

FROM BIRTH TO RESURRECTION LIFE CONQUERS DEATH

Amidst the fight against the coronavirus, and in these difficult times, one's thoughts are only focused on this invisible enemy and how to defeat it. I am, as others are, constantly obsessed by this virus, and I fear for my family, my country and for the whole of mankind.

I saw, through a televised report, the Nativity Square completely empty from its visitors. The sight of the pilgrims who arrived from all over the world hovers in my mind. Those pilgrims who were patiently waiting for their turn to enter the church in a long queue to visit the birth place of the messenger of peace, in awe and prayer to our Lord.

I reflect for a moment on this holy message, while my thoughts roam to the Nativity Church, which wears its new decorated attire after substantial rehabilitation works and efforts to preserve this religious and human heritage. Now the church stands as the pearl of humanity, shining the light of life and renewing the spirit of hope with the yearly celebrations of the birth of the messenger of peace and love, while chanting "Glory in Excelsis Deo".



Yet abruptly, in a scene we never dreamed of, we find the Church of the Nativity and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher alike, turned into silent stones, beaten by an absolute stillness. Their bells toll with pain and sorrow during Lent season while the believers from all over the world turn their eyes towards the Holy City, towards Via Dolorosa, and towards the Holy Sepulcher during Holy Week and Easter.

The time will come soon when the church will open its doors again to continue the religious rites, and maintain the legal and historical status of celebrations. We will defeat the epidemic and life will conquer death, with the resurrection of our Lord. In this moment, we remember the recent Christmas celebrations with the chimes of the Christmas bells in the town of Bethlehem, announcing the birth of Jesus Christ with whom hope, life, love and brotherhood are renewed.



I see the day when the Nativity Square and its Church will be filled with delegations and pilgrims praying for God Almighty as life and hopes are renewed. I see the day when Bethlehem will defeat the forces of evil and will come out in victory with a smile on the faces of its children, women and men. A time when happiness will enter the hearts of its inhabitants, Muslims and Christians alike, who steadfast on this Holy Land, with the sounds of the churches' bells and mosques' minarets.

Here, in Bethlehem, where he has personally supervised the Nativity's renovation, I see his Excellency Mahmoud Abbas, accompanied by the Presidential Committee, welcoming the world leaders, their Beatitudes the Patriarchates, and the heads of churches to the Holy Land. I see the world leaders accepting his invitation to celebrate the great victory over the



epidemic, and celebrating the restoration of the Church of the Nativity after several years of works. The Church has become a world heritage for the entire humanity as it was praised by the World Heritage Organization, emphasizing this unique Palestinian achievement.

The leaders will arrive in Bethlehem and they will experience the town as never before: they will arrive to live the culture and art. They will see the beauty of the mosaic and of the decoration. They will closely understand the creativity of the people of Palestine, whose generosity thrives despite the oppression of the occupying power. Most importantly, here they will admire the grotto of the nativity, from where shines the light of hope to the world, as life conquers death with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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Renovation of the Church of the Nativity