



## Head of Russian Ecclesiastical Mission visits Bethlehem



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On 20<sup>th</sup> December 2023, Archimandrite Vassian (Zmeyev), head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, accompanied by Mr Yury Romashuk, the Mission's representative to the Palestinian National Authority, visited Bethlehem and met with Metropolitan Benedict of Diocaesarea of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, Patriarchal Representative in Bethlehem.

Metropolitan Benedict warmly greeted Archimandrite Vassian and congratulated him on his new appointment, wishing him blessed help from God in his service. The participants in the meeting discussed various topical issues of the present-day church life, including the plight of Christian population in Palestine in view of the ongoing armed conflict in the Gaza Strip. They expressed their deep sorrow at the civilian casualties, as well as destruction of churches and monasteries. As Archimandrite Vassian noted, the Churches of Jerusalem and Russia experience the same tragedy and

pain when their faithful are subjected to severe afflictions and ordeals, as is the case in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip, Press Service of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission **reports**.

Among the topics under discussion was also a possibility for the Mission's clergy, nuns from the Gorny Convent and Russian pilgrims to attend the Divine Liturgy in the Bethlehem Church of the Holy Nativity – birthplace of the Lord Jesus Christ – on the days of forefeast of the Nativity of Christ. Metropolitan Benedict warmly invited the Russian Orthodox clergy and monastics to take part in the divine service and noted that pilgrims from Russia are always welcome in Bethlehem. Archimandrite Vassian thanked the archpastor for the kind hospitality.

After the meeting, Archimandrite Vassian visited the Church of the Nativity to venerate its shrines, as well as St. Nicholas Church in Biet Jala, where there is a small cave in which St. Nicholas the Wonderworker is believed to have lived for several years during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land prior to his episcopal consecration. At the Monastery of the Shepherds, the head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission was met by Hieromonk Ignatios, Hegoumen of Beit Jala, who showed him some of the most venerated sites associated with the angels appearing on a field on the night of the Nativity of Christ.

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