

# THE FEAST OF PROPHET ELIJAH AT MAALOULE OF NAZARETH

On Saturday 23rd July / 5th August 2017, the memory of the Holy Prophet Elijah the Thesbite was celebrated a few days after the actual feast day at his Holy Church (which also honours the Ascension of the Lord) in the town Maaloule, a Nazareth suburb.

This town was inhabited until 1948, the year of the establishment of the State of Israel, when both the Palestinian inhabitants of the town and the Arab-speaking Greek-Orthodox ones of the Patriarchate deserted the town and its Holy Church.

The Church was asked for and returned to the Patriarchate with a licence from the surrounding Israeli army, with the acting policy of the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth and the funding of the Hegoumen of Mount Tabor Archimandrite Hilarion, after approximately fifty years.

In this Holy Church, the Divine Liturgy was officiated by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, among whom was Archimandrite Hilarion and Arab-speaking Priests, such as Fr. Simeon, Fr. Sergios and Fr. Spyridon, Archdeacon Mark and Deacon Anastasios. Singing were the choir singers of the Nazareth Shrine with the participation of a Congregation from Nazareth and its suburbs. Among this faithful there were descendants – children or grandchildren – of the Orthodox people who left the town, or of the reposed ones who have been buried there.

His Beatitude preached the divine word to this noble congregation as follows:

*“Then Elijah the prophet rose up like fire, and his word burned like a torch. He brought a famine upon them, and he reduced their number by his zeal. By the Lord’s word he shut up the sky, and in the same way he brought down fire three times. How glorious you were, Elijah, in your amazing deeds! Who will boast like you can?” (Wisdom Sirach 48:1-4).*

*Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

*Noble Christians and Pilgrims,*

*The incarnate Angel, the Prophets’ summit and boast, the second forerunner of the coming of Christ our God, Elijah the glorious, has gathered us all in this sacred place, where the Church dedicated to him stands, in order to festively honour his annual memory.*

*He came from Thesbis of Galaad, from the land of the Arabs and the Naphtali tribe. He is the greatest character in the Old Testament and the genuine bearer of the religion of the moral monotheism. This is made manifest by his ascetic life and miracles. Elijah and Moses appeared together with Christ on His Transfiguration and they were conversing with Him (Mat. 17:2-3). Moreover, the Apostle James the Brother of God, referring to the power of prayer, calls upon the Prophet’s example saying: “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (James 5:17-18).*

*Needless to highlight that the power of Prophet Elijah’s prayer has as its spring the inherent zeal of the Prophet, namely his great zealous faith in God. And the sudden appearance of this Prophet, as well as his manner of death,*

show the great and immediate intervention of God in the history of the people who infringe and wrong the truth, by every kind of idolatry and their obscene life, as St. Paul preaches: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them" (Romans 1:18-19).

In other words, my dear Brothers, the wrath of God is made manifest through the exceeding zeal of Prophet Elijah, who however, fails to realize that God is primarily and especially philanthropist and long-suffering, waiting for the repentance of the sinner, as Prophet Joel says: "turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel 2:13), meaning that He changes His mind over the punishment of our evil deeds.

Interpreting the aforementioned words of St. Paul, Theodore Mompousteas says: "Rightly – St. Paul – said that the wrath of God will be revealed, however, in this present time it is covered by the long-suffering God Who is not punishing at the same instant, so that He may not shut out the time of repentance." So, St. Paul correctly said that the wrath of God is being revealed in the world, nevertheless, because God is long-suffering and awaits the repentance of man until the time of the Last Judgment, He does not rush to His creation's immediate punishment.

"During his life, Elijah performed wonders, and in death his accomplishments were marvelous", Sirach says (Wisdom Sirach 48:14). Prophet Elijah's prophetic voice as well as the miracles he worked took place at a time when his people and the people of God were plagued by corruption and religious conjunctivism. This is witnessed by the book of Kings where we read: "And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped

his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (3 Kings 19:13-14). And immediately the Lord answered him: "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (3 Kings 19:18).

The prophetic and judgmental voice of today's honoured Saint of our Church, Elijah, does not only refer to the society of his time, but also to our contemporary society and time, and to the moral decline and corruption of the religious ideals in general and the fundamental principles of our Christian faith in particular.

In other words, my dear ones, Prophet Elijah's word denounces the injustice and idolatry of the passions and of the false gods; it denounces the irreverence towards the God of love and righteousness and the light of truth; it denounces iniquity and apostasy. Simultaneously, Prophet Elijah preaches and confesses that the God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac lives and He is not absent, and he prays to Him saying: "Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (3 Kings 18:37), meaning that You Lord are the true God Who is able to turn the hearts of this people back to You again so that they may follow You.

Prophet Elijah's prayer was heard, and the Lord God sent fire from heaven and burnt down the altar of the false god Baal. In similar faith and fervent prayer are we also called to invoke and pray to God our Saviour Christ, by the intercessions of the Most-Blessed Theotokos Maria, and the prayers of the

*glorious Prophet Elijah. Amen. Many happy returns."*

After the Divine Liturgy there was a reception on the yard under the shade of the pine trees, while at noon, a meal was offered to His Beatitude and others by Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth.

### **From Secretariat-General**

<http://youtu.be/R0Whar3q4NU>

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