10/01/2023

VISITS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES OF JERUSALEM AT CHRISTMAS

On Monday, December 27, 2022/January 9, 2023, the visits of the Christian Churches of Jerusalem took place on the occasion of our Christmas Feast.

First, the Patriarchate was visited by the Fraternity of the Franciscans under its Abbot Custos, Father Francisco Paton, who congratulated our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilo on the Christmas Feast and thanked for the joint cooperation to overcome problems that Christians face, such as at the Gate of David, at Siloam, at the Anglican and Protestant Cemetery on the hill of Holy Zion and also thanked Him for His letter of condolence on the deceased former Pope

Benedict XVI.

His Beatitude said the following in English:

“Your Paternity, dear Father Francesco,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods, Dear Fathers,

Christ is born!

Glorify him!

We thank you, dear Father Francesco, and your Brotherhood for your gracious greetings as we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Incarnate Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is always a time of great rejoicing, as the hymnographer reminds us:

Today Christ is born of a Virgin in Bethlehem.

Today he who knows no beginning now begins to be, and the Word Is made flesh.

The powers of heaven greatly rejoice,

and the earth with humankind makes glad.

(Mattins of the Nativity)

As we keep this festive season, we wish to take this opportunity first of all to express our condolences in this formal way on the passing away of His Late Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. We remember with deep respect his visit to the Holy Land in 2009, and his commitment to the Church.

We also are mindful today of your ongoing cooperation in the restoration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Our mutual commitment to this crucial cooperative venture between our two Brotherhoods remains a powerful sign of hope for the world of the Gospel that we share, and we wish to express our gratitude to you for this shared endeavour. The restoration will make the Church of the Holy Sepulchre an enduring place of pilgrimage for generations to come.

This festive Christmas season reminds us that we are people of prayer and hope. Our hope is in the Word made Flesh, who united earth and heaven, and who

gathers us into a common destiny. And we remain in the life of the Word made Flesh as long as we remain a community of prayer. Prayer must always embrace everything that we say and do, for prayer is the source of the strength that enables us to live the values of our faith. Prayer enables us to resist secular and political influences, and remain focused on the Gospel, which is the foundation for true peace, justice, and reconciliation.

We rejoice with you and your Brotherhood, dear Father Francesco, in this joyful Christmas season. MAY God bless you and the communities committed to your pastoral care, and MAY the light of the Incarnate Logos shine in our hearts and minds.

We wish you a happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Thank you."

Subsequently, all the other Christian Communities visited the Patriarchate, the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem under the Latin Patriarch Pierre Battista Pizzaballa, the Pre-Chalcedonian Churches, Copts, Syrians and Ethiopians and Lutherans and Anglicans.

The Leader of each Church prayed for peace during the Christmas season and for the continuation of the work to deal with the problems of Christians in the Holy Land.

In response, His Beatitude said the following, in English:

"Beloved Fellow Heads of the Churches,

Your Excellencies,

Your Eminences, Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Brothers and Sisters,

Christ is born!

Let us glorify him!

We welcome you to our Patriarchate and we thank you for your warm expressions of greeting as we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Incarnate Logos, Our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Church proclaims

Heaven and earth are united today, for Christ is born.

Today has Cod come upon the earth, and humanity up to heaven.

Therefore let us also give glory.

(Compline of the Nativity)

The Christmas message is the message that by his incarnation, the Eternal Logos has united earth and heaven, so that we may live the values of the Good News of the Gospel. The message of Christmas is most emphatically not a message of discord, or violence, or division. It is the message of the triumph of love and compassion, which is the ground of peace, concord, and harmony. As Saint Paul reminds us, whatever we do without love is worth nothing (cf. 1 Cor.13:1-3). We Christians commit ourselves to this way of love.

We also seek to make manifest in our common life that Christmas is not a lovely folktale of long ago or a cultural event surrounded by a lot of social and commercial activity. Christmas is the very revelation of the Logos, the Word that was from the very beginning, through whom, as the Creed declares, all things were made. Let us keep this message of the mystery of the Incarnate Logos at the centre of our mission.

Here our togetherness and our common purpose find their anchor. And because our togetherness and common purpose are anchored in the mystery of the incarnation, they have proven to be effective. The Christian presence in the Holy Land down the ages has been a force for stability that has worked to prevent acts of extremism, and our work together as spiritual leaders is a living witness to this.

In this same spirit, we stand together against the horrific and senseless desecration of sacred places, like the vandalism of the Anglican cemetery on Mount Zion a few days ago, perpetrated by suspected radicals whose agenda is to tear the fabric of our multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious landscape. This vandalism, occurring at the time of this festive season, is no accident. All our Churches have suffered such indignities, and they are on the rise, and we condemn all acts of religious vandalism from whatever source, which are designed only to intimidate, insult and inhibit our life together. And we take this opportunity to express our

support to our brother, Archbishop Hosam, and the local Anglican Church. We would also like to communicate our appreciation to the Archbishop of Canterbury for his real concern for our predicament here.

We must also express our sincere condolences to the Custos of the Holy Land and his Fraternity and also to the Latin Patriarch on the passing away on New Year's Eve of His Late Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, who we had the opportunity to welcome to our Patriarchate.

Our Christmas celebration is a celebration of doxology and prayer. Therefore our task first and foremost is to remain a community of prayer not only for ourselves but also for the whole human family. This is precisely what we did in our celebration at the Church of the Nativity, where pilgrims come throughout the year, and which is itself a place of prayer for the whole world. This Holy City, the Holy Places, and our beloved Holy Land are the great arena of prayer, both for individual faithful people as well as for the Churches. Here prayer has seeped into the very stones, and here countless people have been moved to pray. By remaining a community of prayer, we remain grounded in the divine mystery of the Nativity of our Lord and in the spiritual values of his Gospel.

MAY God bless you and the communities you serve and pastor, and MAY the light of the Sun of Righteousness that shines from the Holy Cave in Bethlehem illumine our hearts and minds.

We wish you all a very happy Christmas and a blessed New Year.

Thank you."

Then the Most Reverend Archbishop Theodosios of Sebastia, as the representative of the Patriarchate, returned their visit to the Syrians, Copts and Ethiopians.

From Secretariat-General

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