

VISITS OF THE HAGIOTAPHITE BROTHERHOOD TO THE CHURCHES OF JERUSALEM ON THEIR CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION

On the morning of Tuesday, December 14th / 27th, 2022, the long-established visits of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood took place to the local Churches, celebrating their Christmas holiday, in accordance with the Gregorian Calendar.

First, the visit to the Franciscan Brotherhood took place. In it, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos addressed the Custodian Fr. Francis Paton with the following address in English:

“Your Paternity, Father Francesco,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Fraternities,

Dear Fathers,

We greet you with joy today as you and your communities celebrate the great Feast of the Nativity of the Incarnate Logos, the Word made flesh.

As the hymnographer tells us:

“Behold, the Most Holy Word comes unto his own

in a holy body that is not his.

By a wondrous birth he makes his own

the world that was estranged" .

(Irmos for the Forefeast of the Nativity)

In this festive Christmas season, it must be our special care to articulate a message of hope, especially for our communities here in the Holy Land. As we all so fully recognize, we are living through challenges and dangers unprecedented in our lifetime, and our Christian communities in the Holy Land are bearing a terrible burden. The combination of the consequences of the pandemic, world economic volatility, political uncertainty in the region, and the pressure to emigrate all weigh heavily on our people, especially on our youth.

What hope can we show our own people? Can this hope, the Incarnate Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, reach our own people with life-sustaining force in the face of so much that seems to rob them of life?

The hope that comes to us at Christmas is precisely the expectation that we can live fully in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious landscape in which Divine Providence has placed us, where there can and must be peace, justice, reconciliation, and mutual respect of those who know themselves to be the sons and daughters of the Creator and Father of all.

Hope is the conviction of those who are confident in God, even in the face of the most terrible of circumstances. For, as Saint Paul says, we know that affliction produces endurance, ^{and} endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (Rom. 5:3-5). Hope is the resolve that our Lord Jesus Christ has made his own a world that was once estranged, but has now been redeemed by his life, passion, death, and resurrection.

Dear Father Francesco, our unity of purpose in our common mission to guard and serve the Holy Places and to ensure the Christian integrity of the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, is itself another sign of hope, for this has produced real fruits. We wish to express once again our appreciation for all that you have done, and continue to do, in this regard, especially in your firm resolve in the face of provocative behaviour from radical groups. We are stronger and more effective in this alliance.

MAY our partnership ever deepen, that together we and our fraternities may be agents of hope to those entrusted to our pastoral care in the Christian communities of the Holy Land. In this way, the world may see hope born again in the Holy Land, and the Holy Land may shine as a beacon of hope to the world.

We wish you, the members of your Brotherhood, and all the faithful committed to your care, the blessings and the joy of this Christmas Feast.

Thank you".

Then the visit to the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem took place. There, His Beatitude addressed the Latin Patriarch His Beatitude Mr Pierre Battista Pizzaballa with the following address in English:

"Your Beatitude, dear Patriarch Pizzaballa,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Beloved in Christ,

We wish to extend to you, Your Beatitude, the greetings and the blessings of this holy season as you and your communities celebrate the Christmas Feast. As we hear in the hymns at this time of the year:

A Light shall spring forth from the root of Jesse,
as the prophet full of light foretold...

O ye people, let us say:

Blessed are you, our God who has come among us:

Glory to you.

(Canticle Nine, Mattins, the Forefeast of the Nativity)

The Light that has come is the Incarnate Logos, the Word made Flesh, the Sun of Righteousness who has brought healing in his wings (Malachi 4:2). By uniting heaven and earth, divinity and humanity in himself, he has brought hope to the world, so that all may know that in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, (2 Cor. 5:19).

As we all well know, we are celebrating this Christmas season at a difficult time for our world and our region. In every aspect of our life, people are under pressure. So well-known are the circumstances of our present life that we need not number them all, but their cumulative effect on our communities is extremely serious. Perhaps most seriously, we see creeping despair, especially among our young people, who do not see a future of possibility for themselves in our region.

We have a message of hope in the Gospel of Christ so that hope may be made manifest in our life today. Our mission is precisely this, to bear witness to the manifestation of hope.

We wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge your commitment, Your Beatitude, to creating a culture of hope in

our region, even in the face of tremendous difficulty and challenge. For hope is the only light that can pierce the darkness of despair and futility, and hope must be our constant message as well as our tireless resolve. The common mission that we share in protecting the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land and in pastoring the communities entrusted to us is nothing less than a mission of hope. May we always keep this hope before us in all that we do.

May God bless you and your communities in this holy season of light and hope, as we celebrate the birth of the living Hope whose light and life shine from the cave in Bethlehem for us all.

Thank you".

Finally, His Beatitude, accompanied by the Patriarchal Commissioner His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Capitolas and the Geronda Chief Secretary His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, visited the Apostolic Delegate (Nuncio), that is, the representative of the Vatican in Jerusalem.

Following these, was the visit to the Anglican Archbishop Naum Hossam, who, on the occasion of Christmas and the visit, offered His Beatitude a decorated porcelain plate.

From Secretariat-General