



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

The Nativity and Epiphany celebrations in the Holy Land

Despite the absence of pilgrims due to health restrictions, a spirit of celebration and joy lit up this Christmas 2021



It all began with the scouts bringing the streets of Bethlehem to life as they paraded in their colourful uniforms. The presence of these young people from the Holy Land echoed the words of the Pope, who addressed them immediately after the Christmas celebrations: “commit yourselves to your land, commit yourselves to your history. And carry out that human vocation that God has given you!”.

After the scouts, it was the turn of Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, to enter Star Street, the road travelled by Joseph and Mary on their journey to the Grotto of the Nativity.

St Catherine’s Church then resounded with the singing of Vespers and the prayers recited during the first procession into the Grotto. The celebrations continued with Midnight Mass... even without pilgrims, it was difficult to find a seat for everyone!

At midnight, the bells pealed throughout the church: Christ is born! Then came the homily: in front of the entire assembly, which included the Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and his delegation, Archbishop Pizzaballa spoke of hope, peace and the Synod desired by the Holy Father. “The synodal journey is focused on listening. I believe that we must learn to listen more. Listening is more than hearing. It means making room for the life of the other within oneself, trying to put oneself in his or her situation. Listening is a way of being, an attitude, a way of life”.

The celebrations continued with many emotional moments, such as the prayers recited in several languages, the consecration and the second procession to the Grotto to lay the new-born Christ there. After the liturgy, short masses were celebrated in the Grotto until late at night. The dawn of the next day did not mark the end of Christmas, far from it. After all, we are in the Holy Land! Here, the celebrations continued until January 7 and 18, as the Orthodox and Armenians celebrate the birth of Christ later. The different Christian denominations in Jerusalem came to the headquarters

of the Latin Patriarchate to exchange greetings with Archbishop Pizzaballa. This is a longstanding tradition that takes place not once, but twice a year, at Easter and Christmas. It is an opportunity for members of different Christian denominations to share a moment of conviviality and listening. This ecumenical meeting is a strong symbol of the Christmas season, which reminds us that, whatever our confession, we are all Christians of the Holy Land!

Archbishop Pizzaballa recalled this in his homily on 1 January 2022: “We [Christians] do not want to be protected and placed under a glass bell, but to be an integral part of the civil and religious life of this society of ours. [...] In society, we want to be those who proclaim the Good News by their way of life, who know how to propose different models of relationships, alternatives to our world of pain, centred on equality and reconciliation, mutual respect and love!”.

Finally, for the Epiphany, in addition to the celebrations in Bethlehem on January 5 and 6, which were attended by the Custos of the Holy Land, Francesco Patton, the Mass celebrating the arrival of the Three Kings was held in Zababdeh (Palestine), led by the Patriarch. There, the Patriarch met and thanked the new priest of the parish and the town’s scouts, for their contribution to celebrations in Bethlehem on December 25. In his homily, he also urged them to persevere in their commitment within the Church, listening carefully to the Word of God, “for even today God is speaking to us, but to hear him, we must pay attention to him, we must welcome his voice.”

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