.f. Acts 8, 27-39). Subsequently, from AD 306, Gaza and its surroundings were

the area of missionary, monastic and social activity of Saint Hilarion the Great, disciple of Saint Anthony. Between the years 395 and 421 AD Saint Porphyrios, who came from Thessalonica to the Holy Land, was ordained bishop of Gaza, and established Christianity in Gaza through many struggles. On these foundations from 743 AD, Cosmas of Jerusalem, the melodist Bishop of Maiuma of Gaza, developed his pastoral work for ten years.

This city, after such a glorious Christian cultural heritage, survived the political conquests and mutations of history, alas! today it is plagued and desolated by hostilities, the consequences of which are the ruins of building complexes, the loss of lives of innocent civilians, women and children, "of which there was no number", which cause a heart-rending sigh, including the 18 victims of those who took refuge at the holy Monastery of Saint Porphyrios of our Patriarchate.

Under the shadow of these gloomy and tragic events and in a spirit of participation towards the tested people and the Greek-Orthodox Arabic-speaking flock in Gaza, the Patriarchate and the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood within it is not celebrating solemnly this year. Instead, a special memorial is being made ecclesiastically, through Doxology at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, for the event of the election and enthronement of Your Holy Beatitude at the glorious Throne of the Mother of Churches, by God's blessing and the unanimous votes of the Holy Synod, eighteen years ago.

Continuing our ecclesiastical Synaxis in this historic hall of the Patriarchate, we consider it worthy and fair to mention that this honourable but also multi-responsible Patriarchal Pastorate was taken over by His Beatitude with the burden of illegal agreements on His shoulders, from those who promised an incalculable amount of material and cultural value property of the Patriarchate, that is the Imperial and Petra hotels of the Jaffa Gate. For the cancellation of these agreements, Your adamant Beatitude went to court and other battles which

demanded huge sums of money.

As one of the priorities of Your Work, Your Beatitude had the preservation of this property under the full ownership management of the Patriarchate, mainly to ensure the always unimpeded access of Christian leaders and pilgrims to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. You did not neglect the care of the dignity of the Church, through the participation of our Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood in the conservation works carried out along with the Franciscans and the Armenians of the floor of the Rotunda and the area below the Seven Arches and to the south of it. Moreover, the preservation and restoration of the old Russian-made chandeliers by special conservators from Russia, as well as donors, under the direction and cooperation of the icon-conservator from Cyprus Mr Stavrou Andreas. Mr Stavrou continues his conservation work by extension to the antiquities of the Library of the Monastery of the Holy Cross and the lower hall of the Patriarchate and to the icons of the Gallery for the purpose of their appropriate placement in the museum which is being prepared to be housed in the preserved and renovated house of the Blessed Patriarch Diodorus.

It should also be noted that the efforts of Your Beatitude were intense in rallying and mobilizing the Christian Churches of Jerusalem in a common dynamic Christian witness under the leadership of the Patriarchate, to protect the rights of Christians in their native Holy Land from verbal and physical abuse by the radical extreme Israeli elements, one of which happens to be the ongoing occupation of the property of the Patriarchate belonging to the School and the cemetery of Holy Zion.

To the Consuls of other visitors of various countries and those of the European Union who visited the Patriarchate without interruption, you put a great effort into their understanding and consideration of the factor of the religions, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, and their doctrines, as the basis for the solution of the old political Palestinian

problem, wherever the status of the Old City of Jerusalem is preserved.

Through Your actions, Your Beatitude, you promoted the Patriarchate to the position it deserved as the most ancient Christian institution of the greatest religious, cultural and pacifying offering and scope and beyond the limits of its jurisdiction in the Holy Land. This is inferred from our visit, beginning last September, to the Exhibition organized in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, to the Ecumenical Centre of the W.C.C. in Geneva, where you presented the renovated Basilica of the Nativity of Bethlehem last year as the heart and the shield protecting the identity of the Christian and the entire Palestinian people. This is also inferred from our visit to the European Union in Brussels, during which you reiterated the need to protect the rights of the Christians of the Holy Land, not least through your participation as an honoured guest at the coronation of the King of the United Kingdom Charles III with oil consecrated to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Also, from our recent visit to Pope Francis in the Vatican, when you once again appealed for the protection of the threatened Christians of the Holy Land and expressed the commitment of our Patriarchate to mediate for a dialogue for the sake of peace between Russia and Ukraine and for the sake of the dialogue of avoiding the consolidation of the schism in the disturbed unity of the Orthodox Churches.

In the dialogue with the other Christian Churches, our Patriarchate also continued to participate in order to approach and present, despite the existing doctrinal differences, a common Christian witness to the world suffering from various problems and asking for comfort. Proof of this is the dialogue hosted by the Anglican Church between the Orthodox and the Anglican Church, which hastily completed its work, due to the onset of the war in Gaza.

It is worth noting that since the start of this disastrous

war, Your Beatitude has continuously consulted with the other local Churches for joint calls for a cease-fire and declarations of condemnation of the attacks, from which the innocent victims were numerous. The victims of the Monastery of Saint Porphyrios, for the repose of the souls of whom Your Beatitude held a memorial service in the Church of the Resurrection and the victims of the Gaza Hospital of the Anglican Church in Jerusalem.

The worthily commemorated here today, Your Beatitude, are only a few contributions from the rich Pastoral activity of our Patriarchate and Your inspired guidance and prudent government management for the strengthening and encouragement of us, the Holy Sepulchre Fathers, and the clergy and the people, so that we may continue united with each other and with You in our struggle for the conquest of what is best and perfect for the praise of our blessed race and the glory of our Triune God.

Raising the glass, Your Beatitude, on behalf of the Brotherhood and the Holy Synod, I wish You many returns in good health, unbroken and stable, undisturbed, so that you may rejoice and be glad when you see the Church of Zion, the Throne of which God bestowed upon You, heading from success to success, from progress to progress and from glory to glory. So be it.”

The Consul General Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos addressed His Beatitude as follows:

“Your Beatitude,

I have the special honour to express to You the warmest congratulations of the Hellenic Republic and mine personally on the 18th anniversary of your enthronement. My colleagues and I are happy to celebrate this glorious anniversary together with the Patriarchate, the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood and your Flock, filled with profound respect for Your Beatitude and gratitude for Your struggle and the precious

work You are doing, since the blessed day on which You ascended the holy Throne of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

No one forgets that You took on this task under conditions that were among the most demanding and dangerous in the modern history of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. But the Church always finds the strength and wisdom to face even the most serious crises. In the long and arduous journey since then, You and the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood have restored and strengthened the prestige and radiance of the Patriarchate, for the benefit not only of its high spiritual and pastoral work but also of the safeguarding of its rights, the protection of holy places in the Holy Land and of its highest mission, the guardianship of its two-thousand-year tradition in the Holy Land.

Moreover, under your enlightened leadership, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is not only an example of ardent adherence to the guardianship of its tradition and the Orthodox Faith but also a guide on the path of moderation and dialogue. In times of constant challenges, heightened international rivalry and intolerance, you have contributed the most with your guidance, with patience and brotherly love, so as to establish admirable unity and understanding among the Christian Churches in the Holy Land. An example of global reach, but also a necessary condition for saving the Christian heritage and presence in the Holy Land.

There is no lack of challenges today and perhaps there won't be any in the foreseeable future. Jerusalem, the Holy Places and the wider region are once again at the centre of a profound crisis, which has turned into a war. Against the pain and misery that provoke irrational and violent politics, national and religious upheavals, the Patriarchate, under your leadership, provides spiritual consolation, but also is an active and unwavering factor of stability and settlement. Above all, it is a reference point for noble moral and spiritual values, keeping unquenchable the hope that your

trying flock, but also all the troubled Humanity, need.

As you know, I was called upon to take up my duties just three weeks before the outbreak of the present crisis. I am sincerely grateful to You for your undivided cooperation, but also for the wise advice you have generously provided me, valuable aids in my own mission.

Your Beatitude,

Greece surrounds you and the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood with sincere and profound respect, fully aware of your arduous mission. I have the honour to renew today on its behalf its assurances that it remains committed to its will to come as a helper and supporter of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. For the Hellenic Republic, the defence of the rights and privileges of the Patriarchate in the Holy Land, the strengthening of the guardianship of the Orthodox tradition and the safeguarding of the Christian heritage and presence, are imperatives of the utmost importance. Which concerns the whole of Hellenism, inside and outside the Greek borders, its historical path and its spiritual identity. Therefore, and its future.

On behalf of the Hellenic Republic and the members of the Consulate General, I offer You our warmest wishes for many and happy returns on the Patriarchal Throne of Jerusalem, health and continued success in Your high mission."

His Beatitude thanked all of them with the following reply:

"The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" the Psalmist exclaims, (Ps. 144,9).

Your Excellency Consul General of Greece Mr Dimitrios Angelesopoulos,

Dear Holy Fathers and Brothers,

Dear Christians,

“My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord” (Ps. 144,21), as Holy David says, on today’s Eighteenth, the anniversary of the Enthronement of Our Mediocrity on the historical and Apostolic Throne of the holy and righteous James the Brother of God and the first Hierarch of the Holy Church of Jerusalem.

As the apostle Luke says: “The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20,28). This Holy Spirit made the righteous James the Brother of God, shepherd and “bishop of God” (Titus 1,7), “A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb. 8, 2).

We say this because the solemn anniversary of this enthronement does not relate to Our Mediocrity, but to the sacred institution of the Church, of which Christ is the head, and He is the Saviour of her body (cf. Eph. 5,23) according to Saint Paul.

Because we too, being grateful for the Lord’s favours, went after the accompanying honourable members of our Venerable Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, we rendered a thanksgiving praise to the Holy Triune God “ who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth forever” (Ps. 135,4).

Recalling the words of Saint Peter: “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5, 2-3), we have not diminished the daily care of the Christians and of the pious flock of the Rum Orthodox Communities serving under the spiritual and ecclesiastical jurisdiction our Patriarchate, saying supplications and prayers of thanksgiving for all people, as the Lord will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (cf. 1 Tim. 2,1-4).

Moreover, we did not give sleep to Our eyes and eyelids (cf. Psalm 131,4) in order to preserve the Holy Shrines which are the visible and true witness of the iconographic history in general and of the great mystery of piety (1 Tim. 3,1-6) more specifically, but also of the holy places of logical worship as well as the defence of the indescribable privileges and sovereign rights of the pious and noble race and nation of the Rum Orthodox Christians.

Even so, following the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest" (Is. 62,1), we did not stop protesting and denouncing every political and diplomatic authority, locally and internationally, the subjugated alteration of the existing poly-religious and multinational character of the holy city of Jerusalem, on the one hand, and the characterization invented by the Civic Authorities and related factors, ab-antiquo recognized ecclesiastical properties and pilgrimage lands, as public gardens (National Parks), on the other. Let it be noted that for this we have the Primates and the other Christian Communities in the Holy Land as -companions.

On the other hand, with agony and deep sadness we are watching the indescribable dramatic developments of the ongoing military conflict in the Gaza Strip, the loss of innocent human lives regardless of age, as well as the precarious situation of those taking refuge in the Holy Monastery of Saint Porphyrios of Gaza for protection, as well as of our Holy Sepulchre brothers, His Eminence Archbishop Alexios of Tiberias, our Patriarchal Representative, and the Hieromonk Silas, who is the ministering Priest there, who serve our Christian flock with self-denial. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his soul for the sheep" (John 10,11), says the Lord.

Our Venerable Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood and Our Mediocrity, being faithful to our spiritual and ecclesiastical mission, which was bestowed upon us by the Divine Providence, and

hearing the Chief of the Apostles Peter's advice, "brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Peter 1,10), have unceasingly tried to recompense to no man evil for evil, to live peaceably with all men (c.f. Romans 12,17-18). We put in action the good tidings of love, peace and righteousness of Christ. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14,17), Saint Paul preaches.

The eighteen-year enthronement anniversary of Our Mediocrity, celebrated today, relates mainly and primarily to the God-ordained institution of the Church of Jerusalem, founded on the redeeming blood of our Saviour Christ. For He tells us all that "the gates of heaven shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18) and "that God is indeed among us" (1 Cor. 14:25). This does not mean that the purpose of the holy Church of God is the building up in Christ and the salvation of our souls. "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jud. 1:3), the Apostle Jude orders.

We say this because the mission of the Christian in our contemporary world, when "the whole world lies in wickedness" (1 Jn. 5:19) and is under the bondage of sin, is the testimony of our faith in Christ "unto the world, to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). This is exactly the truth of Christ, which we were called to bear witness to. "Do not receive a spirit of slavery, but receive a spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8,15) and "with freedom, Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5,1) the wise Paul preaches. The testimony of the truth of Christ is denounced throughout the world by the holy Church of Jerusalem from the place of the "Martyrdom" that is Golgotha as well as the "Empty Tomb" of our Risen Saviour Christ.

We, the successors of the apostolic office of Saint

James the Brother of God, and as Saint Hippolytus says, "appointed guardians of the Church", are not alone in our Patriarchal, ecumenical and pastoral ministry, because we have as communicants and meet comforters the respected and beloved in Christ, Holy Sepulchre Fathers and brothers High Priests, priests, hieromonks, deacons and monks distinguished by the moral and sacrificial and philanthropic spirit of the Church. "Let us all love one another in unity; and I shall not see my neighbour according to the flesh, but in Christ Jesus. Let there not be among you that which may divide you, but be united to the bishop, submitting to God through him in Christ" the hieromartyr Ignatius of Antioch orders.

This enthronement anniversary of Our Mediocrity calls us all to the unity of faith and the communion of the Holy Spirit, especially with the brotherly Orthodox Churches. "Unity is achieved through love and truth and a preference for good", the great Origen points out. This "good choice" was shown very recently by the sister and neighbour Holy Church of Antioch, which restored the Eucharistic Communion with us. Let the love in Christ do this for the imitation of the brothers of the Orthodox Churches who are in misunderstanding and division.

For we too are in ministry to the saints, that is, to Christians as well as to the holy places of the Nativity, Crucifixion and Resurrection of God and our Saviour Christ, ordering ourselves "in all things grieving but not distressed" (2 Cor. 4,8) we continually thank and pray to God, that He may pacify our region, tested by the fire of the enemy, and preserve, in the hearts of the Primate of the brother Churches, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (cf. Eph. 4,3).

Let us ask the Lord to direct our hearts "to the love of God and to the patience of Christ" (2 Thess. 3,5), through the intercessions of our Most Blessed Lady Theotokos Mary and the prayers of our holy Father Nektarios, Bishop of Pentapolis. May the Grace of the Holy and Life-giving Tomb strengthen and

protect us all in everything and always, especially during these difficult days.

Therefore, we call upon, on all those praying with Us and honouring through their presence the enthronement on this feast of Ours, for power from on high, the illuminating energy of the Holy Sepulchre, and every blessing from God, expressing warm thanksgiving to those who addressed Us: His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and Chief-Secretary, who spoke on behalf of the respected members of the Holy Synod and of the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood, His Excellency the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos, the representative of the Holy Church of Russia, Reverend Archimandrite Vassianos, who conveyed the wishes of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Moscow Cyril, the representative of the Holy Church of Romania, Reverend Archimandrite Theophilos, who conveyed the wishes of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Romania Daniel, His Eminence Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, who spoke on behalf of our flock in Nazareth, His Eminence Archbishop Damascene of Yaffo, who spoke on behalf of our flock in Yaffo, Reverend Fr Charalambos Badour, who spoke on behalf of Saint James Cathedral, the representatives of our Russian-speaking flock Fr Nikolaos Koulinsky, Fr Alexander from the Beer Sheba community, Fr Stavros Aranki who spoke on behalf of Birzeit community, the Ambassador of Russia to Israel Mr Victorov, the Ambassador of Georgia to Israel Mr Lasha, Mr Ode Quas, who spoke on behalf of the Schools of the Patriarchate and Mrs Panayiota Kafetzi, who spoke on behalf of the School of Saint Dimitrios, as well as all others who have participated in this celebration of the Enthronement Anniversary.

The reception was followed by a meal for the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood at the Patriarchate's refectory.

From Secretariat-General

**EMBRACING UNITY: H.B.
THEOPHILOS III'S LETTER TO
H.H. KIRILL STRESSES
IMPORTANCE OF UNITY, AND
EXTENDS DEVOTIONS ON HIS
HOLINESS BIRTHDAY AT THE HOLY
TOMB OF JESUS CHRIST**

ΕΛΛΗΝΟΡΘΟΔΟΣΙΟΝ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΕΙΟΝ
ΙΕΡΟΣΟΛΥΜΩΝ



GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE
JERUSALEM



No. 669

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill
Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia
Moscow
RUSSIA

Your Holiness, dear Brother and Fellow Concelebrant in the Lord,

On the happy occasion of your birthday celebrations, we greet you from the Holy City of Jerusalem, and we wish to extend our warmest fraternal best wishes to you. It is a sadness to us that we cannot join in these celebrations in person so that we might enjoy together the full expression of the unity and communion that we share in the Divine Liturgy.

As you are fully aware, we face a most difficult ongoing situation here where our people are enduring tremendous hardship and violence, and this prevents us from being with you. However, we shall offer a devotions for you at the Holy Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even as we do our utmost to support and to minister to our people here, we are committed to our spiritual mission to uphold the unity of the Orthodox Church and to do all in our power to contribute to the healing of the unhappy divisions that exists between our Orthodox sisters and brothers in Russia and Ukraine. We are grateful to you for the encouragement in this process that you gave after our recent announcement in September and we further appreciate your support echoed in the October meeting of the representatives of Russia's religious communities. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem has always had a special concern for the unity of the Church, and has acted across the ages when the need was calling. We shall be devoted in our efforts to continue this legacy and to uphold in every possible way the journey of reconciliation that we started in Amman, with care and accommodation to all our fellow Orthodox primates.

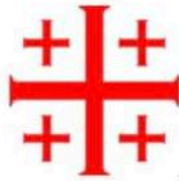
May the Prince of Peace, whose Nativity in the Holy Grotto of Bethlehem we are preparing now to celebrate, strengthen you in your primatial ministry, and may he bring lasting peace and reconciliation to our beloved Holy Land and to our Holy Orthodox Church in every part of the world.

With fraternal love in Christ.

THEOPHILOS III
Patriarch of Jerusalem

Holy City of Jerusalem
Monday, November 20th, 2023

**STATEMENT ON THE RECENT
EVENTS IN THE ARMENIAN
QUARTER**



PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

STATEMENT ON THE RECENT EVENTS IN THE ARMENIAN QUARTER

November 18, 2023

We, as the Christian community of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, share grave concern over the recent events taking place within the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. In recent days, a contested contract for development on a considerable portion of the Armenian Quarter has been declared canceled. Instead of it being handled through the proper legal channels, the alleged developers have decided to hire armed provocateurs, obstruct parking entrances, and begin demolition work.

We are worried that these events potentially endanger the Armenian presence in Jerusalem, as they set a precedent for similar engagements. The illegal actions taken by the alleged developer against the Armenian Patriarchate and community are not conducive for the social order that the peaceful and law-abiding Armenian community, which is a member of our Christian family in the Holy Land, longs for.

The provocations that are being used by the alleged developers to deploy incendiary tactics threaten to erase the Armenian presence in the area, weakening and endangering the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

As the Heads of the Churches, we express our solidarity with the Armenian Patriarchate and community in their decision to take the proper legal procedures in their cancellation of this transaction and urgently appeal to all relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies able to assist in this matter to help us restore the former peace and harmony enjoyed by all those who have used this land in the Armenian Quarter.

We are convinced that matters of this nature should be handled only through legal negotiations and procedures to avoid further escalations and violence.

—The Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem

**STATEMENT ON THE CELEBRATION
OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS IN
THE MIDST OF WAR ON GAZA**



PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

Statement on the Celebration of Advent and Christmas in the Midst of the War

November 10, 2023

Each year during the sacred seasons of Advent and Christmastide, our Christian communities throughout the Holy Land take great delight in their preparations for the commemoration of the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In addition to attendance in religious services, these celebrations have normally involved participation in numerous public festivities and the large-scale display of brightly lit and expensive decorations as a means of expressing our joy at the approach and arrival of the Feast of the Nativity.

But these are not normal times. Since the start of the War, there has been an atmosphere of sadness and pain. Thousands of innocent civilians, including women and children, have died or suffered serious injuries. Many more grieve over the loss of their homes, their loved ones, or the uncertain fate of those dear to them. Throughout the region, even more have lost their work and are suffering from serious economic challenges. Yet despite our repeated calls for a humanitarian ceasefire and a de-escalation of violence, the war continues.

Therefore, We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, call upon our congregations to stand strong with those facing such afflictions by this year foregoing any unnecessarily festive activities. We likewise encourage our priests and the faithful to focus more on the spiritual meaning of Christmas in their pastoral activities and liturgical celebrations during this period, with all the focus directed at holding in our thoughts our brothers and sisters affected by this war and its consequences, and with fervent prayers for a just and lasting peace for our beloved Holy Land.

Moreover, during this season of giving, we also invite the faithful to advocate, pray, and contribute generously as they are able for the relief of the victims of this war and for those in dire need, as well as to encourage others to join them in this mission of mercy.

In these ways, we believe, we will be standing in support of those continuing to suffer—just as Christ did with us in his Incarnation, in order that all of God’s children might receive the hope of a New Jerusalem in the presence of the Almighty, where “death shall be no more, neither mourning, nor crying, nor pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

—The Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem