

THE NAME DAY OF H.B. THEOPHILOS, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

On Tuesday, the 9th/22nd of March 2016, the Name Day of H.B. Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, was celebrated in commemoration of St Theophilos, one of the Holy Martyrs who had suffered a martyr's death in the year 320 AD, during the reign of Licinius, in Lake Sebaste, Pontus.

A' Vespers

The feast began in the form of Parrhesia through the reading of the Ninth Hour at the Monastic Church of Sts Constantine and Helen, followed by procession to the Church of the Resurrection, censing and veneration at the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre.

Vespers was then held at the katholikon, upon which the Patriarchal Entourage returned to the Patriarchates.

B' On feast-day

On the morning of Tuesday, the 9th/22nd of March 2016, the Patriarchal Entourage walked to the Church of the Resurrection where the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts was led by Patriarch Theophilos, having as concelebrants: Metropolitans Kyriakos of Nazareth and Benedict of Philadelphia, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and Arabic-speaking presbyters, Archdeacon Evlogios and Hierodeacons Anastasios and Markos. Archimandrite Aristovoulos sang, aided by novice Georgios Papanikolaou, in the presence of the Greek Consul-General to Jerusalem and several pilgrims.

The divine Liturgy was followed by Doxology.

The service was broadcast live over the internet on the Patriarchate's Radio Station.

Upon return to the Patriarchates, His Beatitude was addressed by the Elder Secretary-General, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, and the Greek Consul-General to Jerusalem.

In his speech, Mr Zacharoudiakis conveyed the unwavering support of the Greek Government to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, declaring their acknowledgement, appreciation and respect for the Patriarch's tireless efforts and multidimensional contribution, and underling the absolute confidence with which He is invested. "The unprecedented change and rapid developments of our times", said the Consul-General, "especially in the troubled region of the Middle East, project once more the Rum-Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem as a fulcrum of modesty, prudence and stability that, by means of its moral and spiritual stature, contributes to the fight against blind fanaticism and to the defence of justice, the strengthening of understanding and solidarity as well as to the achievement of progress in the efforts towards peace in the suffering Middle East".

Mr Sami Halasa, Minister of Public Works of the Government of Jordan, and representative of the king of Jordan, also addressed the Patriarch.

Moreover, Metropolitans, Patriarchal Commissioners, representatives of Communities and of sister Orthodox Churches and of the Arabic-speaking flock paid tribute to Patriarch Theophilos.

Extending thanks to those honouring Him, the Patriarch urged everyone to emulate the virtue of the saints in the face of contemporary persecutors of the Church of Christ, who rage against the faithful members of His Church and their innocent fellow citizens. "Lets us therefore pray to the saints", concluded the Patriarch, "so that by their mediation we

provide testament of the love and forbearance of Christ our Saviour, and we become worthy of peace and concord during these days of the holy Forty-Day Lent before reaching the glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

The festive gathering was followed by meatless monastic lunch.

From the Secretariat-General

<httpv://youtu.be/ozEJiGkvl3w>

<httpv://youtu.be/P09L83ebPRc>

<httpv://youtu.be/J3EAyNoXzbo>



SCAFFOLD INSTALLATION FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE AEDICULA OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

On Tuesday, 9th/22nd of March 2016, the feast-day of the Forty Martyrs who had suffered a martyr's death in Lake Sebaste, Pontus, and the name-day of His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, the scaffold required for the protection, reinforcement and restoration of the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre was attached to the structure in accordance with the report conducted by the NTUA's Scientific Team under the supervision and coordination of professor Antonia

Moropoulou.

On the conclusion of the divine Liturgy for the Presanctified Gifts and the Doxology for His Beatitude's name-day at the katholikon of the Church of the Resurrection, a modest ceremony took place in front of the Aedicula's southwest wall. The ceremony included the presentation of the scaffold tower by His Beatitude, the Custos of the Holy Land, and the Armenian Patriarch, in the presence of Ms Moropoulou, the Greek Consul-General to Jerusalem, Mr Zacharoudiakis, the Head of Christian Affairs at the Israeli Ministry of Religions, Mr Cesar Margie, and all Hagiotaphite Fathers.

During the ceremony, Patriarch Theophilos addressed guests in English, see:
<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2016/03/22/21731>

and went on to extend warm thanks to ATTICA BANK and in particular its Chairman, Mr Ioannis Gamvrilis, for courteously offering the amount of 50.000 euros for the purchase and installation of the scaffolding.

At the end of the ceremony, the Patriarchal Entourage proceeded to the Patriarchate for the celebrations of His Beatitude's name-day.

From the Secretariat-General

<httpv://youtu.be/6IyqC2Jgkkg>



REMARKS AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE SACRED AEDICULE IN THE CHURCH OF THE ANASTASIS

22 March 2016

Your Excellency Father Pierrebattista, Your Beatitude Patriarch Nourhan, Esteemed Members of the Project Team, Your Eminences, Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we mark the formal beginning of the project for the restoration of the Sacred Aedicule in the Church of the Anastasis. This project is being carried out by a team of specialists from the National Technical University of Athens under the supervision of Professor Moropoulou, whose important report has recently been completed and published. This report was submitted to the three Communities here in Jerusalem in February of this year, and the work can now begin;

We wish to acknowledge the consensus that the three Communities have reached so that this project could proceed. We are grateful to the Custos, Father Pierrebattista, and to the Armenian Patriarch, Patriarch Nourhan, for their commitment to this work. In so doing, the three Communities, which are the historic guardians and servants of the Holy Places, are fulfilling the historic responsibility that has been entrusted to us by the Status Quo, the provisions of which have been honored both in the process of producing the report and in the renovation work that is about to start.

For the first time in over two centuries, the Sacred Aedicule

will receive urgent restoration and renovation. This restoration will secure this Holy Place for generations yet to come for all those pilgrims and people of good will who come to this church to seek spiritual renewal. During the entire process of renovation, the Holy Tomb will remain accessible to pilgrims without disruption, and for this careful planning and execution we owe the project team a huge debt of gratitude. The Holy Tomb must always be open to all.

May God bless this work and those whose responsibility it is to carry it out, and may the renovation of the Holy Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ be a beacon of hope for a hurting world.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Sunday, the 7th/20th of March 2016, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the Patriarchate commemorated the restoration of the icons by pious emperors Theodora Augusta and Michael in the year 843 AD following more than a century of merciless persecution against them.

Through the restoration of the holy icons, the Church attests to the incarnation, humanization and birth in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and to His appearance amongst men. According to the Fathers of the Church, denying the icons equals denying the presence of Jesus on earth.

A' Vespers

This event was celebrated by the Church with the reading of the Ninth Hour at 2:00 pm at the monastic Church of Sts Constantine and Helen, followed by Vespers at the Church of the Resurrection, censing and veneration at the Apokathelosis and the Holy Sepulchre, as members of the Synod and Primate's venerated at the Golgotha, amidst bells tolling.

After Vespers, the Patriarchal Entourage walked to the monastic Church of Sts Constantine and Helen.

B' On feast-day

At 7:00 am of Sunday, the 7th/20th of March 2016, the Patriarchal Entourage, headed by Patriarch Theophilos, walked to the Church of the Resurrection.

Once His Beatitude, Primate's and Priests were dressed in sacerdotal vestments, the divine Liturgy began at the katholikon, led by the Patriarch. Co-officiating were Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, Archbishops Dorotheos of Avila, Aristarchos of Constantina, Theodosios of Sebaste, Demetrios of Lydda, Makarios of Qatar and Metropolitan Joachim of Zambia, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, and Archimandrite Nektarios as head priest. Archimandrite Aristovoulos sang with pious pilgrim, novice Georgios, and others in the presence of the Greek Consul-General to Jerusalem, Mr Georgios Zacharoudiakis, as a great crowd of nuns, members of the Greek parish, the Arabic-speaking flock and pilgrims participated in piety.

The Apolysis was followed by a procession of the Holy Icons

around the Holy Sepulchre and the shrines surrounding the katholikon, in declaration of their victory.

On the completion of the procession, the Patriarch read the Gospel on the Resurrection and the Synodicon of the First Sunday of Lent for the eternal memory of those who restored the Holy Icons and anathema against the iconoclasts.

At the Patriarchate, His Beatitude addressed guests in Greek, pointing out that “the restitution and veneration, hence the restoration of the Holy Icons marks a great event for our Orthodox faith in the Crucified and Resurrected Lord or better say God the Logos united in substance with our own human nature, as proclaimed by the Apostle Paul: *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. (1 Timothy 3, 16)*”.

The Patriarch closed his speech by proclaiming “Eternal Memory!” for the followers of the holy icons.

From the Secretariat-General

<httpv://youtu.be/C8y00CqXg-s>

<httpv://youtu.be/tNjLftPfSdw>

<httpv://youtu.be/aa0i9tKjtYg>



THE FIRST STASIS OF THE SALUTATIONS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On the evening of Friday the 5th/18th of March 2016, the Patriarchate celebrated the First Stasis of the Salutations of the Most Holy Theotokos.

The First Stasis of the Salutations was read in the context of the Small Compline service and of the Canon “I shall open my mouth” at the katholikon of the Church of the Resurrection, under His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem. Patriarch Theophilos was accompanied by the Patriarchal Commissioner, the Most Reverend Isychios, Metropolitan of Kapitolias; the Elder Secretary-General, His Eminence Aristarchos, Archbishop of Constantina; His Eminence Demetrios, Archbishop of Lydda, the Most Reverend Joachim, Metropolitan of Zambia, the Elder Kamarasis, Archimandrite Nektarios, and other Hagiotaphite Fathers. In attendance was the Greek Consul-General to Jerusalem and members of the Greek parish and of the Patriarchate’s Arabic-speaking flock.

In the context of this pious service, His Beatitude preached the Word of God in Greek, saying inter alia:

“The Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary became the vessel of the Grace of the Holy Spirit, through which every man that comes to the world is enlightened and blessed. St Gregory Palamas calls the Holy Theotokos “a border between the built and unbuilt nature” and explains that no one could approach God than through her and the mediator born of her, and none of God’s gifts could be given to either angels or humans than through her”. [...]

“The pure and ever-virgin Theotokos stands apart as the par

excellence paradigm of obedience to the will of God, which in this case signifies fasting, namely the submission of our will to the will of God. It also signifies repentance and confession of our transgression and sins. “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6, 37) says the Lord. To the question of the Apostle Peter, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times” (Matthew 18, 21-22). [...]

From the Secretariat-General

<httpv://youtu.be/bUfK5EfSrmQ>



THE FEAST OF HOSIOS GERASIMOS OF JORDAN AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Thursday the 4th/17th of March, 2016, Thursday of the First Week of Lent, the Patriarchate observed the memory of hosios Gerasimos of Jordan at the Monastery dedicated to his name, on the West Bank of the river Jordan, before the river mouth at the Dead Sea.

St Gerasimos came from his hometown of Lycia, Asia Minor, to the Holy Land and led a monk's life at a Monastery in the region of the river Jordan. Having shortly deviated to the heresy of Monophysitism circa 450 AD, he returned to Orthodoxy under hosios Efthymios the great and excelled in defending the Christological doctrine of the two natures of Christ at the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon. He went on to found a monastic Lavra for advanced monks, led thousands of them to

life, completion and deification in Christ, and attracted several Christians from across the world to piety in Christ. The Monastery he founded survived the transformations of human history, albeit in the tumultuous region of Palestine.

At this Monastery, His Beatitude Theophilos officiated at the divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, having as concelebrants Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, e.g. Archimandrite Ieronymos, hegumen in Fhes, Jordan; Archimandrite Ignatios, hegumen at the Village of the Shepherds; Archimandrite Paisios, hegumen at the Monastery of the Prophet Elias; Archimandrite Ananias, hegumen at St George, Beit Jala; Hieromonk Kyriakos, priest at the Monastery, and the vicar of St Constantine, f. Nikitas; Arabic-speaking presbyters as f. Issa Mousleh, f. Yusef Hondali and f. Pavlos Aleme; also, Archdeacon Evlogios, Hierodeacons Agapios, Markos and f. Anastasios. Metropolitans Kyriakos of Nazareth and Isychios of Kapitolias, the Elder Secretary-General, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Archbishops Demetrios of Lydda and Makarios of Qatar, and Metropolitan Joachim of Zambia prayed jointly. Archimandrite Aristovoulos sang with monks of the Monastery of Hozeva and Bethlehem, having students from the Patriarchal School as participants. Attending the service were the Patriarchate's Mass Media representatives, ministers of the church and pilgrims from Greece, Cyprus, Russia, Romania and Ukraine.

To the pious congregation the Patriarch preached the word of God in Greek.

In Arabic, the Patriarch's speech may be reached here: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2016/03/17/19668>

A great crowd participated in the Sacrament of the Holy metalepsis. A procession followed, as the icon of Abba Gerasimus was carried thrice around the Monastery, and supplication was made for health and peace in the world, and for the repose of the souls of our departed fathers and

brothers.

At noon, the hegumen, Archimandrite Chrysostomos, hosted everyone to meatless lunch.

From the Secretariat-General

<httpv://youtu.be/uXnde1LD9h0>

<httpv://youtu.be/qnt0SYg30Fs>

<httpv://youtu.be/NpacowJ9Wa0>



THE FEAST OF ST PORPHYRIOS IN GAZA

On Sunday the 29th of February/13th of March 2016, Cheesefare Sunday, the memory of St Porphyrios, Bishop of Gaza, was celebrated at the Monastery dedicated to his name, in Gaza.

According to his biographer, deacon Markos, St Porphyrios came from his birthplace of Salonika to the Holy Land circa 380 AD and went on to lead a monk's life at a Monastery by the Jordan river, where he excelled in asceticism and all virtues.

When he fell ill, he went to Jerusalem and found cure by the grace of God. In 392 AD, he was ordained Presbyter and

Crusader of the Church of the Resurrection. In 395 AD, he was ordained Bishop of Gaza. In Gaza, he was strongly opposed by Greek idolaters, as Gaza was still a stronghold of pagan Hellenism. The pagans' reaction against Christians in Gaza was so strong that it initiated persecutions and a prohibition to erect Churches. In Constantinople, Bishop Porphyrios obtained an ordinance by Emperor Arkadios, on the suggestion and help of Empress Eudoxia, by virtue of which he went on to preach Christianity in Gaza, destroyed pagan temples, the Church of Marna being the foremost amongst them, founded Christian churches and, taking on a missionary work, attracted thousands of souls to Christianity.

Ever since, Gaza has remained one of the Bishoprics of the Church of Jerusalem, its centre of veneration being the Church of St Porphyrios, built on the site of his tomb.

The tomb and the church are indeed a centre of veneration for the Rum Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate, numbering approximately 3000 members, having survived in adverse conditions caused by conflicts between Palestinians and Israelis. They are guided by their spiritual shepherd, the Patriarchal Commissioner, Archbishop Alexios of Tiberias.

The divine Liturgy was performed on the aforementioned day, led by Patriarch Theophilos. Co-officiating were the Patriarchal Commissioner, Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias; the Patriarchal Commissioner in Gaza, Archbishop Alexios of Tiberias; the Elder Secretary-General, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina; the vicar at St Porphyrios church in Gaza, Archimandrite Amphilochios; Archdeacon Evlogios and deacon Markos. The congregation sang in the Byzantine style, participating piously in the divine Liturgy.

To the pious congregation, the Patriarch preached the Word of God in Greek.

For Arabic, see link:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2016/03/13/19572>

Many of the faithful received Communion by the Patriarch, as well as Jerusalemite eulogias after the distribution of the antidoron.

On the conclusion of mass, a reception followed at the events hall that is adjacent to the historic church of St Porphyrios, and was recently built by Archbishop Alexios of Tiberias.

There, the Patriarch addressed the congregation in Greek.

For Arabic, see [link: https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2016/03/13/19574](https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2016/03/13/19574)

His Beatitude went on to visit the Patriarchate's school and the Community's cultural centre.

At noon, Patriarchal Commissioner Alexios, who took on the significant task of protecting the poor during the last conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, hosted guests to lunch at a seaside restaurant.

After lunch, the Patriarchal Entourage crossed the borders between Gaza and Israel, and returned to Jerusalem, praising the Lord for His wonders.

From the Secretariat-General



ATHENS PRESENTATION OF

INNOVATIVE PROGRAMME OF CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION OF THE AEDICULA OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

On Tuesday, the 24th of February/8th of March 2016, the innovative programme of conservation and restoration of the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre was presented at the Zappeion Megaron in Athens by the interdisciplinary team of the NTUA, consisting of: the head of the programme, Professor Antonia Moropoulou of the School of Chemical Engineers; the former professor of the School of Architects, Professor M. Korres; Professor A. Georgopoulos of the School of Rural and Surveying Engineering; and Professor K. Spyarakos of the School of Civil Engineering. The presentation was held upon the invitation of Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem, the Rector of the NTUA, Mr I. Golias, the President, Mr G. Christou, and the Board of the Olympia and Bequests Committee.

At the presentation of the study, which has been conducted for the first time after 1810 when the Rum Orthodox erected the Aedicula, the Patriarchate was represented by Patriarch Theophilos, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Archbishop Isidoros of Hierapolis, the Holy Sepulchre's Exarch in Athens, Archimandrite Damianos, other Hagiotaphite Fathers, and Archimandrite Mathaios and Hieromonk Savvas, serving at the Exarchate in Athens. Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and all Greece, Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus, Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Messenia – Dean of the University of Athens' Faculty of Theology – and Metropolitan Pavlos of Glyfada also attended the event.

The state was represented by the Minister of Culture and Sports and emeritus professor of the NTUA, Mr Aristides

Baltas, and the Deputy Minister for Culture, Research and Religious Affairs, Mr Constantinos Fotakis. Also in attendance were the President of the Greek House of Representatives, Mr Nikolaos Voutsis; the Minister of State, Mr Alexandros Flambourakis, representing the Greek Prime Minister; the former Rector, Mr Theodoros Fortsakis, representing the Opposition; the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administrative Reform, Mr Panagiotis Kouroumbilis; the Deputy Finance Minister, Mr Tryfon Alexiades; the Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, Transports and Networks, Ms Marina Chrysoveloni; the President of the Union of Centrists, Mr Vasileios Leventis; the President of the Academy of Athens, Mr Thanasis Valtinos; Ms Aikaterini Paliou, representing the Prefect of Attica; the Jordan Ambassador to Greece, Mr Fawwaz Qasim Al-Eitan, the Ambassador of Israel to Greece, Ms Irit Ben-Abba, the Palestinian Ambassador to Greece, Mr Marwan Emile Toubassi, the Greek Ambassador to Lithuania, Mr Asteriades, Members of the Greek Parliament, the President of the Bank of Attica, Mr Ioannis Gamvrilis, the President of the Technical Chamber of Greece, Mr Stasinios, Rectors, Deputy Rectors, Deans and professors of the National Technical University of Athens, and many others.

The event included four different units, namely: a) Opening Speeches, b) Presentation of the Innovative Programme of Conservation and Restoration of the Aedicula of the Holy Sepulchre in the Church of the Resurrection, c) Remarks and d) Closing.

Patriarch Theophilos addressed attendants in Greek, pointing out that the event consists a landmark in the history of the Church of the Resurrection, and that whilst conducting the restoration study, the interdisciplinary team did its utmost not to prevent freedom of access to thousands of pilgrims visiting the Holy Sepulchre from across the world. The presentation of the Interdisciplinary Study, said His Beatitude, paves the way for the materialization of the

assigned project.

In his address, Minister Baltas pointed out that the presence of the leaders of the Christian Communities of the Holy Sepulchre, namely the Custos of the Holy Land of the Franciscans and the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, sets the signal for and a perspective of consultation within the Christian world.

The Rector of the NTUA, Professor Ioannis Golias, underlined that the National Technical University of Athens confirms that social and national contribution consist a significant axis of its mission, hence why it has undertaken the aforementioned innovative research. Mr Golias added that this is an emblematic project pertaining to a leading monument of global influence.

After the Patriarch's address, Ms Moropoulou and Messrs. Georgopoulos, Korres and Spyrakos presented the "comprehensive study on the documentation and diagnosis of the pathology of the Holy Aedicula and on the proposal for compatible and sustainable materials and interventions for conservation, enhancement and restoration".

The presentation was followed by comments from the International Scientific Community, i.e. the Representative of the Institute of Geological Research of the Armenian Academy of Science, Mr H. Babayan, Professor G. Tucci of the University of Florence, and representatives of the Christian Communities, His Paternity the Franciscan Custos of the Holy Land, Rev. f. Pierrebattista Pizzaballa, and His Beatitude the Armenian Patriarch in Jerusalem, Nourhan Manougian.

On the conclusion of the event, the Exarchate of the Holy Sepulchre hosted lunch at "Aegli Zappiou", on behalf of the NTUA's Rector, Professor Golias.

From the Secretariat-General



THE ROMANIAN PRESIDENT VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE

On the afternoon of Monday, the 23rd of February/7th of March 2016, the Romanian President, Mr Klaus Werner Iohannis, accompanied by a group of Romanian government officials, the Romanian Ambassador to Israel, Ms Andreea Păstârnac and his esteemed wife, visited the Patriarchate.

His Excellency the Romanian President and his entourage were received by H.B. Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, in the presence of Hagiotaphite Fathers. The Patriarchal Commissioner, Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, and Archimandrite Porphyrios had accompanied the Romanian President to the Patriarchate from the Gate of David.

Upon arrival at the Hall of the Throne, Patriarch Theophilos addressed Mr Iohannis in English, see link: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2016/03/07/21304>

His Beatitude went on to bestow on the Romanian President the honorary distinction of Crusader of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, in recognition of his support of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and of the Mother of Churches.

Touched, Mr Iohannis thanked the Patriarch for the distinction and offered him a plaque with stamps of Romania.

An interesting discussion followed on the harmonious relations between the Patriarchates of Jerusalem and Romania, whilst

guests were hosted to a reception before both the Patriarch and the Romanian President walked in procession to the Church of the Resurrection.

There, Mr Iohannis venerated at the Holy Sepulchre, the Katholikon and Golgotha before proceeding to the office of the Elder Sacristan wherein the Holy Cross and relics of saints are kept.

From there, the Romanian President left to carry on his visit to Israel.

From the Secretariat-General

<http://youtu.be/lfjIyFGb3G0>



ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO HIS EXCELLENCY KLAUS IOHANNIS THE PRESIDENT OF ROMANIA TO THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

7 March 2016

Your Excellency Mr. President,

Respected Members of the Romanian Delegation,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We welcome you warmly, Your Excellency, to the Holy City of Jerusalem and to the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. You come among us as a peacemaker to a land that is thirsty for peace, and we assure you of our prayers for your mission.

As the oldest religious institution in the Holy Land, the Patriarchate is a witness to sacred history, and also the guardian and the servant of the Holy Places. We have endeavored down the ages to protect and sustain the Holy Places as places of worship that are accessible to all without discrimination. Jerusalem is very dear to the entire world, and to this Holy City we welcome you as a pilgrim, just as we welcomed your predecessor, His Excellency, former President Basescu, in 2014.

Your visit renews and deepens the warm relationship that has existed between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Romanian people for centuries. Our predecessors, in particular Patriarch Dositheos II and Patriarch Chrysanthos, had a special pastoral devotion to the region now known as Romania; and we also rejoice in the fact that the earlier principalities that now form the modern state of Romania gave great moral and material support to the Patriarchate in the struggle to protect the Holy Places.

The Patriarchate receives many pilgrims from Romania every year, and we are pleased that a fraternal and canonical relationship exists today between our Churches. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem has been entrusted with the care of all Orthodox Christians who live in or visit the Holy Land, and we take this pastoral responsibility extremely seriously. This is our ecumenical vocation to the Orthodox Church.

A visible sign of this close relationship was the recent canonization of the Romanian Saint John the New Chozibite at the monastery in Wadi Qelt. The presence of the relics of Saint John in the monastery of Saint George are a deep spiritual bond between the Church of Jerusalem and the Romanian people.

Furthermore, your visit is an encouragement for the Christian presence in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East. As Your Excellency is well aware, the Christian presence is of paramount importance to the integrity of the cultural and religious landscape of the region. The Christian presence is also fundamental in preserving the Christian character of Jerusalem.

We congratulate you, Your Excellency, on your recent election as President, and we assure you of our best wishes and prayers for the work that lies ahead of you in this weighty office. In token of our appreciation and in recognition of the intimate relationship between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Romania, we would like to bestow on you the decoration of the Grand Cross of the Holy Sepulcher.

May God bless all the people of your beloved country.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem