

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

9 January 2016

Your Beatitudes,

Your Excellencies,

Your Eminences,

Beloved Members of our Respective Churches and Communities,

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We greet you with these words of joy:

*Today heaven and earth are united, for Christ is born. Today
God has come to earth, and man ascends to heaven. Today God,
who by nature cannot be seen, is seen in the flesh for our
sake. Let us glorify him, singing:*

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace!

Your coming has brought peace to us.

Glory to You, O our Savior!”

The words of our liturgies at Christmas speak eloquently of
the coming of the Incarnate Logos to take on our human flesh

and our human life for the sake of our salvation. We thank all of you for coming to greet us today, and we wish you all the joy of this great Feast of the Nativity.

On behalf of all the Christian communities of the Holy Land, we wish to take this opportunity to remind ourselves of some crucial commitments that are ours.

First, we remain committed to dialogue as the only effective way to achieve unity, respect, and mutual co-existence, not only between Christians, but between all people of good will irrespective of culture, language, ethnic origin, or religion. This human dialogue is a reflection of the divine-human dialogue that was ushered in by this Feast of the Incarnation when heaven and earth were joined, and God restored us to our right relationship with Him.

At this season of peace and reconciliation, we also remain committed to peace and reconciliation between the Abrahamic faiths. The Holy Land is our common home, and we share a common destiny. The World looks to us in hope for the promise of a new human future in which all may enjoy freedom of worship, and mutual understanding.

And lastly we re-iterate our condemnation of all violence of any kind from whatever side it comes. We know that it is dialogue, that careful and patient listening and speaking, and not violence that shapes the common ground on which all people of good will desire to stand.

We must never waiver in these obligations. At Christmas especially we preach the message of peace, justice, reconciliation, and the respect for the human person, and this message we must also strive to embody ourselves.

This message we declare to the whole world also by keeping the Holy Places for all people as places of spiritual nourishment and enlightenment. As our world is more and more misled and confused, and as so many suffer from human violence and human

neglect, we cannot allow anything to distract us from our primary mission.

May this season of the Light of the Incarnate Logos, which is the living expression of the union of humanity and divinity, be our guide and inspiration as we pledge ourselves once again to our spiritual mission.

May God bless you, and may God bless all the peoples of our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

**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.**

9 January 2016

Your Excellency, dear Father Pierbattista,

Your Eminences,

Beloved Members of our respective Brotherhoods,

Reverend Fathers,

We welcome you warmly to the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Your Excellency, and we thank you for your gracious greeting to us on the occasion of our celebration of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This meeting comes at an especially happy time: when we greeted you after your celebration of the Nativity just a few days ago, we expressed our concern for Father Dhiya Azziz, who had been abducted on his way to serve his community. We now rejoice with you at his release earlier this week, and we hope that he is restored to you well and quickly.

We celebrate this great mystery of our salvation in these words from our worship on the Synaxis of the Mother of God:

Lord, you have come to Bethlehem

and have made your dwelling in the cave.

You have heaven as your throne,

yet you are laid in a manger.

The hosts of angels attend you on every side,

yet you have come down among shepherds,

that in your compassion you might save humankind.

Our mission is to be a living witness of this very mystery of the Incarnation, of the Incarnation of peace, the Incarnation of justice, the very Incarnation of the Living God who is our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are glad to be sharing in the joy of this feast with you, dear Father Pierbattista, as we have come to enjoy the fruits of mutual understanding and effective co-operation between our Brotherhoods both in the pastoral sphere, but also in the area of issues touching on the Status Quo. In particular we note in this respect the work to restore the Edicule of the Tomb of Christ. The preliminary report that we given to us recently is a tremendous step forward both in the preservation of the most holy site of our Christian faith and in the affirmation of our shared responsibility.

Our mutual understanding and effective co-operation are, as we know, of crucial importance for the well-being of our two communities as well as for the diverse populations of our region. Time and again we have known how imperative it is for us to remain solidly united in these things in order to ensure that the Holy Places remain places of prayer, worship, and spiritual refreshment for the whole world. As the Incarnate Logos left heaven for a manger, and the company of angels to dwell with us to save us, let us never forget our mission to serve all those, especially those in the greatest spiritual need, who come to the Holy Places for heavenly succor and the assurance of salvation.

May we be faithful to this proclamation of the Christmas Feast, and may we grow ever more deeply in our common mission to all our people in our beloved Holy Land, and to all who look to the Incarnate Logos in hope.

May God bless you, dear Father Pierbattista, the members of your Brotherhood, and all the faithful of your community in this blessed and holy season.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

CHRISTMAS VIGIL AT THE BASILICA OF THE NATIVITY (2016)

The feast of Christmas was celebrated by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem on Thursday, 25th of December 2015/7th of January 2016, in the town where our Lord Jesus Christ was born in the flesh, namely Jerusalem and the Grotto of the Nativity.

B' On feast-day

The feast of Christmas was celebrated as a night-long service of Matins and divine Liturgy at the Basilica and the Grotto of the Nativity.

At 22:30 pm of Wednesday, Christmas Eve, the 24th of December 2015/6th of January 2016, the Service commenced with the entrance of the Orthodox from the internal south gate of the Basilica, known as the Gate of the Baptistry, as Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias officiated during Matins at the Katholikon of the Basilica before the iconostasis.

His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, went on to

officiate at Matins.

Before the Beautiful Gate of the Holy Bema, the Patriarch and Primates descended to the Holy Cave, led by His Beatitude, flanked by His Excellency the Palestinian President, Mr Mahmoud Abbas, and government officials, and by the Greek Consul-General to Jerusalem, Mr Georgios Zacharoudiakis and representatives of the King of Jordan.

Upon entrance to the Grotto, the excerpt on the Nativity from Luke's Gospel was read in Greek and Arabic, after which, the message of the Patriarch was read in Greek by His Eminence Aristarchos, Archbishop of Constantina:

Today Bethlehem welcomes

the one who sits for ever by the Father,

today angels godly praise

the born infant,

glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace,

good will to people.

(Idiomelon of Christmas Matins)

The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church of Christ across the world celebrates today as it pastorally declares to its members and peacefully attests to the world a marvellous and splendid event that transcends every human concept, perception and power.

This event is the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. It is the realization of the nations' expectations. God, in His infinite love, oversaw the years of man's ignorance, forgave his committed sins and transgressions and invited him to a new divine life for which he had been made from the very beginning, *"And the Lord hath sent redemption to*

His people" (Psalm 110, 9).

Redemption is the Only-Begotten Son and Word of God. *"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as Sons"*(Galatians 4, 4) according to the Apostle Paul. *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us and out of His fullness we all received grace in place of grace already given"* (John 1, 14&16), according to the Evangelist of love.

The incarnation of the Logos, His investment in human flesh, was not performed in compliance with the laws of nature as – *"where God wishes so, the order of nature is overcome"* – but according to the will of the Father, a Holy Spirit descended upon Mariam, the Virgin daughter of Nazareth, and she conceived the Son of God as man. The Son of God became the Son of man too, he was incarnate and personified. Mariam bore the Messiah, Christ, in the flesh. The event took place in this town of Bethlehem, at this plain Cavern under the reign of Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus Octavianus.

This *"strange and paradoxical mystery"* is indeed God's loving and healing descent towards man. Through Jesus Christ, God *"descended into the lower parts of the earth"* (Ephes. 4, 9) so that man may be restored to the godlike beauty before the fall, and rise to the heavens. According to St Cyril of Alexandria, *"God, who exists outside the ecumene, has come to it and made the human soul alike so that it be cleansed from sin, and He took on the human form so that man be made a citizen of heaven"*.

To this mystery God had called for accomplices, helpers and witnesses. His accomplice was the ever-virgin Mary so that she might lend her flesh to His Son. Joseph was her helper and protector, the one who had accompanied Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, then Mary and the divine infant from Bethlehem to Egypt. His witnesses had been the magi, wise kings of the

Persians, led by a star, and the simple shepherds dwelling in the adjacent town of the Shepherds. God had also called as witnesses angels from heaven, proclaiming the mystery with the hymn *"Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace, good will to people"* (Luke 2, 14).

This angelic hymn proclaimed God's good will to men, *"and through Him to reconcile to himself all things"* (Colossians 1, 20) and *"to unite all things in Christ"* (Ephesians 1, 10), the Incarnate and Personified, *"because in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the deity in bodily form"* (Colossians 2, 9), *"so that in Christ they shall be brought to fullness"* (Colossians 2, 10) and *"they are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of His household"* (Ephesians 2, 19), in His body of the Church, *"of which He is the head"* (Colossians 1, 18).

Opposite this mystery of man's divinization by grace where he is *"co-heir"* (Romans 8, 17) with the Incarnate Jesus Christ, men have took various stances. Some, as the magi and the shepherds, rejoice upon the angelic proclamation and venerate the born infant. Others, as Herod the maniac, an imitator of the devil and killer of men, doubt and question and uncritically and indiscriminately chase away men from their paternal homes, violently and *en masse*, persecuting and murdering innocent children, youth, old, in contempt of human life made by God. To escape Herod's mania, on divine encouragement, Christ fled to Egypt, demonstrating through his flee the vulnerability of His human body which, after all, would endure the holy passion on the cross before *"annulling the vulnerability with His resurrection from the dead"* according to St Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Hideous incidents of violence at the expense of Christians and other innocent fellow humans in the region of the Middle East and across the world are denounced by the Church of Christ. The Church denounces war and violence, advocating peace for those near and those far. Though persecuted, it does not

persecute but prays for its persecutors. Through Baptism it accepts man in its body, the body of Christ, and blesses and cultivates and formulates man as a peaceful person believing that *"blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God"* (Matthew 5, 9).

The word of peace, justice, conciliation and exchange and the beginning of God's reign on earth, already experienced within the Church, is declared on this universal feast of Christianity by the Mother of Churches from the Sacred Cavern and the Holy Manger in the Basilica of the Nativity, preserved through the centuries as the apple of the eye, with wishes to the congregation within its jurisdiction, residing in the Palestinian state, for the blessing, strengthening and grace of the Lord of peace and justice, the Angel of God's great will, the Incarnate, Personified and Born by the Virgin in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, and with a supplication for the recommencement and fruition of peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians for the final and just resolution of the Palestinian problem, under the experienced guidance of His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas-Abu Mazen, honouring our feast today, whom we thank and for whom we wish several happy returns in health, safety and progress, prosperity and complete independence of the Palestinian people.

In the Holy Town of Bethlehem, **CHRISTMAS 2015**

Ardently blesser in the Lord,

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

The address was read in Arabic by Protopresbyter f. Issa Mousleh.

At this point, the Palestinian President left, and the service continued with a supplication, veneration at the Star and the Manger by His Beatitude and Primates in the presence of the

Greek Consul-General to Jerusalem, Mr Georgios Zacharoudiakis.

On the conclusion of the Service at the Cave, the Patriarchal Entourage exited through the northern Gate of the Grotto and walked in straight line from the chapel used by the Armenians, where a procession thrice began around the Basilica, as Archimandrite Aristovoulos sang in Greek and the Church of the Nativity Choir by Mr Lawrence Samour sang in Arabic.

Once Matins was completed, the divine Liturgy began at the Holy Bema, led by His Beatitude. Co-officiating were Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, Archbishops Dorotheos of Avila, Aristarchos of Constantina, Philoumenos of Pella, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and clerics visiting from other Orthodox Churches, Archdeacon Evlogios and Hierodeacons Markos and Anastasios. Archimandrite Aristovoulos sang in Greek and the Choir of the Church of the Nativity in Arabic, in the presence of a great crowd of locals and pilgrims from Greece, Russia, Romania and other Orthodox countries.

The feast was concluded with Communion and the distribution of *antidoron* at 3:30 am.

At the Cave, the divine Liturgy was led by Metropolitan Joachim of former Zambia.

The Patriarchal Entourage was then hosted to festive lunch by Archbishop Theophylaktos of Jordan.

After receiving spiritual and material food, and extending thanks to God for the celebration of Christmas, the Church of Jerusalem left Bethlehem for Jerusalem.

From the Secretariat-General

<httpv://youtu.be/NalQbhd1cAc>

httpv://youtu.be/ypZ9MRV_T80

<httpv://youtu.be/8bU40EZKhZA>



CHRISTMAS GREETINGS TO THE GUSTOS AND THE FRANCISCAN COMMUNITY.

29 December 2015

Your Excellency, dear Father Pierbattista,

Your Eminences,

Beloved Members of our respective Brotherhoods, Reverend
Fathers,

We greet you warmly today in these days after your celebration
of the Feast of the Nativity with these words of rejoicing:

*Your Nativity, O Christ our God,
has shone to the world the light of wisdom!
For by it, those who worshipped the stars,
were taught by a star to adore you,
the Sun of righteousness,
and to know you, the Orient from on high.*

O Lord, glory to you!

The Uncreated Light of the Incarnate Logos shines in our world even as the darkness threatens our region, and as we greet you with the joy of the Feast, we also wish to express our concern and assure you of our prayers as you attempt to locate Father Dhiya Assis, the parish priest of Yacoubieh in Syria, who disappeared in the days before Christmas as he was going to his community. The suffering of all our peoples and the dangers that the Christian communities of the Middle East face, remain at the heart of our pastoral and spiritual mission.

We share this pastoral and spiritual mission, and our common stand and our collaboration have produced tangible results. By working together carefully and attentively within the provisions of the Status Quo, we have continued to preserve the Holy Sites as primary places of worship, and we have kept them open and accessible to the whole world. Here in the Holy Sites the real ecumenical spirit is alive, and we have a great moral responsibility in this mission not simply to our respective communities, but to the whole world.

We live in a time in which many millions have never heard of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and even in the so-called developed world, familiarity with the Christian faith and with Christian culture has fallen dramatically in recent years. This places an even greater responsibility on our shoulders as those to whom Divine Providence has entrusted the safeguarding and the *diakonia* of the Holy Places, for Jerusalem and the Holy Land without the Holy Sites would be a lifeless desert.

Time and again, the Holy Places have been the very guarantee of the presence of the Christian community in the Holy Land and in the Middle East, a presence that we know to be of

absolute importance to the integrity of the region and its stability.

In the ecumenical spirit that is ours in this common mission, and in this season when the Uncreated Light is born in Bethlehem, we pray God to enlighten our minds and warm our hearts so that our brotherly co-operation and mutual understanding may grow deeper for the well-being of the Holy Land, our respective communities, and all those around the world who look to Jerusalem in hope.

We wish you, dear Father Pierbattista, all the members of the Brotherhood and all your people a blessed and joyous Christmas Feast. Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

SPEECH AT THE NEW YEAR RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL.

28 December 2015

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

Respected Members of the Government,

Beloved Heads of the Churches of the Holy Land,

Fellow Leaders of other Religious Communities,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this festive season, when our many religious communities celebrate their feasts and when we mark the turn of the year, on behalf of the Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land, we greet you, Mr. President, and we wish to express our gratitude to you for the strong stand you have continued to take in demonstrating respect for all religions and for the religious diversity of our region.

You have often said that you are the President for all the peoples who call Israel their home, and that the whole human family are the children of the One God. You have defended the rights of minorities in this country, and you have condemned the use of violence from whatever side it comes, especially in the current situation.

We who represent the Christian communities of the Holy Land join you in these affirmations and condemnations. We understand the integrity of this region to lie in a healthy diversity of ethnic and religious traditions in which there is true co-existence with mutual respect and security for all and we reject all forms of violence and terrorism, no matter the circumstances. It is absolutely unacceptable to use religion in this way, and in this season of light and peace, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to work for peace and reconciliation in our beloved Holy Land.

Recently at a meeting with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, we remarked that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and this truth is the foundation for our

understanding of the human person. But more than this, by extension we must also say that not only do we share a common humanity that is a mirror to us of God; we are also created of the same earth.

We went on to say that the earth belongs to all, and this particular earth of the Holy Land is not only our common home, it is our common origin. According to the Book of Genesis, we were “formed from the dust of the earth” (Gen. 2:7), and this common origin must be a reminder that we are united in a new common purpose to work together for the well-being and the flourishing of all who call the Holy Land their home and Jerusalem their spiritual capital.

In this regard, our mission has been precisely this, in safeguarding and serving the spiritual richness and beauty of Jerusalem, which is the embodiment of sacred history that is shared by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. Jerusalem is a home of worship, and our mission throughout the ages has been to ensure this special and unique character by upholding the provisions of the Status Quo, which remains the key to harmony and peace, and also to respecting the legitimate privileges and rights that history has accorded to us.

It is in this framework that we can find a renewed unity of identity and purpose. For this reason reconciliation and unity are fundamental to building trust and lasting peace.

Allow us to reiterate our commitment to education, an education that is based on the principles and moral values that derive from our common heritage in the Scriptures, which we are promoting through our schools. It is well known that education based on such values and principles is of paramount significance in shaping our social fabric.

As we greet you for the New Year, Mr. President, we assure you of our commitment to maintaining accessibility to the Holy Places for the thousands of pilgrims who are coming to the

Holy Land. Their yearning for spiritual nourishment is met in the Holy Sites, which are primarily places of worship.

We take this blessed opportunity to wish you a peaceful New Year, and we pray for God's blessing on our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UKRAINE HIS EXCELLENCY PETRO POROSHENKO TO THE PATRIARCHATE.

23 December 2015

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

Your Eminences,

Distinguished Members of the Presidential Entourage,

Your Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this season of preparation for the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, we welcome you warmly to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. You have come to the Mother of all the Churches, and the Patriarchate has a long history of playing an important role. For we represent not ourselves; we represent the entire Christian world.

The Patriarchate has a special concern for our Orthodox sisters and brothers around the world, and they feel at home here in Jerusalem with us. Through the ages, and with the moral and financial support of the Orthodox world, the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher has served and protected the Holy Places, ensuring that they remain open and accessible to all without distinction.

Every year the Patriarchate receives many thousands of pilgrims, many of whom come from the Ukraine. We are in contact with your country through these pilgrims, who come from your country to the Holy Land every day. In recent years we have welcomed many Bishops and clergy, and we remember today with particular affection and respect the late Metropolitan Vladimir, who made many pilgrimages here over the years.

It is right that we should honor this special relationship between the Patriarchate and the Ukraine, for this relationship is deep and goes back for centuries. Our predecessors the Patriarchs Theophanes III and Paisios played a crucial role in the life of the peoples and the Church in the region of the Ukraine in the 17th century in defending Orthodoxy in times of great difficulty.

In this same spirit, we are following closely the events in

your country, and we are aware of the challenges and difficulties that are before you. We pray especially for the end of the schism of the Orthodox Church in the Ukraine and the restoration of unity, for this unity is essential for the well-being of the country as a whole. We recall the words of Saint Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians, in which he said:

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose.

(I Cor. 1:10)

Unity is the foundation upon which normalization is built. There are solutions to every problem, but the successful resolution depends on unity and all enduring solutions flow from unity.

Here we must remark that in the restoration of unity, the Orthodox principle of oikonomia is fundamental. Oikonomia lies at the basis of the mind and heart of Orthodoxy, and it is in this framework of the divine oikonomia that a way forward can always be found.

The Church of Jerusalem is the Church of the Cross of Christ. We share in both the joys and the sufferings of the Church and our peoples wherever they may be, and we stand ready to make our contribution to the restoration of peace and the building of reconciliation.

We are pleased to welcome you here, Mr. President, as the leader of a great country, and we wish you success in your mission in our region. But we welcome you not simply as the head of state, but as a pilgrim, following in the footsteps of so many of your fellow countrymen down the ages who have come to the Holy Land for spiritual refreshment and renewal.

We therefore pray that Christ, who is the Incarnate Light of the Sun of Justice, may shine upon you, your family, and on all the peoples of your beloved Ukraine.

In token of the long and formative relationship between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Ukraine, we wish to bestow upon you, Your Excellency, the decoration of the Order of the High Cross of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

REMARKS AT THE MEETING OF THE HEADS OF CHURCHES & OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS WITH THE CHIEF RABBINATE OF ISRAEL.

21 December 2015

Rabbi David Lau,

Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef,

Your Beatitudes,

Your Graces,

Beloved Fellow Leaders of our Communities of Faith,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my remarks at this meeting, I wish only to make two central points.

The first is to say as clearly as possible that we totally condemn all violence against the human person, from whatever side of the conflict it comes, and under whatever circumstances it occurs. While we recognize the legitimate aspirations of both the State of Israel and the Palestinian people, we cannot condone acts of terror and the taking of life.

From this condemnation of terror and violence comes our second point. We make the bold claim that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and this truth is the foundation for our understanding of the human person. But more than this, by extension we must also say that not only do we share the same human nature that is a mirror to us of the divine life; we are also created of the same earth.

The earth belongs to all, and this particular earth of the Holy Land is not only our common home, it is our common origin. We were “formed from the dust of the earth” (Gen. 2:7), and this common origin must unite us in a new common purpose to work together for the well-being and the flourishing of all who call the Holy Land their home.

Because we are all created from the same earth, we are also all subject not just to the same corruption, but also to the same transformation. As we read in Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour

*pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves...
groan inwardly while we wait for adoption,*

for the redemption of our bodies.

(Rom. 8:22-23)

On this earth that we share, from which we take our common origin, we must also take a stand together, united for the sake of peace and reconciliation, and refusing to let any other concern deflect us from the task of building a society here, where all can live in peace, security and mutual flourishing.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE NEW YEAR RECEPTION OF THE ISRAELI MINISTER OF TOURISM.

21 December 2015

Your Excellency, Mr. Levin, Your Eminences,

Distinguished Members of the Ministry of Tourism,

Fellow Religious Leaders,

Your Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once again we gather in this festive Season of Light to celebrate our respective religious traditions and to welcome the New Year. On behalf of the Churches of the Holy Land and of the religious leadership of all our diverse communities, we are grateful to you, Mr. Levin, for this reception, and for the focus that it gives us at this time of the year.

We welcome many thousands of pilgrims every year to Jerusalem and the Holy Land from many different religious traditions. The essential identity of Jerusalem depends on its rich religious heritage, a heritage that embraces Jew, Christian, and Muslim alike, and in this respect, the Church of Jerusalem, which is the Church of the blood both of the prophets and of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a beacon for all.

The mission of the Church has been, and continues to be, the maintaining of the ecumenical uniqueness of the Holy City of Jerusalem, to which all are welcome without distinction. For Jerusalem is the spiritual home of all humanity, and it is the river of grace to which all come to drink:

As the deer longs for the water-brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God.

(Ps. 42: 1)

The Psalmist articulates for us the universal human longing

for God, a longing that it is the divine destiny of Jerusalem to fulfill for all. This is not a metaphor, but a profound reality, and this reality is shown in the ongoing – indeed, increasing – flow of pilgrims to these walls. This unbroken procession of pilgrims, which has existed since antiquity, builds the mission and identity of Jerusalem as the city of peace and reconciliation.

Jerusalem gathers the peoples of many nations and affiliations, as again the Psalmist tells us:

Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity with itself; to which the tribes of the whole world go up, to praise the name of the Lord.

(Ps. 121 [122]: 3-4)

This mission requires our vigilance if it is to keep its integrity, and we are all called to strengthen this mission. It is a truth that the vast majority of tourists to the Holy Land are pilgrims, and we must always keep before us the vital role we all play in ensuring that all people of good will, without distinction, may continue to find here in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land, the spiritual refreshment and renewal for which they so desire.

We stand united in our condemnation of terrorism of any kind, from whatever quarter it comes. Jerusalem must always be a beacon of peace and harmony between peoples, especially at this season when the world looks to Jerusalem in hope.

We wish you, Your Excellency, and the staff of the Ministry, a very happy New Year, and we pray God's blessing on all the peoples and communities of our beloved Holy Land. Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA H. E. EDI RAMA TO THE PATRIARCHATE.

21 December 2015

Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister,

Your Eminences,

Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Entourage,

Your Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we prepare in this season to celebrate in the Holy Land the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, we welcome you warmly to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. You have come to the Mother of all the Churches, and in witness to the Incarnate Light of God, the Church of Jerusalem is always engaged in spreading

the Gospel of peace, love, and reconciliation to the whole world.

We are glad that in Albania, after a long period of totalitarian rule in the 20th century, the freedom of religious expression and worship has been restored. We pray that this crucial liberty may always be supported and strengthened, as it is crucial for the well-being of any nation. Indeed we have been a witness to its progress in your country, when we were present in 2012 with Archbishop Anastasios for the consecration of the Resurrection of Christ Cathedral in Tirana. This event was a landmark in the modern history of Albania, and a recognition of the deep Christian roots of the region.

We take special pride in our close relationship with the Orthodox Church of Albania and our brother, Archbishop Anastasios. The Orthodox Church is playing a vital role in promoting the multi-cultural and multi-religious society of your country, and Archbishop Anastasios is deeply committed to the well-being of Albania and all her peoples.

We recognize the special relationship that Albania enjoys with the State of Israel, not least because of the role that Albania played in protecting its Jewish population during the Second World War. As you foster this important relationship, we take this opportunity to remind you that the integrity of Jerusalem depends in large measure on the place and the role of the Patriarchate, which remains the oldest, continuously functioning religious institution in the Holy Land. So your visit to the Patriarchate, as well as your mission to the State of Israel and the Holy Land, opens a new door in our deepening relationship.

It is always important that we remember that the Holy Land embraces a diversity of peoples, cultures, religions, and ethnicities, and in particular the followers of the Abrahamic faiths, that is Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

We welcome many thousands of pilgrims to the Holy Land every year, and we look forward to welcoming even more pilgrims from Albania. Pilgrimage is one of the most effective ways of strengthening the bonds between peoples and nations with our region, we welcome you, Mr. Prime Minister, not only as a political leader, but as a pilgrim yourself.

We wish you success in your mission here, and we pray for God's blessing on you, your family, and all the people of your beloved Albania.

In recognition of the special relationship that exists between the Patriarchate and the Church and people of Albania, we wish to bestow on you the decoration of the Order of the High Cross of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM HOLDS EVENT FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES

On the evening of Saturday, the 29th of November/12th of December 2015, the Patriarchate's Amman Office of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) organized a charity dinner

with the aim of securing financial aid for Syrian refugees, as two millions of them reside in refugee camps in Jordan.

Heading the event was the Director of the aforementioned Amman Office, Ms Wafa Gousous.

Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem honoured the event with His presence. He was accompanied by Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Metropolitan Joachim of former Zambia, the Patriarchate's Liaison with Arabic-speaking media, f. Issa Mousleh, the Hegoumen in Fhes, Archimandrite Ieronymos, and Archdeacon Evlogios. Diplomatic representatives of Russia, Japan and other countries attended the event, as well as the Secretary-General of the MECC, f. Michel Jalakh, the representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch to the MECC, f. Samer Lahham and others.

The event, that followed a similar charity organized by UCLAN Cyprus University under the title *Christian Experience*, was attended by many eager to contribute in favour of refugees.

Patriarch Theophilos addressed guests in English, see link: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2015/12/12/18868>

Addresses were also made by the Secretary-General of the MECC, the Head of the Armenian Catholic Church, and Ms Wafa Gousous.

After dinner, guests visited an exhibition featuring items made by refugees and their children. Proceeds from the sale of items will be used for the financial support of refugees.

From the Secretariat-General

