

THE FEAST OF SAINTS GEORGE AND JOHN THE CHOZEVITES

On Sunday January 8/21, 2018, after the Feast of Theophany, the Patriarchate commemorated Saints George and John the Chozevites, at the Holy Monastery bearing their names, at the Brook Chorath on the way to Jericho.

On this Feast, the Church honours St. John who left his Archdiocese in Caesarea of Palestine in the 5th century and lived in this monastery, becoming a leader of souls and the renovator of the Monastery. The Church also honours St. George from Cyprus, who comforted monks' souls and renovated the Monastery after the Persian raid damages in 614 A.D.

The All-night Vigil in this Monastery was officiated by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Archbishops, and Priests. The choir was formed by noble pilgrims who came from the Church of Greece; Leonidas Doukas, choir leader at the Cathedral of the Holy Archdiocese Iliou Aharnes and Petroupolis, Eustathios Kasteliotis, choir leader of the Holy Church of St. Paul in Athens, Gregorios Zarkos, choir leader of the Holy Church of the Holy Trinity in Pireaus and Dionysios Thanasoulis, left choir singer of the Holy Church of Panagia Faneromeni in Attiki. The service was attended by a large congregation.

The Hegoumen of the Monastery Archimandrite Constantinos addressed His Beatitude upon His reception with the following words:

“Let us praise in hymns the two leaders of our Holy Monastery, St. John along with St. George, our patron Saints and intercessors to God.”

Your Beatitude Father and Master, and Your Venerable Entourage,

Festal is our gathering tonight! It is festal because we honour the two Owners and Patron Saints of the Lavra of Chozeva, Saints John and George.

Both Saints led an ascetic life here, admonishing and supporting the three thousand Monks who also lived in asceticism in the Lava; in other words, they became leaders of the Ascetics.

The centre of our life is one! The Holy Altar! The mystical life, the Services of our Holy Church! St. George the Chozevite himself, was teaching the following while strengthening spiritually his Monks during hardships:

“Spend much time, my child, in the Church of God, giving all your strength in this effort, in silence and piety. Because it is good for one to serve his mother, which is the Church, in all reverence and meekness. All Grace comes to us from her (the mother Church), making us heirs of eternal life.”

Friend of the Saints, Father and Master!

As your Sons, we exclaim; welcome, Your Beatitude!”

His Beatitude preached the Divine Word as follows:

“The true Light hath appeared, and He giveth enlightenment to all. Christ, Who surpasseth all purity, is baptized with us; He bringeth sanctification into the water, and it becometh a place of cleansing of souls. That which is visible is earthly; which is perceived with the understanding is higher than the Heavens. Through washing cometh salvation, and through water, the Spirit. By descending into the water we ascend to God. Wondrous are Thy works, O Lord; glory to Thee”. This is what the hymn writer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims of the Saints of Chozeva sacred relics,

Our Father among the Saints George the Chozevite, who has invited us all in his festal commemoration, had become a communicant of the true Light that hath appeared. His Monastery witnesses the marvels of God as the psalmist says: "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works" (Ps. 71:17).

Indeed, the wondrous works of God have been declared in this Monastery until now, through the sacred relics of the Fathers and monks who have lived in ascetic striving throughout the ages in the caves on either side of brook Chorath; and especially the full relic of our Father among the Saints John the new Chozevite, the wonder worker, who became a martyr of consciousness.

The monks who lived in ascetic striving here became sons of light of our Holy Church, namely of the mystical body of Christ as the psalmist says: "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Ps. 103:17-18).

Saint George, whose sacred memory we commemorate today, lived approximately one hundred years after Saint John the Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine who also lived in this Monastery. St. George, who experienced the barbaric Persian raid, undertook both the gathering of the scattered monks and ascetics and the reconstruction of the monastic and coenobitic life in the Lavra of Chozeva. "The height of his virtues and the miracles he worked with his holy prayers placed the Monastery above all others in Palestine, which after his death received the name of St. George the Chozevite. Because he is its patron Saint and his tomb became the most honoured place at the Monastery", according to the epistles of St. John the New Chozevite.

The height of the Saint's virtues is expressed clearly by the hymn writer who says: "Neither lengthiness of the road nor severity of the place could avail to weaken thy strong and fiery zeal to make thy journey to God; and when thou joyously hadst arrived at the places that were trod by the feet of our Lord and God, thou leftest nothing undone till through thy labours and ascetic deeds thou camest unto the Sion in Heaven's heights."

St. George linked the fiery zeal, namely his most fiery journey to the Lord, with the places that were trod by the feet of the Incarnate Logos of God in the cave of Bethlehem, by the pure blood of the Ever-Virgin Mary; the places in the river Jordan district, where St. John the Baptist preached repentance and baptized the people in the water (Luke 3:3). And our Lord Jesus Christ was baptized by John in the river Jordan (Mark 2:9). "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mat. 3:16-17) according to the Evangelists' witness.

Bearing in mind the witness of the Holy Apostles and Evangelists and heeding to St. Paul's words: "But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:4-6), St. George came to this biblical sacred place of Chozeva, and made it a natural and spiritual font; where we foretaste the bathing of the baptism, "the bath of palingenesis" (concept of rebirth or re-creation), namely the resurrection. "For this is the meaning of palingenesis...the second birth", Ecumenios says.

In other words, my dear brothers and sisters, "the grace of

God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). The grace which overshadowed those Saints in Christ who lived in ascetic striving before and after St. George in Chozeva, is no other than the Holy Spirit that came down on the beloved Son of God our Lord Jesus Christ in the bodily form of a dove, at the river Jordan.

As our Father among the Saints George the Chozevite became participant and communicant of this salvific grace, we are also called to partake of it, having the Saint as an example to imitate. And with the hymn writer let us say: "Thou didst pass thy life on earth like a bodiless being, O though who art truly great; wherefore, thou wast united to the choirs of the bodiless hosts, singing thrice-holy songs unto the Creator and receiving His illumination." Amen.

The Hegoumen and renovator of the Monastery Archimandrite Constantinos offered a monastic meal after the Divine Liturgy.

From Secretariat-General

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