

The Christmas Message of the Heads of Churches of Jerusalem

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel (which means, God with us)” (Matthew 1:23).

We, the Heads of the Churches of Jerusalem, share with you God's 'Good News' of the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, to whom belongs all glory, honour and praise. This 'Good News' was first proclaimed to the people of God in this very holy place, where Joseph and Mary, the shepherds and the Magi rejoiced with the heavenly host in welcoming God's holy visit to the world in the incarnation of God's Son. God humbled himself to be clothed with our humanity so that we may be glorified in him and be clothed with his divinity.

God is with us! Emmanuel. This was the 'Good News' that broke through human history, the 'Word became flesh and dwelt among us,' to reassure the whole of creation that God who created this universe is always there to be with God's people. We, the Heads of Churches in the Holy Land, are in prayer and vigil as we continue to see the alienation and separation of the children of God in many places and situations. Christmas, though a time of celebration and joy, remains a time of deep concern for those who are lonely, unloved, deprived, marginalized, and oppressed. Christmas is the 'Nativity' of hope and assurance of God's presence among us, especially among those who are disadvantaged and have 'no place in the inn.'

The whole region of the Middle East is going through a time of uncertainty and ambiguity. The Church, both its leaders and faithful ones, search for peace based on justice and reconciliation among all those who are affected in one way or the other by the recent developments within our Middle East. We pray for the presence of God among all peoples and nations, so that we all may rejoice with the angels and the heavenly host in reciting the first Christmas carol: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!”

Christmas is a season where we remind ourselves that we are not alone: God is with us! It is a time to celebrate God embracing the whole of creation, because through 'Emmanuel' heaven and earth were brought together and were united. The Christian presence throughout the Middle East is going through a challenging time, where the hemorrhage or Exodus of Christians within many countries raises big concerns to the future of the whole area. Christians are not only authentic and rooted citizens within their communities, but their presence and role is essential and vital in the interfaith dialogue and the promoting of peace and justice. "Do not be afraid; for see-I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

The Christian witness and ministry in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East brings the 'Good News' of God's holy presence among all people of faith everywhere! Christ is born! Alleluia.

+Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate

+Patriarch Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarchate

+Patriarch Torkom II Manoogian, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate
+Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, ofm, Custos of the Holy Land
+Archbishop Anba Abraham, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem
+Archbishop Swerios Malki Murad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate
+Archbishop Joseph-Jules Zerey, Greek-Melkite-Catholic Patriarchate
+Archbishop Abouna Matthias, Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate
+Archbishop Paul Sayyah, Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate
+Bishop 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
+Bishop Yoseph Antoine Kelekian, Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate

(Christmas, 2011)