

THE EVE THE OF THEOPHANY FEAST AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Wednesday 5th /18th January 2017 the Feast of the Eve of Theophany was celebrated by the Patriarchate according to the typical order of the Church of Jerusalem.

In the morning of this day the Theophany Royal Hours were read at the Monastic Church of Saints Constantine and Helen at the end of Matins. The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil followed. At the end of the Liturgy H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated the service of the Small Blessing of the Waters, for the blessing of the Archbishops, Hieromonks, monks, nuns and pilgrims.

The ascent to the Patriarchate followed, with the priests dressed in their liturgical vestments and the choir singing "When Thou were baptized in the Jordan". Therein, the Priest blessed the Patriarchate Hall, while His Beatitude and the Archbishops waited until the Entourage of the Blessing of the Waters from the Cathedral of St. James the Brother of God led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Theodosios of Sebastia arrived, who also blessed the Hall. Having completed the above, a short while later His Beatitude with the Hagiotaphite Fathers departed for the River Jordan via Jericho, accompanied by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos.

In Jericho His Beatitude was received firstly by the Hegoumen of the Monastery of Prophet Elisha, Archimandrite Philoumenos, and then by the Palestinian Mayor of Jericho, whom His Beatitude addressed with the following:

"Honourable Mouhafez – Governor of Jericho,

Reverend Sheikh,

Mr. Mayor,

Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem,

The feast of Holy Theophany, known as the "Feast of Lights", is marked as the extension and completion of the great Feast of Christmas, which was majestically celebrated at Christ's Birth place, Bethlehem.

His Eminence the President of the State of Palestine Mr. Mahmoud Abbas – Abu Mazen, during his honouring presence, stressed in his speech that this Feast is a Feast for the Palestinian people, meaning both Christians and Muslims.

This very fact is what we ascertain today, being here with you, at the most ancient city of Jericho, where the unspeakable mystery of the Holy Spirit's descent on our God and Saviour Jesus Christ took place, at His baptism by Saint John the Baptist.

The Greek Orthodox (Rum Orthodox) Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which is the source-mother of all Churches, continues throughout the centuries, meaning its long-lived historic active presence, to witness the holiness of the Palestinian land, which the Almighty God sanctified through His Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ and through His Prophets.

The Holy Monasteries and Churches within Jericho and the neighbouring to the River Jordan areas witness this truth. They also witness that God is the source of Light and He is the Light which enlightens every man coming into the world. This Divine Light, is therefore the Light of love, peace and righteousness. Which means that it is not possible for peace to exist without righteousness.

This very message is being evangelized by the Greek Orthodox (Rum Orthodox) Patriarchate of Jerusalem throughout the centuries. Moreover, the historic treaty between Omar Ibn Khattab and our predecessor Patriarch Sophronios, was

established based on this principle, that is, peace and righteousness according to the Divine Law: "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17), the Apostle Paul says. Furthermore, according to the evangelist Matthew's witness, St. John the Baptist was preaching the way of righteousness: "For John came unto you in the way of righteousness" (Matthew 21:32).

We wish, that the Divine Light, which was revealed to the people in the banks of the River Jordan and the surrounding area, may enlighten the hearts of the mighty people of the earth so that they "exercise righteousness" (Acts 10:35), as to our reverend President of the State of Palestine, His Eminence Mahmoud Abbas – Abu Mazen, we wish that he may direct his government representations towards every good action for the Palestinian State, especially towards its complete national independence, peace and conciliation in our region. Many blessed and peaceful returns."

From the Jericho Town Hall, His Beatitude was driven through the borderline iron gate which separates Jericho from the Israeli Military Command of the River Jordan area. Passing through, His Beatitude arrived at the Holy Monastery of St. John the Baptist. Therein he was graciously received by the Israeli Military Command, the Palestinian Scouts, the Hegoumen of the Monastery of St. Gerasimos Archimandrite Chrysostomos and a great crowd. Having been dressed in the Patriarchal cloak, His Beatitude led the 9th Hour of Theophany at the Monastery of St. John the Baptist, which was destroyed at the six-day war in 1967. The Monastery has recently been renovated, funded by the Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of Sarantaron Mount, Archimandrite Gerasimos.

After the 9th Hour, the procession towards the bank of the River Jordan followed, the chanting was by the Leading Choir singer Archimandrite Aristovoulos in Greek, Arabic, Russian

and Romanian, at the presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos, a great multitude of pilgrims following or standing on either side of the road, crowded, in order to receive the blessing. When the procession arrived at the bank of the River Jordan, on a platform especially set, His Beatitude led Vespers and the Service of the Small Blessing of the Waters, at the end of which he went down to the river bank and submerged the Sacred Cross in the water, while everybody was singing "When Thou were baptized in the Jordan".

From the River Jordan, His Beatitude went to the neighbouring Holy Monastery of St. Gerasimos of Jordan, where the good curator of the Monastery Archimandrite Chrysostomos offered to many people a fasting meal, as the Eve of Theophany is one of the great fasting days of our Church in order to drink the blessed water on the actual day of the Feast of Theophany.

From Secretariat-General

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NEW YEAR CAKE CEREMONY AT THE

PATRIARCHATE

On Friday evening 31st December 2016/13th January 2017, the New Year Cake ceremony took place at the Patriarchate's hall. In the ceremony His H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos gave the following address:

"Behold now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation"

(2 Cor. 6:2).

Behold now is the right time, behold, now is the day of salvation, the Apostle of Nations St. Paul proclaims.

*Our Holy Church, which is the prolonged throughout the centuries body of Christ, inside the world, not only salutes, but also evangelizes the entrance of the New Year through the hagiographic Sunday words : **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."** (Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4: 18-19).*

*In other words, my dear brothers and sisters, the consideration of the meaning of time is not made understood **"through cunningly devised fables"** (2 Peter 1:16), but **"according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began"** (Romans 16:25), of the incarnation of God the Logos and our Saviour Jesus Christ, consubstantial with the Holy Spirit and co-creator of all visible and invisible things.*

This is the understanding of time that our Holy Church offers, not as a worldly social organization, but as the body of Christ, of which, according to St. Paul we are members (Eph.

5:30). This very Christ is **"Him which is, and which was and which is to come"** (Rev. 1:4). This means that the Church introduces in the world the eternity in Christ and co-expands towards it. Inside therefore the Church, where time becomes course, the memory of the past becomes memory in Christ. And the hope of the future becomes hope in Christ. For this reason the wise Paul says, recalling the words of the Prophet Isaiah (49:8): **"In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"** (2 Cor. 6:2).

The great and distinguished Church Father St. Basil, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, whose annual memory coincides with the beginning of the New Year and therefore with the feast of the Circumcision of our Lord, God and Saviour Christ, calls us in this modest ceremony held in his honour, namely the cutting of the New Year cake, to consider that **"for our sin we were stranded on earth, and for the philanthropy of our creator we were recalled to heaven"**.

And thus, **"we journey towards our in Christ recall to heaven during the Eucharistic time of the Divine Liturgy, when the human mind is transferred from the "present things to those of the future"**, according to St. Basil the Great.

Moreover, referring to the relevance of time, Apostle Peter encourages the faithful towards repentance by saying: **"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day"**.

Taking under consideration the contemplation of time according to Christ, let us implore the Hierarch of Cappadocia Basil the Great, to pray to Christ our God for the salvation of our souls and for the peace of the world and of our region. And together with the hymn writer let us say: **"Thou who hast created all things in wisdom, pre-eternal Word of the Father, and established the whole creation by your mighty word, bless**

the New Year of Thy virtuousness and preserve our venerable Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, our Christian congregation and our Holy City, granting the world Thy great mercy through the prayers of Theotokos", Amen.

Many Happy Returns!"

Immediately afterwards the Apolytikion of the Circumcision of the Lord and that of St. Basil's "Thy proclamation hast gone out to all the earth" were sung, and His Beatitude blessed the faithful by saying: "have an auspicious, peaceful and blessed New Year 2017".

Consequently, while the School students sang the New Year carols and other songs, His Beatitude distributed the pieces of the New Year Cake to the people honouring the ceremony, the Greek Consul General in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos, the Archbishops of the Patriarchate and the other Hagiotaphite Fathers, the monks and the nuns, the members of the Greek community, the members of our Arab-speaking congregation and all participants at the ceremony.

After the ceremony the School students sang the carols to the Fathers of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and to the members of the Greek community.

From Secretariat-General

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HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM ADDRESS TO THE ARMENIAN BROTHERHOOD OF SAINT JAMES

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

9 January 2017

Your Beatitude,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers,

We welcome you to our Patriarchate on this joyous Feast, and we greet you with words of celebration from the Service of Matins for the Feast of the Nativity:

Our Saviour, the dayspring from the East,

has visited us from on high,

and we, who were in the darkness and shadow,

have found the truth,

for the Lord is born of the Virgin!

This is our joy, that the darkness has been dispelled by the one true Light, the Incarnate Logos.

As we celebrate the joy of the manifestation of this Light on earth, we wish to take this opportunity, Your Beatitude, to express our gratitude to you for the effort and attention that have found expression in the common work of the restoration of the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre, and the ongoing work on the Church of the Nativity.

We cannot over-emphasize the significance of this, and the fruit of peace and understanding that this represents. We must give our best efforts together to building up and strengthening this relationship, and we know from our experience that dialogue has proved to be the only way to resolve family disagreements and misunderstandings and to bring about a new unity of purpose.

We fully appreciate the spirit of understanding, mutual respect, and common witness that has been shown by Your Beatitude, and we assure you of our full support as we continue together in this common work and common *martyria* for the well-being of our respective communities, for the people of the Holy Land, and for our wider world.

In our respective traditions, there is a close theological relationship between Feast of the Nativity and Feast of the Theophany, and the Incarnation of the Divine Logos reveals to us the life of the Trinity in the waters of the River Jordan. May the joy of our celebrations of the Nativity and the Theophany, in which the divine life is revealed among us in human flesh, give us renewed spiritual strength and purpose for the work before us.

Thank you for the expression of your greetings in this glorious Feast.

May Christ our God, who is born in the cave of Bethlehem, renew his joy in us and in the hearts of our communities and all the peoples of the Holy Land, that we may work for the fruits of truth, justice, and reconciliation, and may God

bless you and the members of your community this Christmastide.

We pray to our Lord Jesus Christ that the New Year will be a fresh season of reconciliation and co-existence of the Abrahamic traditions in the Holy Land, for this is the work that brings forth the fruit of peace.

Thank you

FESTAL VISITS ON THE OCCASION OF CHRISTMAS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Monday 27th December 2016/ 9th January 2017, the other Christian Communities visited the Patriarchate on the occasion of Christmas in the following order:

1. At 9:18am the monastic community of the Franciscans of the Holy Land visited the Patriarchate, a team of approximately fifty monks headed by their Hegoumen Fr. Francesco Paton.

To their address to him, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos answered in English as follows in the link

below:<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2017/01/09/29042>

2. At 10:00am the other Christian communities headed by their Leaders visited the Patriarchate, namely the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, the Anglican Church, the

Lutheran Church, the Coptic Church, the Ethiopian Church and other Christian teams with them. To their short addresses, His Beatitude answered as follows:<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2017/01/09/29038>

3. At 11:00am the Armenian Church in Jerusalem visited the Patriarchate. To their address His Beatitude answered as follows in the link:<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2017/01/09/29035>
4. At 11:30am the Apostolic Delegate visited the Patriarchate.
5. At noon the Orthodox Communities of the Patriarchate visited His Beatitude.

From Secretariat-General

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ADDRESS TO THE HEADS OF THE CHURCHES & THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES OF THE HOLY LAND ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

His Beatitude Theophilus III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

9 January 2017

Your Excellencies,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Fraternities,

Dear Fathers and Pastors,

We thank you for your greetings for the great Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we rejoice in the words of this hymn:

Today Christ is born of the Virgin in Bethlehem!

Today he who knows no beginning begins to be,

and the Word is made flesh.

The heavenly powers rejoice,

and the earth with humankind makes glad;

The Magi offer gifts to the Master,

and the shepherds marvel at his birth.

And we cry aloud unceasingly:

Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace, good will among all people.

(From Matins of the Nativity)

The feast of the Nativity is one of great joy, a joy that is a gift from God the Father, and that is at the heart of our Christian faith and witness. This is the great joy that the angels announced to the shepherds (Lk. 2:10), and this is the same joy that is born again on this Feast in the Holy Cave.

We must always nurture this joy in ourselves and in our communities. Our Christmas celebration has a special significance for our Christian *martyria*, not least because we are experiencing new developments in the challenges that we face in our region: the rise of extremism, persecution, and displacement, attempts to restrict some religious practices; and the pressure that is put on our sacred property and on our inheritance. And in the world over we see a disrupting rise in violence of all kinds.

Jerusalem is the place where the members of our local Christian communities, the pilgrims who come to us, and all people of good will, are renewed in the energy of hope, the consolation of the fruits of our faith, and the sacred atmosphere of this Holy Land.

This is the visible sign that our mission is not in vain. Those who are critical of the Church must understand that our spiritual and Eucharistic mission is strong and continues to have a huge impact. We are hearing calls for a fresh understanding of the oversight of the Holy City, with a special body to ensure the Status Quo and the administration of the Holy Places. This is a challenge to our role, and we

must be prepared to assume this greater role, which must increase in importance with respect to the establishment of a lasting peace. Therefore our unity of heart and purpose is crucial.

Christmas is the feast of peace and justice. We who lay claim to be the followers of the Prince of Peace know that in trusting God there can be no peace without justice. As the Prophet Isaiah proclaims:

*The effect of justice will be peace,
and the result of justice,
quietness and trust forever.*

(Isaiah 32:17)

The peace and justice of God's promise to us are assured to us again by our Lord himself, when in the Sermon on the Mount he says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mt. 5:6). Therefore there is no way for peace to co-exist with injustice.

In this Feast of the Nativity, we declare that the fruit of truth, justice, and reconciliation have been brought to earth by the Incarnation of the Divine Logos. This fruit of new life the world rejects, but we know to be the way, the truth, and the life.

This coming to earth of the fruit of truth, justice and reconciliation are the cause and the sustenance of our joy. As the Christian community we give thanks to God, who has enlightened our minds and strengthened our hearts to join our efforts in the restoration of the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre and to continue the renovations of the Church of the Nativity. We are committed together to the ongoing work of the restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and this is a great sign of encouragement and hope to our region in

particular, and to the world.

We thank you once again for our gathering in our Patriarchate on this happy Feast and for your greetings. May Christ our God, who is born in the cave of Bethlehem, renew his joy in us and in the hearts of our communities and all the peoples of the Holy Land, that we may work for the fruits of truth, justice, reconciliation, and may God bless you and the members of your communities this Christmastide.

We pray to our Lord Jesus Christ that the New Year will be a fresh season of reconciliation and co-existence of the Abrahamic traditions in the Holy Land, for this is the work that brings forth the fruit of peace.

Thank you

ADDRESS TO THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR FRATERNAL VISIT TO THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM FOR THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

His Beatitude Theophilus III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

9 January 2017

Your Paternity

The Custos of the Holy Land,

Beloved Members of the Franciscan Fraternity,

Dear Fathers,

We welcome you to our Patriarchate on this joyous Feast, and we greet you with words of celebration from the Service of Matins for the Feast of the Nativity:

Our Saviour, the dayspring from the East,

has visited us from on high,

and we, who were in darkness and shadow,

have found the truth,

for the Lord is born of the Virgin!

The Feast of the Nativity is one of great joy, a joy that is a gift from God the Father, and that is at the heart of our Christian faith and witness. This is the great joy that the angels announced to the shepherds (Lk. 2:10), and this is the same joy that is born again on this Feast in the Holy Cave.

We must always nurture this joy in ourselves and in our communities. Our Christmas celebration has a special significance for our Christian *martyria*, not least because we are experiencing new developments in the challenges we face in our region: the rise of extremism, persecution, and displacement; attempts to restrict some religious practices; and the pressure that is put on our sacred property and on our inheritance. And in the world over we see a disturbing rise in violence of all kinds.

Jerusalem is the place where the members of our local Christian communities, the pilgrims who come to us, and all people of good will, are renewed in the energy of hope, the consolation of the fruits of our faith, and the sacred atmosphere of this Holy Land, that emanates from the Holy Places of which we are the guardians. This is the visible sign that our mission is not in vain. Those who are critical of the Church must understand that our spiritual Eucharistic mission is strong and continues to have a huge impact. We are hearing calls for a fresh understanding of the oversight of the Holy City, with a special body to ensure the Status Quo and the administration of the Holy Places. This is the challenge to our role, and we must be prepared to assume a greater role, which must increase in importance with respect to the establishment of lasting peace. Therefore our unity of heart and purpose is crucial.

Christmas is the feast of peace and justice. We who lay claim to be the followers of the Prince of Peace know that in trusting God there can be no peace without justice. As the Prophet Isaiah proclaims:

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The peace and justice of God's promise to us are assured to us again by our Lord himself, when in the Sermon on the Mount he says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Mt. 5:6). Therefore there is no way for peace to co-exist with injustice.

In this Feast of the Nativity, we declare that the fruit of truth, justice and reconciliation are the cause and the sustenance of our joy. As the Christian community we give

thanks to God, who has enlightened our minds and strengthened our hearts to join our efforts in the restoration of the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre and to continue the renovations of the Church of the Nativity. We are committed together to the ongoing work of the restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and this is a great sign of encouragement and hope to our region in particular and to the world.

We thank you once again for your Christmas and the New Year visit to our Patriarchate on this happy Feast, and for your greetings. May Christ our God, who is born in the cave of Bethlehem, renew his joy in us and in the hearts of our communities and all the peoples in the Holy Land, that we may work for the fruits of truth, justice, and reconciliation, and may God bless you and the members of your communities this Christmastide.

We pray to our Lord Jesus Christ that the New Year will be a fresh season of reconciliation and co-existence of the Abrahamic traditions in the Holy Land, for this is the work that brings forth the fruit of peace.

Thank you

CHRISTMAS AT THE PATRIARCHATE (2017)

1. On Christmas Eve, the welcoming of His Beatitude in Bethlehem

According to the very old tradition of the Church of Jerusalem, the feast of Christ's incarnation has been

celebrated in Bethlehem, the birthplace of our Lord Jesus Christ since the 4th century A.D.

Likewise, on Friday 24th December 2006 / 6th January 2017, after the customary visit of the Police of Jerusalem at the Patriarchate, with the Orthodox scouts leading the way and under the sound of bells tolling, the Hagiotaphite Entourage, led by His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem, headed towards Jaffa Gate. There, the entourage members boarded the vehicles and preceding the police escort went to the Holy Monastery of Prophet Elijah which is located halfway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

There, the Mayors of the towns Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala together with their associates and the Israeli military Command of the area Kfar Etzion welcomed His Beatitude. The meeting was followed by venerating the Holy Church and a reception.

Afterwards, preceding the Israeli horsemen, the Patriarchal Entourage continued through the border of Rachel's tomb. Passing through, preceding Palestinian motorcyclists, they continued in slow speed driving due to the Scouts' marching ahead, as well as the crowd of Bethlehem citizens – regardless of their religion – on either side of the road asking His Beatitude's blessing, until they reached Bethlehem square.

There, His Beatitude was received by the Patriarchal Vicar Most Reverend Archbishop Theophylactos of Jordan, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks dressed in their liturgical vestments and married Presbyters of the Patriarchate from the neighbouring to Bethlehem towns, the Mayor and the Prefect of Bethlehem, Police Authorities and Scouts, the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sofianopoulos and the rest of the Consulate staff, the Professor of the National Technical University of Athens Mrs. Antonia Moropoulou and a great

multitude of people.

From Bethlehem Square, together with the Patriarchal receiving hosts, the Patriarchal Entourage entered the Basilica through the courtyard.

Upon entering, with the Greek Consul General standing on the right hand side and the Mayor of Bethlehem on the left, the Entourage headed towards the Iconostasis and turning right towards St Nikolaos Chapel, went down to the Nativity Cave.

Inside the Basilica, with the Greek chanting by the leading choir singer of the Most Holy Church of the Resurrection Archimandrite Aristovoulos and Mr. Alvanos, and the Arabic chanting choir, the descend to the Grotto of the Nativity took place, followed by the ascent through the north gate to the Armenian chapel, and finally stopping in front of the Holy Iconostasion.

Therein, the Christmas Royal Hours were read followed by their incense procedures, led by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, concluding with Vespers and St Basil's Divine Liturgy according to the Church order at 3:30pm.

At the end of the Service the Patriarchal Entourage went to the Hegoumenion through the Baptismal gate, where a fasting meal was offered.

Around 7:00pm in the evening His H.B. offered a reception in honour of the President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas Abu Mazen and other Palestinians, Government Representatives of Jordan, and the Foreign Affairs Minister Mr. Bashir Hassoun. Herein His Beatitude offered Christmas presents and addressed the President of the State of Palestine in Greek as follows:

Your Excellency Mr. President of the State of Palestine Mr Mahmoud Abbas,

“Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace, good will among men”(Lk 2:14), is the great and everlasting message of the Feast of Christmas in general and of the city of Bethlehem in particular. This message is nothing but the voice of Divine Justice which corresponds to the great expectations of the aggrieved and weak people.

It is not possible for peace to exist without justice. The Prophet Isaiah features peace as a work of justice “the works of righteousness shall be peace” (Isaiah 32:17).

In you Mr. President is internationally identified the one “who hungers and thirsts after righteousness” (Mt 2:6), the political leader of the people of Palestine. This truth has been strongly supported with the recent decision of the United Nations Security Council which denounces the policy of the settlers in the occupied territories of Palestine.

We know Mr. President that this was a personal success of your efforts and those of your collaborators. Allow us to congratulate you. According to the principles of the Abrahamic religion and therefore of the Gospel of the birth in the Bethlehem Cave from Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit of God the Logos, of Christ, the sacred gift of peace is the fruit of truth, justice and love.

This very incident is what we celebrate today. This incident is exalted by Christians and Muslims who make up and compose the Palestinian people and its Government under the wise leadership of your Excellency Mr. President.

The Holy Shrines which are historic meeting places of Heaven and earth, of Divinity with humanity, are those which guarantee the harmonious co-existence of the faithful people of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

They are the ones which throughout the centuries formed the unique culture of the multicultural, multinational and interreligious identity of the Middle East and especially of

the Holy Land. Any effort of distortion of this informally existing Status Quo will be considered as lack of respect towards the God of love and peace (2 Cor. 13:11).

Mr. President, your presence with us constitutes an irrefutable witness of the good fruit of the historic and sacred Treaty of the Great Caliph Omar Ibn-al Khattab and our predecessor Patriarch Sophronios. This sacred Treaty is not a historic past, but a living present and a bright beacon amidst the ordeals, agitations, and confusions in the open sea of the people's lives, especially in our region. As for Bethlehem, the Nativity Cave of the Prince of Peace and the Sun of Righteousness, they are the soluble harbour, where with governmental skill, prudence and wisdom you have already led the independence of the State of the Palestinian people.

We wish you many happy returns and a Peaceful New Year.

2. On Christmas Day

At 10:30pm on Friday 24th December 2016 / 6th January 2017, the feast of Christmas began with the Matins Service. For this, there was a formal entrance of the Orthodox congregation in the Basilica through the south gate of the Baptismal site, led by the Patriarchal Vicar Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitlias, who upon entering recited the introductory psalm, while the Greek choir under the leading choir singer Archimandrite Aristovoulos sang on the right and the Arabic choir of the Basilica of the Nativity under Mr. Samour Lawrence sang on the left the Matins troparia.

Around 11:30pm, His H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos arrived and sang the Katavasie "Christ is born, give Him glory", he prayed to receive the blessing and entered the Holy Altar where the brotherly Episcopal osculation took place, and the Priests likewise prayed to receive the blessing.

Having completed the above, around midnight His Beatitude exited the Holy Altar gate and went down to the Grotto of the Nativity under the chanting of the troparion "Come oh faithful! Let us go to see where Christ is born", accompanied on his right hand side by the President of the State of Palestine his Excellency Mahmoud Abbas Abu Mazen, and on his left hand side the Greek Consul General Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos, followed by the Archbishops and the Priests who were dressed in their liturgical vestments, the Governmental and Consulate representatives as well as a crowd of Orthodox people participating in the prayer.

Herein after the chanting of the Degrees, the Gospel reading on Christ's incarnate birth according to St. Luke was recited in Greek and in Arabic, "...in those days there went out a decree from Caesar August". After the Gospel reading, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos' Christmas message was read in Greek by Geronda Chief Secretary and in Arabic by Dean Presbyter and Press officer of the Patriarchate in the Arabic mass media, Issa Mousleh.

For the English translation of the Christmas message follow the link:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2016/12/20/28521>

His Beatitude especially underlined the following on the occasion of the presence of His Excellency the President of the State of Palestine:

"To the President of the State of Palestine His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas Abu Mazen we wish health, strength, solidarity and success in all his actions for the benefit of the Palestinian people. We also thank him for the honour of his presence in our Feast and for all his provisions and concern for our Patriarchate and all the Christians of the Holy Land".

Consequently there was the veneration of the Star in the Manger, the ascent through the north gate of the Cave,

followed by a thrice litany, one for each of the Basilica aisles, under the choir chanting, which concluded in the middle of the Basilica for a Deisis (prayer).

Matins succeeded, with His Beatitude chanting the 9th Ode, the Praises, the Doxology and the Divine Liturgy officiating His Beatitude and co-officiating Hagiotaphite Archbishops, the Patriarchal Vicar Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Most Reverend Archbishops: Gerondas Aristarchos of Constantina and Chief Secretary, Theodosios of Sebastia, Demetrios of Lydda and Secretary of the Holy Synod, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Priests and other Arab speaking Presbyters, among a multitude of faithful people who were praising and glorifying God. The Divine Liturgy in the Grotto of the Nativity was led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Nectarios of Anthidona.

The Divine Liturgy finished at 3:30pm on Christmas Day, 25th December 2016 / 7th January 2017. After the Divine Liturgy the Hegoumen and renovator of the Monastery Most Reverend Archbishop Theophylactos of Jordan offered a lavish meal at the refectory of the Monastery.

From Secretariat-General

<httpv://youtu.be/5j2MlPyCE7Q>

<httpv://youtu.be/cbfj62n609c>

<httpv://youtu.be/TWYJHfNE7xI>

<httpv://youtu.be/0rIgn0Q3gIo>



VISIT OF THE HAGIOTAPHITE BROTHERHOOD TO THE FRANCISCAN AND THE LATIN PATRIARCHATE ON THE OCCASION OF CHRISTMAS

On Thursday morning of 16th/29th December 2016, the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood headed by its Hegoumen His Beatitude and our Father the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, visited on the occasion of Christmas the Franciscan Friars where Hegoumen is Fr. Francesco Paton and the Latin Patriarchate where Patriarch is the former Custodian Pierbattista Pizzaballa.

To the Franciscan Friars His Beatitude gave the following speech in English, follow the link: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2016/12/29/28806>

For the His Beatitude's speech in English to the Latin Patriarchate follow the link: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2016/12/29/28800>

From Secretarial General

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS OF PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III TO THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND.

29 December 2016

Your Excellency, Father Francesco,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Fraternities

Dear Fathers,

We greet you, Your Excellency, dear Father Francesco, with the joyful words of the much-loved Christmas hymn, **Adeste fideles;**

O come, all ye faithful,

joyful and triumphant,

O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;

come and behold him, born the King of angels.

As the eyes of the world are turned to Bethlehem at this holy season, as you celebrate your first Christmas as Custos, may you be encouraged in your ministry by the Light of the Incarnate Logos that shines from the Holy Cave,

We take this opportunity once again to congratulate you on your election, and to *assert the good* relations and co-

operation that exist between our two Fraternities Your predecessor, His Excellency Archbishop Pizzaballa, was instrumental in shaping our common work and witness, and we look forward to continuing this legacy – a legacy that is crucial for the well-being not only of our respective Fraternities and communities, but of the Holy Land, and especially of Jerusalem.

It is precisely this mutual respect and understanding, and our ability to work together, that shows the world that we are worthy of the diakonia of the Holy Places with which Divine Providence has entrusted us.

We rejoice in particular at the good work that we are doing together for the restoration of the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulcher. Our unity of purpose in the restoration of this, the most holy site in the world, is a wonderful witness to our common faith in the Incarnation and the Resurrection, and it shows that we can indeed overcome a long history of suspicion and difficulty for the sake of our spiritual mission. As you yourself have so rightly said in your Christmas message, it is our religious duty to move from the sentiment of the season to action for the sake of those who need the ministry that it is our responsibility to provide.

We look forward to continuing the good work on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher with you, as we move on from the restoration of the Sacred Edicule to the crucial repair and renovation of the underground water and drainage systems beneath the Rotunda.

The Holy Places are not simply stones, or even monuments of historical interest. They are the undeniable, living martyria of sacred history that we acknowledge and proclaim to the world.

As we celebrate this great Feast of the Nativity in our beloved Holy Land, may God strengthen us all to be faithful

witnesses, jubilant in the news of the Birth of the Incarnate Logos and Son of God, who brings healing in his wake, and joy to the world.

May God bless you, Your Excellency, and all the members of your Fraternity, and we wish you all a very happy and holy Christmas, that the peace that passes all understanding may prevail.

Thank you.

Merry Christmas and Blessed New Year!

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.

**CHRISTMAS GREETINGS OF
PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III TO
THE APOSTOLIC ADMINISTRATOR
OF THE LATIN PATRIARCHATE IN
JERUSALEM.**

29 December 2016

Your Excellency, Archbishop Pizzaballa,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers

We greet you, Your Excellency on this joyful Feast
with the beautiful words of the ancient hymn

Creator of the stars of night.

*When this old world drew toward night, you came; but not in
splendor bright not as a monarch, but the child of Mary,
blameless mother mild*

(Conditor alme siderum)

In this mystery of God's kenosis, of the miracle of the Creator of the Universe who consented to be born in our human flesh, we share in the humility of God, and give thanks together for the incarnation of the Divine Logos, Who is Himself the source of our grace and the hope of our glory.

We are glad to be greeting you at this Feast in your capacity as Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate, and we are pleased that His Holiness Pope Francis recognizes in you the experience and wisdom that you have gained in your many years of life and service in the Holy Land.

The continuity of your ministry and presence among us helps greatly in the ongoing strengthening of our close co-operation, in the building up of which you have played a crucial role as Custos of the Franciscan Fraternity. Together our common work on the restoration of the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre is a sign of great hope to a world in which there is so much despair.

But more than this, our co-operation in the diakonia of the Holy Places is a sign of something much deeper, for our co-operation also strengthens the effect of our pastoral mission. At a time when our region and our communities are suffering terribly by a range of dangers and untold difficulties, this pastoral mission is always at the forefront

of our common concern and efforts.

As primates we are charged primarily with the spiritual care and nurture of the children of God entrusted to us, and they rightly look to us for this ministry. May we together always be an encouragement to all our peoples and communities in Jerusalem and throughout our beloved Holy Land,

Creator of the stars of night, your

people's everlasting light,

O Christ, Redeemer of us all,

we pray you hear us when we call.

May Christ our true God, who's born in a cave in Bethlehem, hear our prayers and give you strength Your Excellency, in your pastoral ministry. And may God bless the members

of your community throughout the Holy Land. And may the peace of our Lord prevail.

Thank you.

Merry Christmas and blessed the New Year!

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem