

The Christmas Message of the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches of Jerusalem

-2020-

'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' (Matthew 1.23)

We, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches of Jerusalem, greet you all in the name of the Babe of Bethlehem during this blessed and holy season of Christmas, the commemoration of the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The birth of Jesus is not a mere historical fact, but a perpetual gift to the whole of creation. It is the Incarnation of the Word of God who dwelt among us in human form to be with us, redeem us, and to transform our lives into the likeness of His glory.

The birth of Jesus and the celebration of His Nativity are constant reminders to us all that God is with us and will always be. Through the Incarnation of the Son of God, the Word made flesh, heaven and earth were united, and the Creator of all things, seen and unseen, was wrapped in bands of cloth and placed in a manger. The heavens and the earth were united because God has visited the earth in the flesh and made it His footstool, so that He continues to be *Emmanuel*—'God is with us.'

This transcendent and most holy gift to the world is our salvation and our hope that we are not alone. God's presence with us in all circumstances is a source of encouragement and sustenance, especially at these exceptional times of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, injustices, and increasing violence against the vulnerable and weak. We express our solidarity with all people around the world who have been affected by the pandemic and its multi-layered implications, particularly the people of Bethlehem and the surrounding area. We pray that the forthcoming vaccination against COVID-19 may bring an end to the pandemic and a return to normalcy.

The presence of the Christian communities, together with other faith communities in the Holy Land, continues to be an essential part of the social, cultural, and religious mosaic of the Middle East. The recent desecration of the Church of the Agony in Jerusalem will not discourage us from continuing in our peaceful Christian mission and witness.

Jesus was born in a time of distress, violence, exclusion, and poverty. He has shared with us the human flesh and its limitations, except sin, so that through

His passion, death and resurrection, we all may have life and have it in abundance. God's gift to us at these difficult times brings to the whole creation hope, renewal, and encouragement—for if God is with us, then who is against us.

Alleluia! Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches of Jerusalem.