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Patriarchal Epistle for the Feast of the Holy Nativity 2017

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill..." Luke 2:14.

Our venerable brothers in the Holy Synod, the metropolitans and bishops; the reverend presbyters and the elect deacons, and the faithful sons and daughters of our holy Church:

A blessed Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ to you all!

The great and marvelous gift of God towards mankind is manifestly seen in the heavenly proclamation which the angel announced, when he visited the shepherds who were tending to their flocks close to the place wherein Jesus was born. The glory of the Lord shone upon them, and they became greatly afraid. The angel said unto them, *"Be not afraid, for I announce to you great joy that shall be for the whole world. For, today is born to you the Savior, who is Christ the Lord... And when the shepherds heard this heavenly annunciation, they made haste and came to Bethlehem and saw the Child, with Mary his mother, and they worshipped him. But Mary kept all of these words in her heart, and pondered upon them"* (see Luke 2:8-19).

This heavenly annunciation moves us, also, to say with those heavenly hosts:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of goodwill!"

We ought not to consider this holy day as other profane days, and neither to consider it a simple day of rest from our labors. Rather, when we read or this these words of the heavenly proclamation we ought to recall that the first obligation of man is to offer glory to God, even as the holy angels did. In addition, we must also remember that we must keep the word of God and ponder upon it in our hearts as the Holy and Blessed Mother did. Man must also promote peace upon earth, even as God has commanded. We must always sow the good seed in the field (which is the earth) which God has given us, that mankind might abide in peace upon it.

We pray to God the Father and beseech that just as His glory shone upon the shepherds at the Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, in like manner may it shine upon the hearts and minds of mankind today. In this way man will be able to come up from the deep chasm of the ugly reality of wars, mass killings and destruction, in which man has fallen, particularly in the region of the Middle East. The destructive effects of this has been felt most by the Christians, who have suffered beyond measure and many of whom have fled the lands of their forefathers and have taken refuge in foreign lands. On this occasion, it is most fitting to recall the blessed and magnanimous role played by the faithful of our holy Church, in order to make lighten the burden and affliction of their brethren. May God in His manifold mercy repay them.

In conclusion, we reiterate our greeting of a blessed and glorious Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to all of you, as well as for the New Year 2018. We pray that the new year brings manifold blessings, peace and tranquility in all the regions of the world, and particularly in the countries of the Middle East. We also pray for the mutual understanding and rapprochement of all Christians, as well as good health and prosperity for all of our people.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit with all of us, forever and ever; Amen.

Given at Patriarchal Cell, Erbil, Iraq, on the Feast of the Nativity, 2017 A.D.

G. Sliwa

✠ **Gewargis III Sliwa**

*By Grace: Catholicos-Patriarch
of the Assyrian Church of the East*

