



PATRIARCHS AND HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM

Easter Message — 2023

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3)

We, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem, convey our Easter Greetings from the Holy City of the Resurrection to faithful Christians around the world, both far and near.

It was from here in Jerusalem that the angel first greeted the women at the empty tomb, proclaiming, “Do not be afraid . . . He is not here; for He has been raised (Matt 28:5-6). It was from here that Jesus himself saluted these same women with the words, “Do not be afraid” (Matt 28:10). And it was from here that the Risen Lord calmed the fears of his disciples as they hid behind closed doors, saying to them, “Peace be with you,” and breathing upon them the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-22).

From those first encounters until today, the fulfillment of God’s promise in the Risen Christ has remained the Easter message. For just as Christ has been raised, so too have we been raised with him to a new life in the hope of that same resurrection (Romans 6:4-5).

As the Apostle Peter would later write, Christ’s resurrection offers us “a new birth into a living hope.” That hope would sustain the Apostles and early Christians through many trials and tribulations, giving them the strength to endure with joy, dignity, and grace. “In this you rejoice,” continued St. Peter, “even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith . . . may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:6-7).

These words both encourage and empower us during these tumultuous times, when our own faith continues to be tested. As we have all seen in recent months, escalating violence has engulfed the Holy Land. Local Christians in particular have increasingly suffered adversities similar to the ones about which St. Peter wrote.

For over the past year, some of our churches, funeral processions, and places of public gathering have become targets of attack; some of our holy sites and cemeteries have been desecrated; and some of our ancient liturgies, such as the Palm Sunday Procession and the Holy Fire Ceremony, have been closed off to thousands of worshippers. This is in spite of our agreements to cooperate with the governing authorities, and to accommodate any reasonable requests that they might present.

While we will persevere in these good-faith efforts, we ask the overseeing officials to work cooperatively and collaboratively with us, even as we call upon international community and local residents of goodwill to advocate on our behalf, in order to help secure the safety, access, and religious freedom of the resident Christian community and the millions of Christian pilgrims annually visiting the Holy Land—as well as the maintenance of the religious Status Quo.

Yet in welcoming this support, we do not finally place our hope in the hands of any human source. We place our ultimate hope only in God. For through Christ’s resurrection, we have the blessed assurance of the Almighty’s gracious providence through the Holy Spirit, a source of divine power that is able to sustain us today, just as it sustained Jerusalem’s first Christians those many centuries ago.

And so it is in the hope offered in Christ’s resurrection that we exchange with our fellow believers around the world that ancient Christian greeting that continues to resound so powerfully today: “Christ is Risen! (*Al Maseeh Qam! Christos Anesti! Christos harjav i merelotz! Pikhirstos aftonf! Christ est Ressuscité! Cristo è risorto! Christus resurrexit! Meshiha qam! Christos t'ensah em' muhtan! Christus ist auferstanden!*) He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!”

— **The Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in Jerusalem**