

ΑΙ ΕΠΙ ΤΗ ΕΟΡΤΗ ΤΩΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥΓΕΝΝΩΝ ΕΠΙΣΚΕΨΕΙΣ ΤΩΝ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΩΝ ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΕΙΟΝ

Τὴν προμεσημβρινὴν ὥραν τῆς Πέμπτης, 27^{ης} Δεκεμβρίου 2019/ 9^{ης} Ἰανουαρίου τοῦ 2020, ἔλαβον χώραν αἱ ἐπισκέψεις τῶν Χριστιανικῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων εἰς τὸ Πατριαρχεῖον ἐπὶ τῇ ἐορτῇ τῶν Χριστουγέννων. Αἱ ἀμοιβαῖαι ἐόρτιοι ἐπισκέψεις ἔχουν καθιερωθῇ ἀπὸ ἐτῶν, καθ' ὅτι αὗται συντελοῦν εἰς τὴν δημιουργίαν εἰρηνικῆς ἀτμοσφαίρας πρὸς καλὴν συνεργασίαν διὰ τὴν διαφύλαξιν τῶν Παναγίων Προσκυνημάτων καὶ τὴν προστασίαν τῶν Χριστιανῶν τῆς Ἀγίας Γῆς.

Πρῶτον ἔλαβε χώραν ἡ ἐπίσκεψις τῆς Custodia Terrae Sanctae – Κουστωδίας τῆς Ἀγίας Γῆς – Ἀδελφότητος τῶν Φραγκισκανῶν. Κατ' αὐτήν, ὁ ἡγούμενος αὐτῆς Rev. fr. Franciscus Paton συνεχάρη τὴν Α.Θ.Μ. τὸν Πατέρα ἡμῶν καὶ Πατριάρχην Ἱεροσολύμων διὰ τὴν ἐξαίρετον μετ' Αὐτοῦ συνεργασίαν εἰς τὴν διαφύλαξιν καὶ συντήρησιν τῶν Ἀγίων Προσκυνημάτων καὶ διὰ τὸ ὅτι ἐγείρει τὴν φωνὴν Αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν προστασίαν τῶν Χριστιανῶν τῆς Ἀγίας Γῆς.

Ὁ Μακαριώτατος ἀπήντησεν διὰ τῆς κάτωθι προσφωνήσεως Αὐτοῦ ἀγγλιστί:

“Your Paternity, dear Father Francesco,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers,

We welcome you, dear Father Francesco, and the members of your Brotherhood, to our Patriarchate, and we thank you for your kind greetings to us as we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our joy finds expression in our worship, as we sing;

Make glad, O ye righteous; greatly rejoice, O ye heavens; ye mountains dance of joy, Christ is born!

(Nativity Matins, Tone 4)

Our joy at this Christmas season is grounded in the faithfulness of God the Logos made flesh, “who has visited us from on high” (Exapostilarion from Nativity Matins). Our joy is made complete in this divine-human encounter, and it is in this joy that we seek to be faithful to the mission that has been entrusted to us by Divine Providence.

Our fraternal gathering in joy today, calls to mind the significance of our united witness that we have made in our diakonia in guarding and serving the Holy Places.

As it has been mentioned, we have accomplished much, and our working together has proved immensely effective. This has been demonstrated in our historic agreement to restore the foundation of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and to restore the Grotto of the Nativity. While to some these may seem simple the care of ancient monuments, we know full well that the significance of the Holy Places goes well beyond bricks and mortar.

In joining together to restore the foundation of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Grotto of the Nativity, we are declaring our absolute commitment to the essential spiritual character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, of which these two magnificent Churches and all the Holy Places are living testimony. And they are a living testimony precisely because they are places of worship and sources of refreshment, nourishment, and consolation that strengthen the Christian faith of the believer, both near and far.

We have also borne collective witness to the historic and sacred rights and privileges of the Christian communities here. Our united voice in opposition to radical elements that threaten the fundamental character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land as a truly multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society has sounded abroad, and we have the support of governmental and religious leaders around the world. We continue to face huge threats, especially to the Christian Quarter and access to many of our respective administrative centres, as well as to the Holy Sepulchre and the Churches and Monasteries in the Old City, but in our standing together we have sent a clear message that we shall be faithful in our God-given mission.

All this is a sign of great hope to the world. For we are charged in the Holy Land of keeping alive the flame of the Gospel and the values of the Bible in a world that is torn by confusion and destructive activity that is so contrary to the Christmas message of peace and reconciliation that we confess. As Saint Paul says in the First Letter to the Corinthians; "It is to peace that God has called you...for God is a God not of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor. 7:15, 14:33).

As we keep this joyous Christmas feast, let us pray for strength and inspiration from the true Light, who is the Sun of righteousness and the Prince of Peace who has come into the world, and assumed our common human nature from the pure flesh of the Virgin Mary. For "this Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (cf. John 1).

MAY God bless you, dear Father Francesco, the members of your Brotherhood, and the communities committed to your pastoral and spiritual care.

Thank you."

Ἦκολούθησαν αἱ ἐπισκέψεις τῶν ἄλλων Ἐκκλησιῶν, τοῦ Λατινικοῦ Πατριαρχείου, τῶν Κοπτῶν, Συριάνων, Αἰθιοπῶν, Λουθηρανῶν καί ἄλλων, εὐχηθέντων εἰς τόν Μακαριώτατον εἰρηνικά Χριστούγεννα καί εὐλογημένον τό Νέον Ἔτος.

Εἰς ὅλους τούτους ἀνταπήντησεν ὁ Μακαριώτατος διὰ τῆς κάτωθι προσφωνήσεως Αὐτοῦ ἀγγλιστί:

"Beloved Fellow Heads of the Churches,

Your Excellences,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Brothers and Sisters,

Christ is born!

Let us glorify Him!

We welcome you warmly to our Patriarchate in this Christmas season, and we thank you for your greetings to us for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice together in the great mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, as we say in one of our Orthodox services this time;

How shall I tell of this great mystery?

He who is without flesh becomes incarnate;

The Word puts on a body; the invisible is seen;

He whom no hand can touch is handled;

and He who knows no beginning now begins to be.

(Vespers of the Synaxis of the Theotokos)

Our gatherings on these occasions are more than casual acts of public courtesy. In this holy season, when we visit each other in celebration of the Nativity, and exchange greetings, we are actually doing two things.

First of all, we are showing to the world that, while we do not share a Eucharistic and doctrinal unity, we do share a Christian fellowship in the common mission of our martyria – our witness – to sacred history and to the life of the Christian communities of the Holy Land. As this common mission has drawn us closer, we have experienced the fruits of this in many ways. We have worked together successfully in the care and renovation of the Holy Places – especially the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. We have common cause in the preservation of the historic and sacred rights and privileges of the Churches. We are united in safeguarding our places of worship and sacred properties. We are committed together to ensure the well-being of the Christian presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. And we are never reluctant in affirming the Christian character of Jerusalem. For Jerusalem we shall not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake we shall not rest.

Our gatherings, however, have a deeper significance even than this. For when we come together in such fraternal ways, we are showing to the world the eternal truth that the Incarnation of the Divine Logos transcends all human

categories. When we confess the name of our Lord Jesus, He is in the midst of us, as He promises. For our Lord Jesus Christ has assumed our common human nature and revealed our common human destiny, and this message of hope for the world is of paramount importance. Christ is the revelation of divine justice in all its fullness – justice that is united in mercy and love – that goes beyond our human reason. At this Christmas, with our hearts we cry out for justice and peace, and it is God's justice and peace we long for.

Our mission, dear brothers and sisters, is not for ourselves. Our rootedness in the Holy Land is not to promote narrowly parochial or confessional interests. Our rootedness ensure that the Christian presence in the Holy Land is a living and active community, and that the Holy Places are not just relics of the past, but sources of real spiritual nourishment and refreshment.

If we were not here, who would come here? When we think of other ancient Christian places, now bereft of a living Christian community, places like Cappadocia and Ephesus, for example, while the relics of these places remain, their soul is gone. It is because of our Christian presence here that Jerusalem and the Holy Land are a living place, and not simply a tourist attraction.

The Incarnation of the Divine Logos is our common ground, our shared identity as the Christian Churches and Communities of the Holy Land, and it is all this that we show to the world when we gather as we do today. Let us never, tire in building up this fellowship beyond these ceremonial occasions, so that we MAY continue to grow in faithfulness to our common mission in maintaining the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

We wish to express our gratitude to you for our work together in the past, and we look forward to extending this work in the years to come.

MAY God bless you and the communities you serve, and MAY we all enjoy the blessings of this Holy Christmas season and the promises of the New Year.

Thank you."

Τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν τῶν Συριάνων, Κοπτῶν καί Αἰθιοπῶν ἐπεσκέφθη διὰ τὴν ἑορτὴν αὐτῶν τῶν Χριστουγέννων Ἀντιπροσωπεΐα ὑπὸ τὸν Γέροντα Ἀρχιεπίσκοπο Κωνσταντίνου κ. Ἀρίσταρχον.

Ἐκ τῆς Ἀρχιεπισκοπῆς