



+ Bishop Mar Ya'qoub Afram Sim'an
Patriarchal Exarch of Jerusalem, the Holy Land and Jordan for the Syria

I would like to express my heartfelt greetings and wish you all, Church leaders and community, a merry Christmas and a happy new year. May the little child, who was born in a manger bring to our world peace, especially to our troubled region.

During this pandemic, we remember all our sisters and brothers, who are facing a virus that does not recognize borders nor differentiate between human beings.

During these difficult times, may we all turn to the baby in the manger, our Lord Jesus Christ, to strengthen our faith.. “the father of compassion and the God of all consolation” (2 Corinthians 1:3). Let us lay down all our troubles at the feet of our lord in the manger, knowing with Christ we will definitely come out victorious.

Again I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy new year. may we all celebrate Christmas together in love and unity enjoying the beauty of our traditions.

Reflecting on Christmas in the Gospels

Church of the Annunciation – Nazareth Fra Marwan Di'des – Franciscan Fathers

Two centuries preceding the birth of Christ, the earth seems to have been cut off from the full life of heaven, God stopped speaking to the people, and the eternal lost touch with the temporal. At the annunciation, the heavens had reopened, the eternal reconnected with the temporal, and God resumed the conversation with humanity. But through whom did God choose to speak to us? Was it a king, a priest, or even a prophet? Nay. God favored a simple, poor, and modest young woman from the unknown village of Nazareth. Without a doubt, this sudden and unforeseen event directed us to a new reality. Alas, we were presented with good news of great joy which to this day fills us with awe, wonder, and praise. Through this young woman, God and humanity reconciled. The eternity of God met with the ephemeral human life, thus unlocking the conversation between heaven and earth – between transience and eternity. The timelessness of God intersected with the human life span. Founded on both God and man, a new adventure began. It brought triumph to the skies, and joy to the world.

Church of the Visitation – Ein Karem Sister Ghada Nehme, Rosary sisters

In the visitation, we see God's divine grace get manifested to humans. First, God visits Mary, and in turn, Mary visits her relative Elizabeth and spreads the joy. In the annunciation, God meets with the human, while in the visitation, the human meets with the fellow human. In this sense, God leads us to man, and man leads us to God. From now onwards, the two cannot be divided; they have become interlinked and inseparable. It is this union between the two that will shape history and lead to salvation. In her hymn of praise (the Magnificat), Mary proclaims the Lord's greatness and rejoices in God the Savior. She then expands her horizons and reflects on generations past. She affirms that history shall no more be determined by the mighty, the rich, the powerful, and the proud.

Instead, it will belong to the hungry, the humble, and the lowly. This is a revolution that would transform all of humankind.

Nativity Grotto – Bethlehem
Fr. Issa Thaljeh – Greek Orthodox Church

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Humans are in for a surprise once they find out: Where will God choose for His Son to be born? Jesus Christ was not born at Herod’s Palace or in the Temple amidst the religious scholars and rabbis. He was not even born in Jerusalem, which was deemed as the holy city of God. He was born, instead, in humble Bethlehem – on the periphery of the town in fact – for there was no room for them in the inn. Jesus was laid in a plain manger amidst the poor and ordinary; all of whom were filled with joy, hope, and exuberance in spite of the trials, disasters, and tribulations they have endured. Jesus was born in a crib – helpless and vulnerable. However, it was this unglamorous birth of His which instilled in all those who stood witness to this unique conception such a glorious will to live. Such divine energy derived from this poor, weak, and helpless infant who was born in a deserted manger on the margins of the city, laid in a crib and wrapped in swaddling clothes. Be that as it may, He is the Source and the inspiration of life.

The Shepherds’ Field - Beit-Sahur
Deacon Fadi Abu Sada - Mellkite Church

The birth of Christ altered the simple manger to a universal ceremony. The angels sang their praises, announcing the jubilant news with the inhabitants of the earth. “Glory to God in the highest,” they proclaimed of the Lord. On whom His favor rests, they shared: “Peace on earth, good will to men.” The shepherds looked at each other in disbelief, yet they nevertheless went with haste: “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass,” (Luke 2:15) they declared. Hurrying to the manger in Bethlehem, they glorified and praised God, and they widely made known that which they heard and saw. Both the earth and the heavens marveled at this good news of great joy: “For unto you is born a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” The earth and heavens were now wed – they were no longer estranged. Meanwhile, “Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). We, too, join her to this

day as we ponder the divine sacrament that will ultimately transform all power the foundations of power structures.

Manger Square -Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

Rev. Ashraf Tannous -Lutheran Church

The Magi came from afar to worship Jesus, reminding us of the good tidings of joy which shall be to *all* people, from the east, west, south, and north. Bethlehem and the entire world were thrilled with joy, yet this was displeasing for King Herod and the chief priests and teachers of the law. Herod plotted against this good news and sought to destroy it firsthand, resorting to the murder of all the infant boys in Bethlehem. The slaughter of the infants stands testimony to the likes of Herod across history, who have mercilessly oppressed and trampled underfoot the innocent of the world. Alas, mankind has a full record of innocent victims from Abel and Job, the children of Bethlehem, and onto the victims of wars and catastrophes. Innocent blood still spills upon the earth, yet the just and loving God will transform them to rivers of hope for life; hope for the oppressed people over the five continents, especially in the Arab world, and our Palestinian People in particular.

CLOSING PRAYER

BISHOP HOSAM ELIAS NA' OUM

COADJUTOR BISHOP FOR THE ARAB EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF JERUSALEM

O Lord, the almighty, you who have given us your only son, to assume our nature and be born of a pure virgin; Grant us the blessing, we who have been given the new life, and became your children by adoption and grace, to grow through your Holy Spirit day by day with our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, and with the Spirit, the one God forever; Amen!

