

SYRIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE
OF ANTIOCH & ALL THE EAST
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- SYRIA



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By the Grace of God
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Patriarch of Antioch and All the East
Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church

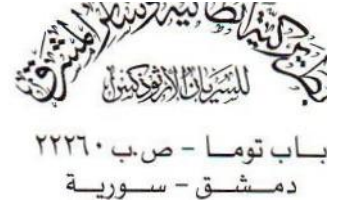


Our Beloved Children in Christ,
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

On a cold and dark winter night, a light shone on earth from a small manger in Bethlehem. A bright star in the skies led to a wonder Child on earth. In the sky of Ephrathah, the Angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2: 14). On earth, the kings worshiped the King of peace, born as a child to Whom the shepherds chanted. This Child was born so we may have life, and have it more abundantly (cf. Jn. 10: 10). He came to reconcile us with God the Father so that "through Him, we have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Ep. 2: 18).

Dearly beloved,

As we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, we bow with the Maggi and worship God Who loved us first (cf. 1 Jn. 4: 19), and reconciled us with Himself in Christ without imputing our trespasses to us (cf. 2 Cor 5: 19). Reconciliation abolishes animosity and restores to our human race its rank which was lost when trespassing God's command. Reconciliation manifests itself in God's redemption, for "He sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." (Gal 4: 4-5). Therefore, we are no longer servants; rather, we were given the right to become children of God — those who believe in His name (cf. Jn. 1: 12). We became brothers and sisters of the Child of the manger, Who reconciled us with His Father.



The incarnation of our Lord Jesus is a great mystery which surpasses our comprehension and is worthy of proclamation. We, therefore, declare with St. Jacob of Serugh:

"On this day, the Father is pleased that, through His Beloved One, salvation, hope, and life shone to His creation.

On this day, the Son of the Living One is happy with His flock, for in Him, it became reconciled and saved from deception.

On this day, the Spirit rejoiced with mankind, for the Son the Father became their brother through His birth..»

With this reconciliation between heaven and earth, one may ask: how long will men fight and remain in conflict? This year, Christmas comes while wars are invading our countries, people are fighting over power, and great powers are seeking to control the wealth of the world and peoples' natural resources.

In Syria, the conflict has been going on for many years because of the greed of countries that finance and arm terrorist groups that reject and try to destroy all those who have different beliefs or opinions. The decision of the president of the United States of America concerning Jerusalem escalated troubles and increased violence in the region. Jerusalem is central for Christians as well as Muslims and Jews; it should remain open to all and its final status should be decided according to the UN resolutions.

At this time, when we celebrate the reconciliation between heaven and earth, we urge all those in power to work for peace in our countries, namely Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt, and to do their best to stop violence, killing, and destruction, so that complete reconciliation may be realized between all the components of each society. When our world is free of violence, we are brought closer to justice and peace which enable further human progress and development of civilization.

Dearly beloved,

Christmas season is an opportunity to reconcile with God through true repentance, reconcile with our selves through abiding by the divine teachings and holding strongly to Christian virtues, and reconcile with others through our commitment to the great commandment to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Luke 10:27). In this way, we live the true meaning of Christmas, of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, Emanuel — God is with us, praising the name of the Lord through our deeds, working for peace in our world and living with hope for a better life for all. With this hope, we remember our brothers in Christ, the two abducted archbishops of Aleppo, Boulos Yaziji and Mor Gregorius Youhanna Ibrahim, and we pray for them and tell them: we are waiting for your return in the earliest so that our joy in this Christmas season is complete.

We ask the Lord to bless the entire world with peace and wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Healthy and Happy New Year.