

FESTIVE GREETING OF H.B. PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS AT THE NEW YEAR RECEPTION HOSTED BY THE MAYOR OF JERUSALEM.

Jerusalem, 23 January 2014

Mr Mayor,

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Fellow Leaders of the Jewish and Muslim Communities,

Respected Members of the Civic Authorities and the Diplomatic Community,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Christian Churches and Communities of the Holy Land, and especially of our beloved Jerusalem, we greet you, Mr. Mayor, in this festive New Year season with the words of the Psalmist:

Praise is due to you, O God... to you shall vows be performed in Jerusalem, O you who answer prayer! To you all flesh shall come... You crown the year with your bounty, (Ps 64:1-3, 1 2)

As we celebrate this New Year – the crown of the year – we do so fully aware of the sacredness of Jerusalem. This is God's holy dwelling-place, and the witness of the three great Abrahamic faiths is a testament to this sacred history. For millennia, in this Holy Land God has conversed with humanity, and God's holiness has been made accessible to his human creatures.

Yet this Holy City is not just a witness to the past. Jerusalem has a present, living identity that leads the human family to the future. For Jerusalem is the embodiment of the future hope of humanity, a sign to us now of our common destiny in God. Jerusalem, the foundation of peace, is the embodiment of the words of the Psalmist, to you all flesh shall come.

We live in a world that increasingly denies or avoids realities of ultimate significance. We no longer view our life in terms of eternity in relation to God, or in terms of the fulfillment of all creation in God, which we call the eschaton. But, it is precisely in this fulfillment of the creation in God's eternal life that peace, justice, and integrity find their true meaning. Jerusalem is the tangible expression to us of this great desire of creation to fulfillment in God. As Saint Paul says:

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. For in hope we are saved. (Rom. 8:22,24)

History cannot avoid judgment. In human terms alone we have experienced this time and again, as we see humanity's inhumanity continue to break out forcibly in our region and around the world. Even this Holy City has been washed in the blood of the Prophets and of Jesus Christ. War, poverty, genocide, the suffering of children, the persecution of the innocent, the denial of human dignity – all this reminds us of the failing of the human family to live up to our divine image as the sons and daughters of the One God, who are descended from our common ancestors, and who are destined for a new future that we are called to build with divine inspiration for the sake of all.

Our spiritual mission as the Christian Churches and Communities of the Holy Land is to maintain the identity of Jerusalem as God's dwelling-place. For we are aware that Jerusalem is the principal focus that brings together the

faithful of the three Abrahamic traditions, and all people of good will, in an encounter with that God-given peace and reconciliation is possible for all those who aspire to it.

We who make up the colourful mosaic of this unique City, which is held sacred in all our Holy Books and in our traditions of worship, cherish both the physical reality of the City as well as its spiritual significance. For the earthly Jerusalem always points us to the heavenly Jerusalem, and in this regard we recall the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines... And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples... he will swallow up death forever... It will be said on that day. Lo, this is our God; We have waited for him, so that he might save us... let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.

(Is. 25:6-10)

This divine impulse continues to inspire the countless pilgrims who come to the Holy Land and to Jerusalem every year – indeed even every day. We all acknowledge that Jerusalem has a life-long impact on the hearts and minds of the many people who come here. The mystery of Jerusalem changes people's minds, and opens their hearts to a new understanding of the power of faith in God.

As we celebrate this New Year – this crown of the year – let us all as people of goodwill of various faiths and confessions, re-commit ourselves to the heavenly truths of which our beloved City is the supreme earthly expression. Jerusalem is a beacon of light to a turbulent world that summons all humankind to the inextinguishable Light of God. To this one, everlasting Light that the darkness cannot overcome are we all on pilgrimage. As Saint Matthew says in his Gospel, echoing the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

...the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.

(Mt. 4:1-6; cf. Is. 9:1-2)

Again, on behalf of the Christian Churches and Communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, we wish you, Mr. Mayor, and your colleagues, every success in your responsibilities, and we wish you a very blessed and peaceful New Year. Thank you".

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III,

Patriarch of Jerusalem.