



PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE OF THE PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM 2023

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder; and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."
(Isaiah 9:6)

We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, convey our Christmas greetings to the faithful around the world in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, born here in Bethlehem more than two-thousand years ago.

In extending these greetings, we are well aware that we do so during a time of great calamity in the land of our Lord's birth. For over the past two-and-a-half months, the violence of warfare has led to unimaginable suffering for literally millions in our beloved Holy Land. Its ongoing horrors have brought misery and inconsolable sorrow to countless families throughout our region, evoking empathetic cries of anguish from all quarters of the earth. For those caught in the midst of such dire circumstances, hope seems distant and beyond reach.

Yet it was into such a world that our Lord himself was born in order to give us hope. Here, we must remember that during the first Christmas, the situation was not far removed from that of today. Thus the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph had difficulty finding a place for their son's birth. There was the killing of children. There was military occupation. And there was the Holy Family becoming displaced as refugees. Outwardly, there was no reason for celebration other than the birth of the Lord Jesus.

Nevertheless, in the midst of such sin and sorrow, the Angel appeared to the shepherds announcing a message of hope and joy for all the world: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11).

In Christ's Incarnation, the Almighty came to us as Immanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23), in order to save, redeem, and transform us. This was to fulfill the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "The LORD has anointed me . . . to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor" (Isaiah 61:1–2a; Luke 4:18–19).

This is the divine message of hope and peace that Christ's Nativity inspires within us, even in the midst of suffering. For Christ himself was born and lived amid great suffering. Indeed, he suffered for our sake, even unto death upon a cross, in order that the light of hope would shine into the world, overcoming the darkness (John 1:5).

It is in this spirit of Christmas that We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, denounce all violent actions and call for their end. We likewise call upon the people of this land and around the globe to seek the graces of God so that we might learn to walk with each other in the paths of justice, mercy, and peace. Finally, we bid the faithful and all those of goodwill to work tirelessly for the relief of the afflicted and towards a just and lasting peace in this land that is equally sacred to the three Monotheistic Faiths.

In these ways, the hope of Christmas will indeed be born once again, beginning in Bethlehem and extending from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth—thus realizing the comforting words of Zechariah, that "the dawn from on high will break upon us to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, guiding our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78–79).

—The Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem