

THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY AT JAFFA GATE

Per the annual tradition of lighting up the Christmas tree at the entrance of the Christian Quarter of Jerusalem, the Imperial Hotel in Jaffa Gate was immersed this evening, December 16, with the colorful communities of the Holy City as His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem, along fellow Heads of Churches and their representatives took to the balcony of this significant hotel, the opportunity to welcome everyone to this event.

As His Beatitude delivered a heart-warming speech from the balcony, the crowds listened attentively as the entrance to the Old City was lit with the candles of Christmas cheer and hope.

Fellow leaders of the various Churches in Jerusalem were joined by the respective members of the diplomatic cord, as several civil society organizations participated in this seasonal festivity.

A Christmas reception was held soon afterwards at the Imperial Hotel as a gratitude from the Heads of Churches for the members of the diplomatic cord.

His Beatitude's full speech can be read as follow:

" Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Beloved Members of our Communities,

Respected Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Sisters and Brothers,

At the beginning of this great festive season, as we gather here to light this Christmas tree, we recall these words from the Gospel of Saint John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

(Jn 1:1-5)

This Light of Lights, the Sun of Righteousness, that rose in the Holy City of Bethlehem from the Cave of hope, is Christ himself, the Word made flesh. This same Light shone again in this Holy City of Jerusalem from the Tomb of hope when our Lord Jesus Christ was risen from the dead. And so today we, as the sons and daughters of the Light of the Sun of Righteousness and of the hope of the resurrection of Christ bless the lighting of this Christmas tree, which stands as a symbol of this Light and this hope.

We pray that this light may shine in the hearts and minds of the rulers of this world as well as in the hearts and minds of those who govern our region, so that peace, righteousness, and reconciliation may reign over us all.

For, as Saint Paul reminds us, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us (2 Cor. 5:19). The work of peace, righteousness, and reconciliation is the responsibility of all people of goodwill.

In the lighting of this Christmas tree, we celebrate all that represents the true character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land and our centuries-old unique experience of our multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious life together and our history of co-existence and mutual respect. This is a powerful reminder that Jerusalem is a beacon for the whole world, especially in the face of the turbulence and violence that affect the lives of so many. Christians have become the target of repeated and continuous attacks by radical Israeli groups, especially in the Holy City. For the past decade, countless crimes have been committed against Christians, including physical and verbal attacks against priests and clergy, attacks have been targeted against churches, holy places have been vandalized and systematically desecrated, in addition to continuous intimidation of Christian citizens, who all they want is to live normal lives as the God-given right of all humans. These radical groups are committing their crimes in a deliberate attempt to expel Christians from Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land.

This is the society we seek so eagerly to preserve and continue to build. We long for peace, and so let us not rend this fabric of our historic common life that has provided room enough down the ages for all who call the Holy Land their home. Divine Providence has set us in this Holy Land together and given us a matchless heritage. This simple ceremony of the lighting of a tree shows us the way and shines as a sign of hope in the darkness. We stand with our good friend Abu Al-Waleed Dajani and his family in their struggle to protect this pillar property. May this season of

light and of the hope of new life bring us together in a new resolve.

We wish all our people many peaceful years and a happy Christmas season.

Thank you."





HIS BEATITUDE HONOURS THE BYZANTINE SINGER VASILIOS PAPADIMITRIOU

On Friday, December 3/16, 2022, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos received the Most Reverend Metropolitan Timotheos of Bostra, , Exarch of the Holy Sepulchre in Cyprus and honoured Mr Vasilios Papadimitriou, as

the Byzantine singer of the Holy Church of the Exarchy of the Holy Sepulchre in Cyprus with the medal of the Order of the Cross-bearers of the Holy Sepulchre.

From Secretariat-General

THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM ATTENDS THE ANNUAL CHRISTMAS RECEPTION BY HM KING OF JORDAN

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem and all of Palestine, joined the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem today, December 14, to attend the annual Christmas reception hosted by His Majesty King Abdullah II, King of Jordan.

During the reception His Beatitude gave the following speech:

Your Majesty,

Your Royal Highnesses,

Esteemed Members of the Government,

Beloved Leaders of our Religious Communities

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We greet you, Your Majesty, in this festive season, in which our region has the privilege of holding the festival of the light of justice, even in a world, and in a time, when there is deep confusion and despair. The words of the Holy Book remind us:

Arise, shine, for your light has come,

and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples,

but the Lord will arise upon you,

and his glory will appear over you.

(Is 60:1-2)

As we emerge into a post-pandemic world, we face tremendous challenges. Most especially we are painfully aware of the deepening danger of new assaults from some quarters on the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious integrity of our region. There can be no doubt that this is an extremely sensitive time in our history, and the situation in which we are living, both in this region and around the world, is extremely delicate. We must admit that it can feel like a volcano that is on the verge of eruption. Those who are motivated by ideology rather than by our common sacred values put not just individual lives at risk, but the entire human community.

In the face of these harsh realities, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan remains a beacon of stability, mutual respect, tolerance, and the flourishing of different religious groups side by side. Your Majesty is well known throughout the world for your commitment to peace-building and the promotion of ordered co-existence so that all may prosper. We are fully aware of Your Majesty's firm and clear voice in defending the Status Quo of our Islamic and Christian religious institutions and also for your care for the Christian presence in the Holy Land and for the Christian character of Jerusalem. As the Heads of the Churches and Christian Communities of the Holy Land, we want to assure you once again of our full support of you in your essential role as the Custodian of the Christian and Islamic Holy Places in the Holy Land. The Status Quo has always been the key for the welfare and peaceful co-existence between all who call the Holy Land our home.

We wish to express our appreciation to you for gathering us in this festive event, so that we may give expression, by our presence, to Your Majesty's commitment to the religious diversity of our region in general, and of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and of the Holy Land in particular, which is at the heart of our collective identity. We are gathered from the many religious communities that make up our diverse society here in Jordan and in Jerusalem, and which have lived together for generations. The future of our region depends on sustaining this diversity, so that all our peoples may have a future of opportunity, hope, and safety.

In times of darkness, the light shines ever more brightly. This is exactly what we are about to celebrate in Bethlehem. We are grateful for the light that the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan shines in our region, and we assure you, Your Majesty, of our ongoing willingness to work with you to ensure the prosperity of all our peoples.

May God bless you, Your Majesty, all the Royal Family, and

all those set in authority under your wise leadership, and may God bless all the peoples of our beloved Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.





THE VISIT OF HIS EMINENCE ARCHBISHOP ELPIDOPHOROS OF AMERICA AT THE PATRIARCHATE

At midday on Friday, November 19/December 2, 2022, the Most Reverend Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, leader of a seventy-five-member pilgrimage group of pilgrim clergy and laity and “Archons” of the Ecumenical Patriarchate visited the Patriarchate.

The Most Reverend Archbishop Elpidophoros of America was warmly received by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, welcoming him and his companions as coming from the Queen of the Cities and from the “Great Church in captivity”, as the famous historian Steven Runciman

characterizes it and coming to the land, which is holy because it was watered with the redemptive blood of our Saviour Christ on the cross and because it housed the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, in the Life-Giving Tomb, which the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood preserves like the pupil of its eye.

In response, His Eminence the Archbishop of America thanked His Beatitude for this visit and for the Divine Liturgy, for which arrangements had already been made, to be held next Saturday evening to Sunday, November 21/December 4, 2022, on the Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple and the visiting of the Holy Shrines, which the Hagiotaphite Fathers have tirelessly and sleeplessly guarded throughout the centuries, underlining that through this visit the way is opened and widened for the arrival of more pilgrims to the Holy Land, even after the past pandemic, and that through this visit the ever-existing bonds of fellowship and cooperation in Christ of the Church of Jerusalem after the Ecumenical Patriarchate are strengthened.

For this visit, His Eminence the Archbishop of America offered His Beatitude a plaque of the 150 years since the foundation of the Archdiocese of America, and the latter offered His Eminence an Episcopal engolpion, an icon of the Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre and the book of the History of the Church of Jerusalem by Chysostomos Papadopoulos. His Beatitude also gave blessings from Jerusalem to the pilgrims of the group.

From Secretariat-General

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY NEW MARTYR PHILOUMENOS THE HAGIOTAPHITE AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Tuesday, November 16 / 29, 2022, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of the Holy New Martyr Philoumenos the Hagiotaphite, who suffered a martyr's death at the shrine of Jacob's Well on November 16, 1979, where he served as Hegoumen.

Saint Philoumenos, as a new martyr, was also included in the Hagiology of the Church of Jerusalem in 2009. Every year his memory is honoured at the place of his martyrdom, where the rector for the last 40 years, Hegoumen Archimandrite Ioustinos constructed a magnificent Church.

In this Church, above Jacob's Well, the Divine Liturgy was officiated by our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the co-celebration of their Eminences, Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Archbishops, Aristarchos of Constantina and Philoumenos of Pella, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios and the Typikon Keeper Archimandrite Alexios, Priests from Greece, the Hegoumen of Rafidia Archimandrite Leontios, Archimandrite Kyriakos from Saint Gerasimos Monastery, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Dositheos, Priests from the neighbouring regions and from Nazareth. The chanting was delivered by the Arab-speaking doctor Yacub Bejali, who received his diploma today, in Greek and the choir of the regions of Samaria in Arabic. The Liturgy was attended by the Consul General of Greece Mr Evangelos Vlioras and many members of the flock, monks and nuns from Jerusalem and pilgrims from Greece and Cyprus praying in reverence.

To this pious congregation, His Beatitude delivered the following sermon:

“Lord, the whole creation celebrates the commemoration of Your Saints, the heavens rejoice with the angels and the earth is glad with its people. By their intercessions have mercy on us”, the hymnographer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims

The grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us all in this holy shrine of the Patriarch Jacob’s Well, where the Samaritan woman met the Messiah Christ, to honour in eucharist the commemoration of Saint Philoumenos the Hagiotaphite, the martyr and preacher of Christ’s faith.

When he came to the Holy Land from the island of Cyprus, he joined the monastic order of the “Studios” (Spoudaioi), namely the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, and was distinguished for his godly zeal for all the Holy Shrines, and for this particular biblical place here.

We use the word “particular” because our Father Philoumenos suffered a martyr’s death for the love of our Saviour Christ in this holy place, and thus became an imitator of the passions of Christ and of the same blood with Him. As the psalmist says: “They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause. For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love” (Ps. 109:3-5).

Indeed, Saint Philoumenos, like Saint Stephen the First Martyr, received fire from the followers of the devil while he was praying in the same place where Jesus told the Samaritan woman: “I that speak unto thee am he [the Messiah]” (John 4:26), and “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must

worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

Interpreting these words of the Lord, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "God righteously accepts the spiritual pilgrim, who does not bear the style of reverence according to the Jewish way, that is in shape and formalities, but the pilgrim who shines in an evangelical way through the achievements of virtue and applies the true worship through the correctness of the divine doctrines".

My dear brethren, the special honour which is offered to the holy martyrs by the Church is owed to this. "Lord, in the commemoration of Your Holy Martyrs the whole creation celebrates, the heavens rejoice with the angels, and the earth is glad with its people," Saint John of Damascus says. According to Saint Clement of Alexandria, "we call martyrdom the end, not because the person has reached the end of his life, like the others, but because he has shown the end of a perfect work of love".

This perfect love for Christ was shown by Saint Philoumenos with his martyr's death, as he suffered many toils and received the crown in the heavens along with the other martyrs, whose only purpose is their union with the Saviour Christ. Saint Paul's preaching has contributed to this cause: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body" (Phil. 3:20-21).

Commenting on these words of Saint Paul, Theodoritos says: "He says that our body will be fashioned according to Christ's glorious body, not according to the quantity of glory but according to the quality. For even this [body] is full of light". In other words, the martyrs' bodies became of the same fashion as Christ's body according to the quality, namely the incorruption, as this is phrased by the hymnographer: "Thy martyrs, O Lord, in their courageous contest for Thee received

as the prize the crowns of incorruption and life from Thee, our immortal God. For since they possessed Thy strength, they cast down the tyrants and wholly destroyed the demons' strengthless presumption. O Christ God, by their prayers, save our souls, since Thou art merciful".

The murdered body of Saint Philoumenos also received God's incorruption, and his holy relics work miracles, testifying to the glory of God; "God is wondrous in His saints" (Ps. 68:36) the Psalmist says.

Our Father Philoumenos became a co-citizen of the Saints and a friend of God (cf. Eph. 2:19), and having boldness before God (1 John 3:21), he urges us all through Saint Peter's words: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13). [In simple words, my dear ones, I urge you not to be surprised regarding your persecutions and sorrows. No, do not feel surprised, but as long as you partake in the passions of Christ with the sorrows and the persecutions, suffering for the sake of His Name, you should rejoice as well as endure, so that you may have the great joy when His glory will be revealed in His Second Coming].

The Holy Church of Christ, especially the local Church of Jerusalem boasts in the Lord (Romans 15:17) for Saint Philoumenos, its confessor of faith and martyr of our Orthodox faith, who shines forth the light of the divine love, peace and righteousness, as well as of the truth, amidst the darkness of apostasy and turbulence of the world of this era.

Therefore, let us entreat the Holy Martyr of Christ, Philoumenos, who shared the passions of Christ and became a communicant of the heavenly brightness, that along with the intercessions of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin

Mary, they may pray for the salvation of our souls.

Many happy returns and a blessed fasting period, toward the welcoming of the Nativity of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ in the caves of our hearts. Amen.”

At noon, the Hegoumen hosted a meal, attended by Mr Vlioras, Officials from the Palestinian Autonomy of Samaria and others.

From Secretariat-General

THE LIGHTING OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE IN TERRA SANCTA

On the evening of Sunday, November 14/27, 2022, the ceremony of lighting the Christmas tree took place at the “Terra Sancta” Franciscan school inside the Old City and in its inner garden next to Damascus Gate.

This ceremony was attended by the Custos of the Holy Land, Fr Francis Paton, his deputy, Fr Ibrahim Faltas, the Director of the Department of Christian Affairs, Mr César Marjieh, the President of the Supreme Palestinian Ecclesiastical Mission, Mr Ramzi Khouri, along with a crowd of about 2000 people, greeting the lighting of the tree.

At this ceremony, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos delivered the following address:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In him was life? and life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness? and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:1, 4-5).

Dear brothers and friends,

This light of life rose in the city of Bethlehem from the Sun of Righteousness, that is, of Christ, and shone in the holy city of Jerusalem in the monument of hope, namely of the Resurrection.

And we today, as children of the light of the Sun of Righteousness and the hope of the Resurrection of Christ, bless the lighting of this Christmas tree, praying that this light shines in the hearts and minds of those who hold the world and those who govern our region, so that peace, justice and settlement may reign. "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19), Saint Paul says.

Many happy returns, a peaceful and blessed Christmas.

From Secretariat-General

CONCERT OF THE CHOIR OF THE SERBIAN CHURCH AND THE CHOIR OF THE CATHEDRAL OF SAINT JAMES THE BROTHER OF GOD

On the evening of Saturday, November 13/26, 2022, a concert took place in the ceremony hall of the Notre Dame hotel, next to New Gate, with the performance of religious Christmas and other hymns by the Branco choir, named after the Serbian poet Branko Radichevich. from the city of Nis, the birthplace of Constantine the Great, under the direction of Mrs Jelena

Stojakovic in Greek and Serbian and in Arabic, by the choir of Saint James the Brother of God, under the direction of Mr Rimon Kamar.

This concert was honoured by his presence H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, accompanied by His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina.

The following day, Sunday, November 14/27, 2022, the day of remembrance of the Holy Glorious Apostle Philip, a Divine Liturgy was held in the Cathedral of Saint James the Brother of God, by the Greek-Orthodox Arabic-speaking Community of the Patriarchate, at the chanting of the aforementioned Bronco choir.

From Secretariat-General

THE RETURN OF THE ENAMEL PADS OF THE OVERDOOR OF THE SACRED EDICULE OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

On Friday, November 12 / 25, 2022, His Beatitude awarded the medal of the Brigadier General of the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre to the Russian pilgrim Mrs Elena Milskaya, for her intense and painstaking efforts, in order to return from Russia the enamel decorations of the door of the Edicule of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, depicting the Risen Lord and the Twelve Apostles.

These decorations are 19th-century art, and they were sent to Russia for conservation twenty years ago. They were removed from the conservationist through the efforts of Mrs Elena

Milskaya, whom His Beatitude deservedly praised and honoured with the medal of the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, assuring her that her name will forever be remembered in the liturgies at the Holy Sepulchre.

After signing the handover document, these decorations were given to the Elder Sacristan, His Eminence Archbishop Isidoros of Hierapolis, to place them in their respective positions.

From Secretariat-General

THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF HUNGARY VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE

Following the visit of the President of Hungary Her Excellency Mrs Katalin Novák on November 4/17, 2022 to Jerusalem, the State Secretary of Hungary Mr Tristan Azbej visited the Patriarchate, accompanied by the Hungarian Ambassador to Ramallah Mr Csaba Rada.

The Minister was received by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos and Hagiotaphite Fathers.

His Beatitude informed Mr Tristan Azbej about the work of the Patriarchate, pastoral, ecclesiastical, about the schools which the Patriarchate selflessly maintains, about the challenges of Christians despite the extreme fanatical elements, those who covet the Christian property.

The Minister expressed his interest in supporting the work of the Patriarchate in the European Union.

His Beatitude thanked Mr Tristan Azbej for his country's financial contribution to the renovation of the Basilica of Bethlehem and the Holy Tomb of the Holy Sepulchre and underlined the need for assistance in the educational work of the Patriarchate for his country and for the European Union and also praised the Ambassador for his work.

The Minister expressed his commitment to the support of the Christians of the Holy Land.

From Secretariat-General

DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE

On Wednesday, November 10/23, 2022, the Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (W.C.C.) Reverend Fr Ioannis Saouka, priest of the Romanian Patriarchate visited the Patriarchate, accompanied by his wife, his collaborators, the doctor Mr Odes Kauas, member of the Central Committee of W.C.C. for the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Father Ioannis Saouka was accepted by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos after the Geronda Chief Secretary His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and other Hagiotaphite Fathers.

In the context of this meeting, there was an interesting discussion about the representation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the W.C.C. from its foundation and about the role

of the Patriarchate in the peace of the churches in general and in the peace of Russia and Ukraine and about the W.C.C.'s support for the Palestinian people and about the W.C.C.'s efforts for the reconciliation of Israel and Palestine and for the elected new General Secretary of the W.C.C. who will fully assume his role from the beginning of the New Year 2023.

Afterwards, Fr Ioannis visited the Library and Archives of the Patriarchate, intending to have a meeting with the President of the State of Israel and the President of the Palestinian Authority for the presentation of the work of the W.C.C.

From Secretariat-General