

Christmas Message 2008

Statement from the Patriarchs and Heads of the Local Christian Churches in Jerusalem

~December 18, 2008~

Dear Sisters & Brothers

Greetings.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas there seems to be even more, darkness, conflict and despair in the world around us. That means for us, as Christians, we must think even more carefully and deeply about Jesus – the baby born in Bethlehem's stable.

Many people are afraid of the dark whether it be the absence of light around them or fear of the unknown in their personal lives or the world at large.

Despite all this we need to think and mediate about Jesus ... "a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower." St. John ch. 1 v. 5

St. John's Gospel goes on to remind us of the facts of Jesus' birth ... "That he was born into a world which did not recognize him and a people that did not receive him." St. John Ch.1 vv 10 & 11

So, as we approach another Christmas we must show the world around us that Jesus is a light in the dark which never goes out, a burning light which takes the terror from the night and moreover, a light on which we should fix our eyes not least when the clouds appear to be gathering around us..

Just as the baby in the stable is the focal point of our Christmas celebrations, so we must affirm and witness to the fact that Jesus is the light which shines out from our personal and corporate lives at all times.

Again and again we need to ask ourselves "What would Jesus do, what would Jesus say". Then, our thoughts and ideas of His actions and words must be translated into the daily life of our community – particularly in this Holy Land.

Similarly, we have to convince the world's political leaders that the true peace will only come on earth when we seek God's will for his people ... not least through the words and actions of Jesus. Nor must we belittle the fact, affirmed in St. John's Gospel, that to all who accept Jesus, He gives power to become the Children of God.

This means we must stand alongside all who suffer around us – the hungry, the homeless, the unemployed and the bereaved since Jesus tells us that when we help others we are doing it to Him as though He were suffering for them.

To stand alongside also involves us in action. We need the light of Christ to shine on this Land to enable us to work more realistically for a two state solution which would end the burden of restrictions arising out of Occupation.

(So we pray for the President – Elect of the USA that he and other world leaders may see the urgent need for peace in the Middle East and not least in this Land).

We need also to see the situation in which many are suffering in Gaza in the light of Christ and make a determined effort to bring them urgent relief.

Moreover, we must never forget our duty to point our children and young people to the light of Christ assuring them

that, through Jesus we all have hope for a better world.

Then we would greet our Sisters and Brothers across the world – not least the thousands who have visited this Holy Land recently. It is important to recall that you are walking in the footsteps of Jesus and when you pause to see the plight of many of your fellow Christians that you respond as you believe He would.

We are conscious of all who suffer across the world but for all we believe the only way forward is to see people and situations in "The light of Christ".

Be assured of our good wishes and prayers for all of you as Christmas approaches and may God's blessing be on your homes and families.

Walk in the light and the light will illumine your path,
Walk in the truth and the truth will set you free,
Walk in the way of peace and you will have, through Christ,
the peace which passes understanding.
(Prayers of the Way: by John Johansen-berg).

Jerusalem
December 2008

Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem

H.B. Patriarch Theophilos III Greek Orthodox Church
H.B. Patriarch Fouad Twal Roman Catholic Church
H.B. Patriarch Torkom Manooghian Armenian Orthodox Church
Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, ofm Custos of the Holy Land
Archbishop Anba Abraham Coptic Orthodox Church
Archbishop Swerios Malki Murad Syrian Orthodox Church
Archbishop Abouna Mathias Ethiopian Orthodox Church
Archbishop Paul Sayyah The Maronite Church
Archbishop Youssef Jules Zreyi The Greek Melkite Church
The Rt. Revd. Suhel Dawani The Anglican Church
The Rt. Revd. Mounib Younan The Lutheran Church
The Rt. Revd. Pierre Malki The Syrian Catholic Church
Fr. Rafael Minassian The Armenian Catholic Church