

THE FEAST OF THE FOREFATHERS AT BEIT SAHOUR

On the Sunday of the Feast of the Forefathers, December 17/30, 2018, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of the Forefathers at the Holy Church dedicated to them which is also the patron Church of Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem.

On this feast the Church honours the commemoration of the Forefathers of Christ who lived before the Law and by the Law, of whom He was a descendant, and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary as He was born in the flesh by her.

In this beautiful Church which is decorated with a stone-carved ikonostasion and Byzantine hagiography, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the morning, officiated by the Most Reverend Archbishop Philoumenos of Pella, with co-celebrants the Priests of this parish, Fr. Savva, Fr. Issa, Fr. Ionannis and Fr. George. The parish choir chanted in Arabic with the participation of a full congregation of the inhabitants of the town.

Presbyter Issa read to this congregation the Sermon of His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos as below;

“Being the fulfilment of the Law and of the Prophets, Christ our God, Thou who hast completed the providence of the Father, do Thou fill our hearts with joy and gladness always; now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.” (Liturgy of St. Chrysostom).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Reverend Christians,

The conveyed message through the mouth of the Angel of God to

the shepherds who remained in their fields at night in your town of Beit Sahour: "behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"(Luke 2:10-11), has gathered all of us today in this Holy Church in order to celebrate in thanksgiving and doxology the commemoration of our Holy Forefathers, namely all those who pleased God from Adam to Joseph the Betrothed to the Most Holy Theotokos; likewise, all the prophets and prophetess, especially Prophet Daniel and the three children.

Those among the prophets who have pleased God throughout the centuries are those who proclaimed the mystery of the Divine Providence, the birth of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who fulfilled every aspect of the Father's Providence.

Today's feast of the Forefathers in this very place where the heavenly hosts, the angels, conversed with the people who stayed in their fields at night, is the preamble of the evangelism of the great joy (Luke 2:3), of the deliverance of man from the bondage of sin and the corruption of death.

And this is so, because the Son of God, Christ, is the new Adam, not the earthly man any more, but the One who has been conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Ever-Virgin Mary and became incarnate through her pure blood, for our salvation.

The sacred history is no other than the history of our Holy Church, and we have been born members of its body, namely of Christ. It is precisely this sacred history that the Holy Forefathers and all the prophets composed and recorded, as they received all the revelations of God. And in the Old Testament the revelations of God the Word, of Christ, were in a bodiless form, while in the New Testament the revelations of God the Word, the Christ were done in the flesh.

The Holy Forefathers, the righteous prophets of the Old

Testament, did not only have a communion in the Holy Spirit with the Word of God, the Christ, but also with the vision of His incarnation. In other words, they saw the Word of God as a man, in the form of a man. Adam, for example, heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise in the evening (Gen. 3:8). Jacob saw the face of God “for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (Genesis 32:30). Moses saw the back of God; “And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:21-23). Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne; “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” (Isaiah 6:1). Daniel saw the Lord as the son of man; “And, behold, one like the similitude of the sons of men touched my lips” (Daniel 10:16). Prophet Isaiah converses with God; “and behold the word of the Lord came unto him, and he said to him: What dost thou here, Elias? And he answered: With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant” (3 Kings 19:9-10).

It is noteworthy that the Holy Forefathers and prophets did not see the unintelligible and unreachable nature of God, but the form and the image of Him, which image was going to be materialized in the future, as St. Paul says, in Christ Jesus, “who being in the form of God... was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:5-7). And elsewhere St. Paul says; Satan “hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Our Holy Church honours and venerates the memory of the Holy Forefathers because they foretell the great mystery of the divine providence, the mystery of the salvation of man. “We honour the pinnacles among the Fathers, even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; for from their seed, Christ shone forth incarnate of a Virgin, since He is almighty” the hymn writer of the Church proclaims.

Christ is the Saviour of the world and this is also proven by the fact that apart from Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and Joseph, the first people who venerated the divine infant were the shepherds who stayed in their fields at night. And this is so because they were characterized by their simplicity and purity of heart. Moreover, the shepherds imitated the lives and virtues of the Patriarchs and of the prophets of the Old Testament. The Church Fathers underline the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ chose the simplest people in the heart and mind to reveal the unspeakable mystery of the incarnation of God the Word. Christ did not choose the proud and cunning Scribes and Pharisees who knew and taught the scriptures and the Law of Moses.

The Church my beloved, is not of this world, of this time, which "lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19) as the Evangelist John says. The Church abides and exists in the world in order to save the world and deliver it from the darkness, the unrighteousness and the oppression of the devil. In other words, the purpose of the Church is to evangelize the "on earth peace" which was introduced to the world by the incarnation of the Divine Word and praised by the angels.

And we say this, because by His incarnation, Christ made peace between God and man, between man with his fellow men, and between man with himself. And this happened because in our Lord Jesus Christ there was the union of the divine with the human nature impartially, with no alteration, with no division and inseparably.

Behold therefore, why the angel of the Lord said to the shepherds in the fields: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

Let us then my dear ones, prepare ourselves and cleanse our hearts so that the great joy and peace of the Sun of

Righteousness, of the born Saviour Jesus Christ may enter in them. Amen.

Have a blessed and peaceful Christmas.”

After the Divine Liturgy there was a meal for the Episcopal entourage and many others, offered by the Community.

From Secretariat-General