The Holy Monastery of Saint Theodosius the Cenobiarch

The Holy Monastery of Saint Theodosius the Cenobiarch is located east of Bethlehem at the beginning of the desert, on the ancient main road that leads to the desert of the river Jordan and the Dead Sea. Today's monastery is built on the location of the ancient coenobitic Monastery founded by Saint Theodosius in the 5th century. After the foundation of the Monastery, Saint Theodosius' mission begins, receiving similar credit and recognition to those of Saint Savvas the Sanctified and Great Euthymios, not only from the Church of Jerusalem and the monasteries of Palestine but from all Orthodox Church.

The Holy Shrine of the Cave is of great interest, as according to the tradition it is the place where the three Wise Men stayed overnight returning from Bethlehem. The cave is natural with a few engraved places and it has gradually been used as a church and a burial ground. Buried in marble sarcophaguses along the cave walls, are the founder of the monastery Sophronios Patriarch of Jerusalem, his successor and renowned Patriarch of Jerusalem Saint Kopris, Saint Sophia – the mother of Saint Savvas, Saint Theodoti – the mother of Saint Unmercenaries, the mother of Saint Panteleimon, Saints Xenophon and Maria and other exceptional figures of the Palestine monasticism.

Hospitals, Old people's homes, orphanages, all kinds of workshops and various other buildings had been erected on the monastery premises. Saint Theodosius had been the most fervent advocate and follower of high standard monasticism, which combined the monastic life and education with the monastic exercise of good deeds and hard toil. On this issue, Great Theodosius imitates his also great compatriots, Basil the Great and Gregory who proved by their own example the

potential of theoretical and practical co-existence in monastic life.

His successor as Hegoumen was Sophronios who worthily continued Great Theodosius' mission. Moschos, the famous writer of Lemonarion was a contemporary and fellow ascetic of Sophronios and Modestos. He died in Rome but his relics were transferred and buried at the Cave of the Wise Men as an ultimate honour for the deceased. With the Persian invasion and the Arab occupation things changed drastically. The monastery fell in disfavour and a lot of monks were slaughtered. The capstone of the monastery is during the Crusades but it is permanently abandoned in the 15th century. In 1881 the Director of the Theology School of the Sacred Cross bought the Holy star of the Wise Men and reconstructed the ruined building. In 1896 the Patriarch of Jerusalem Gerasimos i founded the new monastery. Monk Leontios refurbished the Cave of the Wise Men and bought the surrounding area in 1990. The writer of the history of the monastery, Archdeacon Kleopas Koikylides, considers the number of the 700 monks who lived there in the beginning to have been a miracle. Today's building is a Basilica with a Dome, placed on the south part of the Cave of the Wise Men. Indisputable enduring witnesses of the continuous history of the monastery are Greek inscriptions, mosaic floors, marble panel capitals, constituting the Shrine a spiritual lighthouse in the land of Palestine. Saint Theodosius had been so much overwhelmed by divine love that he fulfilled to the letter the great divine command: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind…Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt 27:37-39).

Short account of the life of Saint Theodosius the Cenobiarch

Theodosius was born in 424 A.D. of pious parents named Proeresios and Eudokia in the town Magarisson near Komana of Cappadocia. He was called great on the one hand due to his

natural attractiveness, agreeableness, and activity, and Cenobiarch on the other, for his mission. In 451 at the age of 27, he leaves his family home in order to visit the Holy Land. Traversing Antioch, he was blessed to meet the famous, radiant with holiness of life and abounding with gifts of grace Symeon the Stylite. Theodosius was astonished to hear Symeon foretelling his forthcoming spiritual feats and Church enterprise.

Having had worshiped the Holy Shrines in Jerusalem, he lived at the Tower of David neighbouring Saint Loginos who was also from Cappadocia, and he joined the Decree of the "Exceptional" of the Church of the Resurrection. As Theodosius longed for greater seclusion he moved to the so called "Old Seat" on the highway from Jerusalem towards Bethlehem, the place of a church dedicated to Theotokos built by pious Ikelia, and where today there is the Holy Monastery of Prophet Elijah. Theodosius stayed there for a short while but longing for even greater ascetic life he moved from the place of the "Old Seat" further into the desert. At that time there was a tradition by word of mouth that the three Wise Men stayed overnight in one of the caves of the area when "being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way" (Matthew 2:12). There, Theodosius initially founded a small brotherhood which rapidly increased in number due to the fame of his holiness. With the expansion of the community, he established the foundation of the monastery during the years 465-475.

After the foundation of the monastery the mission of the great Father begins. Theodosius did not take into consideration the interior structure of the Palestinian Coenobitic monasteries in the formation of his own. Determining factor for this was the location of the monastery on a high mountain instead of a lower ground level rocky place. Visible from the monastery are Bethlehem, Jerusalem with the Mount of Olives, the river Jordan, the Dead Sea and the Sarantarion Mountain. In that

pleasant location, the coenobitic monks toiled not only for themselves but also for the Christian community. Coenobitic live contributed on the one hand to the increase of the number of monks to 700, and on the other to the generous donations of noble wealthy men such as one named Akakios. The donations were used for the building of guesthouses or cells for the monks and gradually a whole town was formed around the monastery. Saint Theodosius supported the monks not only in their ascetic striving towards moral perfection but also in their occupation. At the entrance of the Monastery he had written: “Let no lazy person enter”.

During the last three days of his life, Theodosius was constantly teaching his monks. As his biographer Theodore Bishop of Petra – Arabia says, Saint Theodosius was gifted with much wisdom, he was always studying essential research deriving from it the outmost necessary knowledge. In virtue of his outstanding personality, “many people with a fervent zeal for asceticism implore to join him and beseech his unique spiritual guidance in their path towards God”.