

THE ORDINATION TO ARCHBISHOP OF ARCHBISHOP-ELECT ARISTOVOULOS OF MADABA

On Sunday May 7/20, 2018, Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Synod and of the commemoration of the appearance in the sky of the sign of the Cross, the Episcopal ordination of Archbishop-Elect Aristovoulos of Madaba took place at the Catholicon of the All-holy Church of the Resurrection.

The Ordination was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with concelebrant Archbishops of the Throne, the Most Reverend Metropolitans Kyriakos of Nazareth, Isychios of Kapitolias, Timotheos of Bostra, and the Most Reverend Archbishops Damascene of Joppa, Aristarchos of Constantina, Methodios of Tabor, Theophylactos of Jordan, Demetrios of Lydda, Makarios of Qatar, Isidoros of Hierapolis, Christophoros of Kyriakoupolis and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis. There were also Hagiotaphite Priests and visiting Priests from other Churches, Archdeacon Mark and Deacons Anastasios and Sophronios. The Choir was that of Byzantine Music Professor Mr. Demetrios Balagiorgos. The Service was attended by the Abbess and Nuns of the Holy Monastery of St. Anthanasios Kolindros in Olympos, the mother, sister and relatives and friends of the new Archbishop from Greece, as well as members of the Arab-speaking and Russian-speaking Congregations of the Patriarchate, Hagiotaphite Fathers, monks and nuns.

The main parts of the ordination were: During Matins the reciting of the Confessions of Faith and the Libels against the heresies by the Elect. These were followed by the Divine Liturgy and before the reading of the Apostolic reading and the Gospel His Beatitude addressed the Archbishop-Elect Aristovoulos of Madaba as follows;

Your Grace Archbishop-Elect Aristovoulos of Madaba,

On this day and hour we are blessed by our God to celebrate the Sacrament of the Eucharist at the place where God worked the salvation of the human race in the centre of the earth.

This place is the Horrendous Golgotha and the empty Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ Who was risen from the dead, the heart of all Holy Shrines, which God has appointed the Jerusalem Patriarchate with the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood to safeguard and minister.

Along with the Sacrament of the bloodless sacrifice at this hour, there is another Sacrament, that of your Episcopal Office, after your election to Archbishop of the Holy Archdiocese of Madaba, by the unanimous voting of the members of our Holy and Sacred Synod.

The Church calls you to this ministry, considering your arrival to the Holy Land since your early youth from your hometown, your studies at the Patriarchal Seminary School, your joining the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood after your graduation, and your zealous ministry in various tasks. First of them comes your strong twenty-eight-year Management of the Choir of the All-holy Church of the Resurrection, following with outmost precision the Typikon and the Byzantine Music, according to the council of the Apostle of Nations Paul; "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19) and also being distinguished in it, by receiving the Diploma of the School of Music of Athens. Simultaneously you undertook your post-graduate studies at the Institut d'etudes superieures en Theologie Orthodoxe de Chambesy in Geneva, Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, where your Thesis was on our memorable Predecessor, St. Sophronios Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Despite your Higher Education studies, you never ceased to serve our Greek Orthodox Arab-speaking Congregation, either ministering as the Hegoumen of the Greek Orthodox Community of Beit Jalla, or as a Byzantine Music Teacher in special and intensive courses. You also took care of our Russian-speaking Congregation, visiting prisoners and moving from North to South in Israel to celebrate the Divine Liturgy, having also founded, by Our guidance and support the House of Prayer named after Patriarch Abraham, the Macaws and St. Sophronios the Patriarch of Jerusalem in the town of Ber-Sheba of Negev, following the commandment of the Apostle of Nations Paul to his disciple Timothy saying: "that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience;" (1 Tim. 1:18-19).

From today onward, the Church calls you to work on this pastoral work in "meekness, humility and indulgence of Christ" at the historic and worldwide famous Shrine of Madaba, where lies the scientifically and culturally invaluable Byzantine mosaic map of the Holy Land from the time of Christ's presence on earth. In this Shrine our representative Hegoumen Reverend Archimandrite Innokentios has developed an unprecedented wondrous work that can withstand the power of time in the pilgrimage, ecclesiastical and educational fields. The Hagiotaphite Brotherhood expresses its gratitude and takes for granted the offering of his valuable experience to the support and co-operation with your Grace.

In this place you are called to teach the doctrines and tradition of our pure Orthodox Faith and cultivate the Byzantine Music, following Prophet David in his saying "I will sing unto my Lord as long as I live", organizing Musical and Pastoral Conferences that will promote the long-term mission of our Patriarchate and the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood for reconciliation, peace and cultural development in the places of its jurisdiction, namely the three Palestines as far as Qatar. Your Grace has been proven a worthy Apostle of this

ministry of our Venerable Brotherhood and today you are called to continue in this ministry and service as a Hagiotaphite Bishop.

Thanking therefore God for this gift, and trusting in His mercy, come forth into this Holy and primary Altar which has been founded by the blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ on the Cross, on Which the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been built, and as fervently the Grace of the All-holy and Ceremonial Spirit, as we commemorate the Holy Fathers of the 1st Ecumenical Synod and the Appearance of the sign of the Cross on the sky of Jerusalem; this Spirit may elevate you a chosen vessel for the salvation of souls and the glory of our God in one Trinity, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then the Archbishop-Elect of Madaba addressed His Beatitude and the Fathers as follows;

“Your Beatitude Father and Master,

Honourable members of the Holy and Sacred Synod,

“All the nations in the town of David saw wondrous things
when the Holy Spirit came down in tongues of fire”

Is there a greater honour than this? The Holy Spirit filled Christ’s disciples and changed them. The Church was founded and the earth became a Paradise. The beguiler master of this world “was cast out” and the former enslaved man was liberated and became son of God by grace. Which king has ever given such an honour to his subjects? How easily did we become heirs of the eternal Kingdom? Which worldly power can be compared to the grace of the Holy Spirit? “The Holy Spirit provideth all things; He gusheth forth prophesy; He perfected the priesthood; He hath taught wisdom to the illiterate. He hath shown forth the fishermen as theologians. He holdeth together

the whole institution of the Church”.

This Holy Spirit strengthened St. Stephen the First Martyr and gave him wisdom to silence the loquacious and profane disclaimers of Christ before the court. This Holy Spirit transformed the persecutor Saul and gave the Church the chosen vessel, the Apostle of Nations, the Great Paul. This Holy Spirit guided St. Sophronios the Patriarch of Jerusalem to stand steadfast, all by himself, as an unshakable pillar against the scattering waves of heresy and contributed greatly to the victory of Orthodoxy against Monothelitism.

Considering the greatness of the honour and glory of the Holy Spirit I fail to interpret the criteria by which the Holy Spirit has enlightened Your Holy Beatitude and the Holy and Sacred Synod to choose me the unworthy for this High Ministry.

Up until now, I find it difficult to comprehend the reasons of my election. Only God’s Providence would capsize my human logic, because, under the current circumstances, I was left with the impression that I would leave my last breath as the Choir Leader of the All-holy Church of the Resurrection. I had already begun my students’ preparation for the hymns of the Holy Week for next year. However, “People may have certain thoughts, but God orders things in a different way”.

And now I wonder, how will I stand firm as a Bishop “according to the manner and the form of Christ” when I cannot apply to myself the Lord’s advice: “Learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart” (Mat. 11:29). How will the Grace of the Holy Spirit come down to me the irritable, the negligent and indolent, knowing that: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5 & James 4:6).

What comforts me is the Lord’s assurance according to which: “What is impossible with man is possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

Despite my hesitations, I take very seriously the advice You

gave me, Your Beatitude Father and Master, and I bow my head before the Church, obeying Your spiritual orders.

Heavy is the burden of responsibility and my shoulders weak, when I recall that: "An elder must be blameless as he manages God's household, not overbearing, not quick-tempered, but hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined" (Titus 1:6-9).

I am nevertheless encouraged to overcome my hesitations, having the Church Fathers a living example of patience and endurance, along with You, Your Beatitude, who has continuously been receiving fierce attacks from anti-ecclesiastical groups.

Unfortunately we live at a time when as the Lord foretold: "For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many" (Mat. 24:5), and as the Apostle of Nations Paul prophesized: "savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30).

Indeed, the Church all over the world has been harassed since the mid-19th century from the fallacy of Phyletism which was condemned by the Holy and Great Pan-Orthodox Synod of Constantinople in 1872, and by the Great Synod of Orthodoxy in 2016.

Unfortunately the same anti-ecclesiastical groups have targeted, roaring like an angry lion, our martyred Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and seek fertile ground in the Holy Land for the completion of their lurking plans. Misleading they are deluded, not realizing what St. Paul says: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Within this worldly frame, I reiterate thanksgiving Doxology to God, Who has united me with bonds of unshakable brotherly love with the Most Reverend Archbishop Christophoros of Kyriakoupolis, with whom I sat at the same desk at the Patriarchal School, we were tonsured monks on the same day, ordained Deacons together, he was first and I second, with one-day difference, and now again, we were deemed worthy to receive the Episcopal Grace, with only a day's difference.

The great and unadulterated love that has united us for 30 years is the reply to the arrogance of the enemies of the Church who want to sow weeds between us. To all of them we reply that no matter how much they fight us, we will keep our Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate united by the power of the Sacred and Life-giving Cross and the grace of the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb, under the protection of You, Your Beatitude, and as the memorable and -according to me – Saint Augustine Kantiotis, Bishop of Florina used to boldly proclaim, we will fight “for a free, living Church”.

And now, from this position, before You, Your Beatitude Father and Master, and before the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb and the Horrendous Golgotha, I make my humble promise, that I will consume myself again for the sake of the free living Church. I am well aware that sorrows and inconveniences lie ahead, but seeking the power of the Sacred and Life-giving Cross, that our Church honours especially today, on the commemoration of the miracle of Its appearance in the sky of the Holy City, and placing my hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is Resurrected and Ascended, we will be able to endure every temptation until the end.

Your Beatitude Father and Master,

From this position I owe to express my wholehearted gratitude for the love You have shown me since the very beginning of my joining the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood. I remember when during those first years, quite often, the proximity of our cells

gave me the opportunity to sit and discuss with You various theological matters, either at the cell of the memorable Fr. Photios, or at the cell of the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, or at Your cell. I remember a phrase You used to say very often: "Work at your obedience as if you were going to keep it for life, but at the same time, be always ready to hand in the keys as soon as you are asked by the Patriarchate". I admired the greatness of self-denial in that phrase.

I remember when I was a graduate student at the Patriarchal School, You had come to celebrate the Divine Liturgy at the Feast of the Holy Spirit and at the reception you wished me: "may we have you in Jerusalem next year too", when You knew very well that I had already bought the ticket of my departure from the Holy Land, and I was going to leave after the Pan-Hellenic Exams.

This prophetic phrase was fulfilled a few days later, when during the feast of St. Constantine, instead of leaving to the airport, I cancelled my ticket and declared my final firm decision to join the Brotherhood.

Since the moment that the Holy Spirit elected You at the Throne of St. James the Brother of God, You had not forsaken me, and you immediately sent me to complete my studies in Theology at the University of Athens.

Then You saw to my enrolment to the Institute of the Inter-Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Shambesy for my Post-Graduate studies where I also learnt the French language. There, I was acquainted with the Most Reverend Metropolitan Jeremiah of Switzerland and His Grace Bishop Makarios of Lampsakou, who had actually been present at my christening when I was an infant in Germany. During my studies, I had the honour and the blessing to have as my supervisor Professor Vlassios Feidas, who helped me in my research about the life and work of St. Sophronios the

Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Your appointed me a Librarian Assistant and that way I came to direct contact with the manuscripts, this invaluable treasure of our Patriarchate.

My ministry at the Central Library brought me close to the Byzantine Music Professor Mr. Demetrios Balagiorgos, with whom I developed a fruitful cooperation for the benefit of the Patriarchate.

You entrusted me with the pastoral ministry of the Russian-speaking parishes and with Your guidance, in 2008, I began the reconstitution of the parishes in South Israel, with Ber-Sheba as my base. This obedience gave me the chance to practise the Russian language and become familiar with the problems of our Russian-speaking Congregation. Simultaneously I worked at the pastoral ministry of the prisoners, which was initiated by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Timotheos of Bostra, under adverse circumstances, and there I appreciated the value of the gift of freedom, which of course, those who had the misfortune to find themselves out of the law lack in many ways.

Three years ago You sent me to Nazareth, to teach the art of the Psalter to our congregation and I experienced very closely the hospitality of Abraham by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, who supported me in every way for the success of this mission, which will be continued with my guidance by my excellent student and associate Archimandrite Leontios. Your decision, Your Beatitude to appoint me Patriarchal Representative in Madaba of Jordan will enable me to learn the Arabic language more efficiently.

I thank my spiritual Father, Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, who since the day of my arrival in the Holy Land has never left me alone, and has always supported me, listened to me, advised me, rebuked me in a fatherly manner and endured me. I ask him from this position

to continue admonishing me and support me spiritually in my new ministry.

I thank the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, who since the beginning of his management at the Financial Committee, he has entrusted me totally and has very willingly funded my trips, as he also paid for the monthly rent of Abraham's House of Prayer in Ber Sheba.

I especially thank the Most Reverend Archbishops Makarios of Qatar and Isidoros of Hierapolis, for their love and support, as well as the Elders and Hegoumens Chrysostom of St. Gerasimos of the Jordan and Eudokimos of St. Savvas and Archimandrite Leontios who never denied their support and encouraged me both morally and materially.

I thank my brother Fr. Eirinarhos, Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of the Holy Apostles in Capernaum, alongside whom I decided to leave Florina and come to the Holy Land to study at the Patriarchal School, and later on we decided together to join the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood.

I thank all those who travelled from afar in order to participate in my personal joy, among whom is the Abbess of the Holy Monastery of St. Athanasios Kolindros, Gerondissa Eirini, who despite the health problems that trouble her came to participate in my spiritual joy.

Especially I thank the Byzantine Music Professor Mr. Demetrios Balagiorgos, the Professor of the School of Theology at the University of Athens Mr. Athanasios Glaros and the dear colleague Teacher of Byzantine Music and Phd Student who honoured me by delivering the hymns in my ordination.

I prostrate before all the Fathers and Brothers I may have grieved in the past, either by word or by deed, and ask their forgiveness.

As far as the Russian-speaking congregation of South Israel

that I have been serving since 2008 is concerned, I promise I will not abandon it. I will continue my efforts to find the land for the building of the three-domed Church dedicated to the Holy Patriarch Abraham, St. Sophronios the Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Holy Macaws.

Finally, I thank God, Who has given me my mother, who raised me in self-denial, and taught me with her own example our faith, as well as my brothers and sister in flesh, with whom we share a great spiritual love.

And now, Your Beatitude, Father and Master, I humbly bow my head and ask you to pray to the Almighty God in order to send down His All-holy Spirit and overshadow me, strengthen me and make me Minister of His Sacraments, so that I may be able to sanctify and be sanctified. Amen. So be it."

After the addresses there were the ordination hymns during the three-times circling of the Holy Table, the placing of the hands on the head of the ordained by His Beatitude and the Archbishops with the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the exclamation of "Axios" as the newly-ordained was putting on the Episcopal vestments with the help of His Beatitude and the Archbishops in the Holy Altar.

Before the Dismissal of the Divine Liturgy His Beatitude gave the Episcopal Staff to the ordained saying "receive this staff...". The ordained gave the Holy Communion to the faithful at the end of the Divine Liturgy in the Catholicon. Then there was the Procession on the commemoration of the appearance of the sign of the Cross in the sky of Jerusalem. After the Procession everybody returned in the Catholicon where the ordained gave the blessed bread to the faithful who congratulated him and kissed his hand. Having finished the Service, all congregation returned to the Patriarchate Headquarters.

There His Beatitude congratulated the ordained once more and

wished him a fruitful and rich ministry, while the ordained thanked Him for his election and ordination and promised to work alongside His Beatitude and the Church of Jerusalem for the spiritual development and progress of the Patriarchate's Congregation in Madaba.

From Secretariat-General

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