

THE FIRST STASIS OF THE SALUTATIONS OF THEOTOKOS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Friday evening, March 2/15, 2019, the Service of the Akathist and the First Stasis of the Salutations were held at the Catholicon of the All-holy Church of the Resurrection.

This contrite service of the Canon and the Salutations in the Small Compline were officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, under the chanting of the Choir Leader of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Mr. Constantinos Spyropoulos and Archimandrite Demetrios. Present at the service were local faithful from Jerusalem and pilgrims, and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos. His Beatitude addressed this congregation as follows;

“An Angel, and the chiefest among them, was sent from Heaven to cry: Rejoice! To the Mother of God. Land beholding Thee, O Lord, taking bodily form, he stood in awe, and with his bodiless voice cried aloud to her such things as these: Rejoice, thou through whom joy shall shine forth. Rejoice, though through whom the curse shall be blotted out” , is exclaimed by the composer of this theological hymn which refers to the Annunciation of Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, as well as the unspeakable mystery of the incarnation by the Holy Spirit of God the Logos our Lord Jesus Christ.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and Pilgrims

The sacred service of the Akathist Hymn or, the Salutations of the Theotokos, is a characteristic feature of the Holy and Great Lent before the feast of Pascha, the feast of the

luminous resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And Christ's three-day burial and resurrection from the dead refers to the human nature that He undertook, as St. John the Evangelist says: "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).

The great and unspeakable mystery of the incarnation of God the Word is not some philosophical theory or making, but a specific historic and indisputable action, which took place in a specific time and place, through the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary as St. Luke the Evangelist says: "And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:28, 31). "Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:34-35).

Archangel Gabriel's words "rejoice thou who art full of grace" refers to two things; first, to the fact that though the voice of this bodiless host, the Angel, namely through the voice of the Holy Spirit, Virgin Mary became a vessel of the divine grace. And this divine grace delivered her from every human sin and this way God the Word, Christ, became incorporated in her in a hypostatic way. Secondly, this "rejoice" from the Angel refers to the fact that the joy of salvation illumined the world. And this is so because the curse was banished, the curse which had bound the first-created couple, Adam and Eve, with the bonds of corruption and death, as Joseph the hymn writer depicts in his writing by saying: "Rejoice, O vessel of rejoicing, through whom our first mother's curse utterly is dispelled" and "thou art Adam's recovery, rejoice, Virgin Bride of God, though art the death-knell of Hades".

St. John of Damascus calls all nations and all peoples to honour the nativity of the Theotokos Mary because “she gave birth to a treasure of goods that cannot be taken away from the world. Through her the Creator transformed all nature towards its best form amidst the human race. And if man is a combination of mind and matter, and stands between all visible and invisible creation, by His incarnation and union with the human nature, the Creator Word of God became united with the whole creation”.

In other words, thanks to the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, the Creator, namely, God the Father transformed all creation to its best form, through the human nature of Christ, which He received through the pure blood of the Theotokos. If therefore, being between the mind and matter, man is the linking bond between all visible and invisible creation, then the Word of God, has become united with all creation since He undertook the human nature.

Behold therefore, why the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is recognized as the most glorious creation of God both in earth and in heaven. And behold why the Most Blessed Theotokos is considered to be the “more honourable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim”.

This hymn of doxology and intercession has been appointed by the Church Fathers to be chanted during the full duration of the Holy and Great Lent because the Theotokos is the par excellence intercessor towards God.

In other words, the Theotokos is the one who intercedes for all people who call upon her in faith. And this is owed to the fact that the Theotokos became a participant and communicant of the divine glory of her Son and God, our Lord Jesus Christ, through the unidentifiable mystery of the divine providence, namely the incarnation of God the Word. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding

out!" St. Paul says (Romans, 11:33).

God's love, His infinite mercy and philanthropy call us through St. Paul's preaching, and especially during the period of Great Lent, "to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2: 2-3). And the hidden treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of our God and Saviour are no others than the uncreated light of God's truth, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3) according to St. Paul.

Let us also entreat our God and Saviour Jesus Christ my dear brothers and sisters, so that by the intercessions of our Lady, the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary we may be deemed worthy to go through the period of the Great Lent in repentance and conclude with the luminous resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ , hearkening to the words of the hymn writer of the Church; " The fast has come, mother of chastity, accuser of sins, advocate of repentance, life of the angels and salvation of men. Let us cry out ye faithful: O God have mercy upon us". Amen.

From Secretariat-General