

THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION IN NAZARETH (2017)

On Friday, 25th March/7th April 2017, the feast of the Annunciation of our Most Holy Lady Theotokos was celebrated in Nazareth.

At this feast, the Church commemorates that fact that in the last days, God fulfilled the long foretold mystery of the incarnation of His Only Begotten Son and Logos. To this cause, He sent Archangel Gabriel to a pure virgin in Nazareth and announced to her that by the power of the Holy Spirit, she was to conceive and bear in flesh the Saviour of the world.

When the virgin said "behold the maiden of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to thy word", the incorporeal Logos took bodily form, and the One without flesh became incarnate. This even was celebrated by the Jerusalem Church at the place of its revelation, in Nazareth, at the Shrine where the spring is.

The outdoor Services of Matins and Divine Liturgy were led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with concelebrants the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Most Reverend Archbishops Aristarchos of Constantina, Damascene of Joppa, Methodios of Tabor, the visiting Metropolitans Simeon and Alexandros from Moscow Patriarchate, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks Fr. Hilarion Hegoumen of Tabor, Fr. Chrysostom Hegoumen of Kana, Fr. Sophronios Hegoumen of Aylaboun, Fr. Philotheos Hegoumen of Acre, Arab speaking Priests, many Russian speaking Priests, the Priests of the Holy Shrine Fr. Evaggelos, Fr. Simeon, Fr. John, Fr. Sergios, Fr. Athanasios and Fr. Samuel. Singing was the Choir Leader of the Most Holy Church of the Resurrection Archimandrite Aristovoulos with the newly organized by him

choir and the choir of the Nazareth Shrine, in Greek, Arabic, Russian and Romanian, at the participation in contrition and piety of a large congregation from the locals in Nazareth and other towns of north Israel, and many pilgrims mainly from Russia but also from Romania, Serbia and Greece.

At the Koinonikon of the Divine Liturgy His Beatitude preached the divine word as follows:

“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad” (Psalm 96:11), for “all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God”(Psalm 98:3).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims,

The annunciation of the coming of the “saviour of God”, meaning the Word (Logos) of God from Virgin Mary, has brought us together from near and afar in this blessed place of our hagiographic town of Nazareth, in order to celebrate in doxology and thanksgiving the memory of this universal and world-saving event. And together with Archangel Gabriel let us say to the Virgin and Theotokos, Mother of God Mariam, “Rejoice, thou who are highly favored! The Lord is with thee” (Luke 1:28), for Thou has given birth to the Saviour of our souls.

This great and paradox mystery was foretold by the great Prophet Isaiah saying “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). This is the concealed mystery in all time, and today made known to us humans; that is, God’s Logos and God becomes the Son of the Virgin by the outmost condescension. “A pavilion full of light is prepared for Thee, O Master: the undefiled womb of the Child of God. Come down and enter it, taking pity on Thy creatures, whom the avenging spirit in his envy has attacked and holds in bondage. They have lost their former beauty, and await Thine descend for their salvation” the hymn writer

exclaims.

Yes my beloved brothers, our humankind was enslaved and maliciously fought by its rival the devil. Of course this was due to the fact that the first man, the old Adam, misused his divine gift of "free will" and instead of obeying to the Will of his Creator, he obeyed his own will. Because of this, sin entered the world, meaning the corruption of death, and man lost his first divine glory, the immortality, he enjoyed being in communion with his Creator and God. "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people" St. Paul preaches. In other words, the death of sin came to humankind through the old Adam, while the salvation comes from the new Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is why the hymn writer of the church proclaims: "Rejoice, O modest one, recalling of Adam and deliverance of Eve, joy of the world and exceeding gladness of our race: for in thee all the fullness of the Godhead is come to dwell bodily, by the good pleasure of the eternal Father and with the co-operation of the Holy Spirit".

This undeniable truth is also confessed and witnessed by St. John the Evangelist saying "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Interpreting these words, St. Cyril of Alexandria says: it is well said by St. John the Theologian that, He (the Word) made His dwelling among us, so that he identifies the two parts of this phrase, the first is the One who dwelled and the second the place of the dwelling, so that you will not think that he was extended in flesh, but on the contrary, he took upon himself his own body of flesh, from the temple of the holy Virgin. "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 2:9), as St. Paul says.

The incarnation of God the Logos through the pure blood of Virgin Mary and His dwelling (of God the Logos) in her temple, meaning her womb, made her Theotokos and Mother of God.

In other words Virgin Mary with the co-operation of the Holy Spirit participates in the mystery of Divine providence, meaning the salvation of man, on behalf of all humankind. For this reason we exclaim to her: "Rejoice tabernacle of God the Word, Rejoice Holy one, holier than the Holies". "Rejoice Thou who are full of grace, the Lord is with Thee" (Luke 1:28). "Today things below are joined to things above. Adam is renewed, and Eve is set free from her ancient sorrow; and the tabernacle of our nature, which the Lord took upon himself, deifying the substance He assumed, is become the Temple of God" the hymn writer of the Church says.

Today there are also glad tidings for the ever-existing holy Church of Christ which has been revealed by Christ's incarnate presence. And we say this because Theotokos' annunciation also announced the revelation of the household of our God and Saviour Christ in the world. The household which according to St. Paul is "the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth"(1 Tim. 3:15). In other words, the Church is a pillar and steadfast foundation which holds the salvific truth.

The Holy Spirit which came to Virgin Mary, this very Spirit upholds and composes the institution of the Church. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy and peace" (Gal. 5:22) among other things, St. Paul teaches.

These very fruits of the Holy Spirit, meaning, love, joy and peace, are the good tidings that the Holy Church of Christ brings to us in celebration and festivity today. This was moreover foretold by the prophets and thus by Prophet David saying: "In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound" (Psalm 72:7).

This incarnate peace and righteousness, meaning the Son and Logos of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the One that Virgin Mary conceived in her womb and gave birth to, and became thus the key to Christ's Kingdom. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking" St. Paul says, "but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval" (Romans 14:17-18).

Let us therefore thank our Trinitarian God and say along with the hymn writer: "The Theotokos heard a voice she knew not, when the Archangel brought her the glad tidings of the Annunciation; and accepting his salutation with faith, she conceived Thee the pre-eternal God. Therefore in great rejoicing we also cry aloud to Thee: O God, who without change has taken flesh from her, grant peace unto the world and to our souls great mercy" Amen."

After the Divine Liturgy there was a procession at the town's main street, led by Scouts, with the participation of all the congregation. At the end of the procession Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth and the Community Council offered His Beatitude, His Entourage and many others a meal with fish as the main course at the refectory.

From Secretariat-General

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