

THE CONSECRATION OF THE HOLY CHURCH OF THE DORMITION IN MADABA

On Saturday, September 9/22, 2018, day of the commemoration of the parents of Theotokos and Holy Ancestors of God Joachim and Anna, there was the consecration of the Holy Church of the Dormition, which is built in the Hannine area of the historic town of Madaba, where also lies the shrine of the historic mosaic map of the 6th century A.D. that depicts the Holy Land during the time of the New Testament. The Church has been built by the supervision and funding of the former Patriarchal Representative in Madaba, Archimandrite Innokentios. The consecration ceremony and the Divine Liturgy were officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, having arrived to Madaba from Jerusalem and from Amman, after a warm welcoming reception for Him in the morning of the previous day. Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were the Most Reverend Archbishops; Aristarchos of Constantina and Secretary-General, Makarios of Qatar, Christophoros of Kyriakoupolis, with the participation in prayer of the Patriarchal Representative in Madaba Most Reverend Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba. There were also Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, among whom the Spiritual Father of the Lavra of St. Savvas the Sanctified Archimandrite Eudokimos, the Patriarchal Representative in Irbet of North Jordan Archimandrite Raphael, Arab-speaking Priests, among whom the Priest of the Shrine of Madaba Fr. Joseph, Archdeacon Mark, Hierodeacon Eulogios and Deacon George. The cantor from Greece Mr. Balogiorgos and his choir from the Music School of Athens delivered the hymns and the service was attended by a large congregation of the Christian faithful of Madaba. His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon to this congregation; "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new

creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17) St. Paul preaches. Most Reverend Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba, Holy Fathers and Brothers, Your Grace Archimandrite Innokentios, owner of the Holy Church of the Dormition and its surrounding premises,

Today the historic town of Madaba, which is the cultural centre of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, rejoices along with the Mother of all Churches, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, on the consecration of the new beautiful Church and of the spiritual centre in the Hannina area of Madaba.

This project is of great importance for the people of the wider Madaba area and especially for the spiritual and liturgical needs of the local Greek-Orthodox community, because this project depicts the unceasing mission of the ministry of the word of love of Christ to our fellow men on the one hand; on the other, it displays the cultivated harmonious co-existence of the various religious communities that inhabit the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The Venerable Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in its long term historic course, has never ceased to provide with both words and actions the sacred virtues of love towards the fellow man as well as the enemy, of peace and of the absolute respect towards our fellow man who has been created by God according to His image and likeness.

The historic great national-religious leaders such as Khalif Omar Ibn Khattab and St. Sophronios, Patriarch of Jerusalem have significantly contributed not only to the respect of the co-existence of the religious communities, but also to the free worship of God in His House.

Such a House of God have we consecrated today, in honour of the Dormition of Theotokos and for the glory of the Name of the Almighty God, but also for the praise of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, under the wise governmental expertise of

our most respected King Abdullah II.

Each consecrated Church is in effect a projection of our own temple, namely our body, as St. Paul says; "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is in you*, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19).

And we say this because the House of prayer, namely the Church of God, is the place where the Holy Scriptures are preached. St. Paul says, "All Scripture *is given by inspiration of God*, and *is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

For all these, we would like to thank from the depths of our heart the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba and his dear associates, the Vestry-men of the Church and all those who contributed for this work, and those who strove to organize this festal ceremony of the consecration of the Church of the Dormition.

Finally, we consider it our duty to express the deepest gratitude of our Hagiotaphite Brotherhood to our noble congregation in Madaba, and a personal duty of Ours, to the tireless worker of the vineyard of the Lord, Reverend Archimandrite Innokentios, established member of the venerable Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, who has made our Greek-Orthodox Community here an Ecclesiastical, educational and spiritual Centre. Righteously therefore, " there is laid up for him the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to him" (2 Tim. 4:8).

We also express our warm gratitude to all those who honoured this feast of the consecration of the Church with their presence, and especially the local civil, military and police forces of Madaba.

Many happy and peaceful returns.”

Archimandrite Innokentios also addressed those present with the following words;

“This is the day that the Lord made; let us be glad and rejoice in it”.

Your Beatitude, Most Reverend Archbishops, Honourable Governors, Representatives of the Parents’ Association and of the Church,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The consecration of the Holy Church of the Dormition of Theotokos in Madaba, the Holy Altar of God, is being carried out today, after a series of 10 years of continuous efforts and many labours. This project includes the building of the Holy Church of the Dormition, and of classrooms at the Schools of this area and covers in total 8.000 sq.mt. of construction in 11.000 acres, in order to cover the needs of the town of Madaba in general and of the Orthodox Community in particular.

The town of Madaba has been a great Orthodox Christian centre in the past, as the most important Diocese of East Jordan; until today, Madaba has been a remarkable Shrine of the Orthodox Church of East Jordan and of the Hashemite Kingdom.

We consecrate today this new Holy Church in honour of the Dormition of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, due to the nearby existence of the Mosque which they have been pleased to name Mosque “Of Jesus Christ, Son of Mary”, as they believe in His historic presence. This belief bridges the contrasts between Christians and Muslims and favours their peaceful co-existence in the town of Madaba.

I am in the pleasant position to count 30 years of Priestly ministry in Jordan, including 25 years in Madaba. I would like to thank the members of the Community of the Christian family

of Madaba for the love and commitment they have shown, as well as all those who contributed for the completion of this project and of all other projects that were completed in the Patriarchal Committee of Madaba.

I would like to pay tribute to the memorable Patriarch of Jerusalem Diodoros I, who supported me in my first footsteps as a Hagiotaphite, and who contributed greatly in the development of Education in Jordan, with the schools of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, but also for all the other projects he accomplished in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Likewise, I would like to thank His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, for his trust in me; May your days, Your Beatitude, be many, peaceful and blessed”.

Finally, I should not omit to honour and congratulate for his election the new Patriarchal Representative, Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba, who is known to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem for his ethos, purity and honesty, but also for his particularly important skills and abilities. I wish the people of Madaba may take the Archbishop as an example and benefit from his virtues and abilities.”

This festive ceremony and the Divine Liturgy were followed by a reception at the reception hall below the Church of the Shrine.

There, His Beatitude delivered the following address;

“By means of His coming, Christ hath filled all things with His Light; our souls are now consecrated, and by His Holy Spirit He hath renewed the world; for a house is founded to the Lord’s praise and glory, wherein Christ our God, for the salvation of mortals, doth consecrate and hallow the hearts of all His faithful flock”.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians,

The pre-eternal God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has set His Church as a tower of strength, and has founded it on the rock of faith, has gathered us today in this beautiful newly-built Church of the Dormition, in order to perform its consecration in Doxology and Thanksgiving.

“On Sinai long ago Thou didst show the God-seer Moses a tabernacle not made by hands, thereby depicting Thy Church, O Christ”, the hymn writer says, referring to Moses’ ascend on Sinai, where the Glory of God descended upon him, and he received detailed orders on how to make the Tabernacle of the Congregation (Exodus 24: 15-16 / 25: 8-9), which was made by the Lord and not by any man, as St. Paul says in his preaching: “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Hebrews 8:1-2).

As far as this “true tabernacle” is concerned, behold what the hymn writer says: “When the Word dwelt among us in the flesh, the Son of Thunder (St. John the Evangelist) spake thus in his writings: We have radiantly beheld the glory which the Son hath from the Father in the grace of truth. And as many of us as have received Him with faith, to all hath He given the power to become children of God; and we, who were born again not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, but have received increase by the Holy Spirit, have raised up this house of prayer, and cry out: Do Thou Thyself now establish this house, O Lord”.

This house of prayer is no other than the New Tabernacle of the Congregation, in other words, the Church that our Lord Jesus Christ founded by His own Sacred and Redeeming blood. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2

Cor. 5:17), St. Paul says.

In other words, my dear Brothers and Sisters, today's consecrated Church is a house of prayer, "whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28). And whereby, through our ArchPriest Jesus Christ, "we offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Hebrews 13:15). And in more detail; when I say sacrifice, St. Paul preaches, I do not mean the sacrifice of animals and of blood, but a sacrifice which as the fruit of honest confidence towards God, shall come forth from our lips, which will praise and glorify His Name.

"Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth" (Psalm 26:8), Prophet David chants. "The dwellings of the Lord are beloved unto them that long to see the glory of His countenance unconcealed" the hymn writer of the Church proclaims. "And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power" (Revelation 15:8), St. John the Evangelist says in his book of Revelation.

This means that the Lord used to manifest His Presence and Glory in a special place that was sanctified. And according to the true witness of the Holy Scriptures (Exodus 16:7, 16:10, 3 Kings 8:11), the glory of the Lord, in other words, the Grace of the Holy Spirit, filled the house, meaning His Church, in the form of a cloud during the times of the synaxis of worship, which was the prayer in public. Nevertheless, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24) the Lord says.

It is also noteworthy that this office of the consecration of Holy Church has as its reference point and source the renewed old Adam in the presence of the New Adam, who is the Incarnate Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and of the Ever-Virgin Mary and Theotokos, according to the witness of

the Holy Evangelists and Fathers of the Church. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), St. John the Evangelist says. "Today hath the second Adam, Christ, shown this new tabernacle to be a spiritual Paradise, which beareth, instead of the tree of knowledge, the life-giving weapon of the Cross" the hymn writer of the Church proclaims.

The approved Father of the Church, St. Gregory the Theologian, comments on Jesus' presence at the dedication of the Church of Solomon by saying: "And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter" (John 10:22), the time of unfaithfulness, and Christ was present, the God and temple, God eternal, recent temple, which was demolished in a day and rebuilt in three days and remains for all eternity, so that I may be saved and I may be recalled from the old body to become a new creation, redeemed through such a philanthropy (St. Gregory the Theologian, Speech 44 on the New Sunday).

In other words, my dear ones, the temple of God as a place of worship is the workshop that operates through the Holy Spirit for the salvation of our souls. And the prayers are the way and the means for our communion with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father. For this reason, St. John of the Ladder says that the prayer in its quality is an intercourse and union of man with God, and when it comes to its effect, prayer is the constitution and the conservation of the world. Prayer is the mother of all virtues (St. John of the Ladder, Speech 28 on Prayer).

Let us therefore thank the Lord, for the festive celebration in this day of the consecration of this Holy Church of the Dormition and say along with the hymn writer: "Sanctification is befitting to Thy House O Lord; for Thy Name O friend of man is glorified therein; therefore, along with the prophet we exclaim to Thee in faith; By Thine Holy Spirit do Thou now renew us all, by the prayers of the Theotokos (and the

Ancestors of God Joachim and Anna), Thou who art the only friend of man". Amen"

The Patriarchal Representative Most Reverend Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba also spoke, underlining the importance of the completed work which has been done by his predecessor Archimandrite Innokentios, a work that he is going to continue. His Eminence also stressed the importance of the presence of the choir that came from Greece for the continuation of the cultivation of the Byzantine Music.

From Secretariat-General