

REMARKS AT THE LIGHTING OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE IN JAFFA.

Jaffa, Sunday, 8, December 2013

Mr. Mayor,

Your Eminences,

Distinguished Civic and Community Representatives,

Esteemed Leaders of the Religious Communities,

Reverend Fathers,

Ladies and Gentlemen

We greet you with joy today as we gather here in the Season of Light, when the faithful of different traditions look to God for that divine illumination that only God can bestow. As we move from the lights of Chanukah to the lights of Christmas, we are reminded that the human spirit longs to be joined to God, and that true enlightenment comes only from the Creator of light. For the Lord says, *"I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

We bear in mind that here in Jaffa the population is especially known to be comprised of Jews, Christians and Muslims living side by side. The search for divine illumination is at the heart of our respective traditions, and the future belongs to those who build communities of mutual respect, trust, and peaceful coexistence. We pray that the Almighty God, who is the Lord of light, illuminate the minds

and warm the hearts of all of us, especially political leaders both globally and locally so that the light of peace amongst people of different faiths would prevail.

With the Psalmist we sing, *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?"* (Ps. 26 (27):1) and *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light upon my path"* (Ps. 118 (119):105. In this season, and especially during crucial and challenging times for our region, we are made deeply aware that we are all called to follow that light from God, which leads us into a deeper relationship with Him and with our fellow human beings. For mere human light can often blind us, but God's light reveals to us the path of eternal human destiny, which we all share.

May the lights of this tree be a constant reminder to all who look upon it of God "who is our everlasting Light" and "our Glory."

May God bless you!

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem