



PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF LOCAL CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

The Christmas Message of the Heads of Churches of Jerusalem

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people” - Luke 2:10.

We, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem are delighted to share with you again the message of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ from the heart of Bethlehem. Through the incarnation of the Word a new light has dawned upon the world, and Jesus the son of God dwelt amongst us and took our human nature of the Blessed Virgin Mary to reveal the radiance of God's glory, so that we might be brought out of darkness into God's marvellous light.

The Good News brought to us, and to the whole creation, is the promise of abundant life; a life lived away from alienation, demoralisation, and estrangement. The proclamation of the angels at the time of the incarnation shattered the walls: walls of fear, walls of doubt, and walls of captivity, to reveal the glad tidings of freedom, faith, and fortitude for all times. Today, there are many people in this land, throughout the Middle East, and around the world, who live in the fear of what the day will hold. Fear of war, violence, bloodshed, displacement, oppression, and above all, persecution of all kinds. We pray that the glad tidings may be heard over the cities of Aleppo and of Mosul, and peace may prevail in their streets and neighbourhoods so that all people may return to their homelands and may live in tranquillity and dignity.

To our faithful and our communities here in the Holy Land, we offer our prayers and support as you continue to live in uncertainty of what the future holds for you. We exhort you to seek a deeper commitment within your churches and communities through participation in worship. A Christian community is a worshipping community gathered by the Word of God and gathered for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, particularly the Holy Eucharist. Our Holy Sites and Pilgrimage Centres continue to be our source of empowerment and support for our presence, they provide both a source of fellowship with our sisters and brothers throughout God's creation, and they also importantly provide an atmosphere of conviviality and mutual respect among the different communities. The existing religious status of the holy sites and the ecclesiastical institutions safeguard the vulnerable and delicate situation. We urge all those in authority to protect and respect the sanctity of all religions and religious practices in Jerusalem and beyond.

We urge all authorities and powers to walk in the ways of peace with justice and reconciliation for the common good of all. Finally, our hearts go out, and our prayers uphold, the children of the Middle East and around the world, especially those who are suffering in silence, those who are displaced, and those whose basic needs are not being met at this time.

May the celebrations of Christmas this year bring a deeper understanding of the Good News of God for all humanity and to transform our fears, our uncertainties and our anxieties into the joy of the Incarnation embedded in hope, peace, and love. Happy Christmas and a blessed and peaceful New Year.

- +Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate
- +Patriarch Nourhan Manougian, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate
- +Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Apostolic Administrator, Latin Patriarchate
- +Fr. Francesco Patton, ofm, Custos of the Holy Land
- +Archbishop Anba Antonious, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem
- +Archbishop Swerios Malki Murad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate
- +Archbishop Aba Embakob, Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate
- +Archbishop Joseph-Jules Zerey, Greek-Melkite-Catholic Patriarchate
- +Archbishop Mosa El-Hage, Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate
- +Archbishop Suheil Dawani, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East
- +Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land
- +Bishop Pierre Malki, Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate
- +Msgr. Georges Dankaye', Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate

(Christmas 2016)