

THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On the 4th Sunday of Great Lent, March 25/April 7, 2019, according to the mobile cycle of Triodion feasts, the Patriarchate celebrated the Feast of the Annunciation according to the stable cycle of the feasts in the book of Minaion.

This feast was celebrated at the place where the Annunciation took place, at the town of Nazareth in Galilee. In this town, according to St. Luke the Evangelist (Luke 1:26-37) the Archangel Gabriel visited Virgin Mary and addressed her with the words "Rejoice thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee" and announced that "the Holy Spirit will come down on her and the power of God will overshadow her, and she will bear in flesh the Son of God". The Angel's words became a fact and Mary then said "behold the maiden of the Lord let it be done unto me according to thy word". Then as it is written in the Akathist, "along with the bodiless voice the Lord took a bodily form" and "the Word became flesh" and Mary became a chosen vessel of God and Theotokos [Mother of God].

This supernatural event of God's Providence for the salvation of humankind was celebrated at the place it actually happened, in Nazareth, on the aforementioned day, with the Festal Divine Liturgy that was celebrated at the historic Church of the Annunciation of the Patriarchate.

The Divine Liturgy was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Most Reverend Archbishop Methodios of Tabor, and Hagiotaphite Hieromonks,

with first in rank Archimandrite Ieronymos, and many Arab-speaking Priests from the Galilee district and visiting Priests from other Churches, Archdeacon Mark and other deacons. The chanting was delivered by the choir of the parish of the shrine of Nazareth. The service was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos and the full congregation of the local faithful of Nazareth and its outskirts and pilgrims from various Orthodox countries.

His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon to this congregation;

"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 when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:26-38).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims

Today the Holy Church of Christ has gathered us all in this sacred place of the Biblical town of Nazareth in order to celebrate in thanksgiving and doxology the feast of the outmost philanthropy of God, that of the Annunciation of our Most Blessed Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary.

This event was foretold by Propher Isaiah; "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). And the psalmist proclaims for this reason: "O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; shew forth his

salvation from day to day" (Psalm 96:1-2).

The question and surprise of Virgin Mary towards Archangel Gabriel: "How shall this be for I know no man?" (Luke 1:34) is a question of every human logic mind, because the beyond word and thought mystery of God's Will is made understood only through faith to the unspeakable plan of what St. Paul says: "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:9-10).

In other words, the salvific plan of God for humankind was fulfilled by the full of grace and blessed Virgin Mary; a humankind which had been under the influence of the bondage of the corruption of death, of sin. St. Paul says; "but when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

Interpreting these words, Ecumenios says; "He didn't say through a woman...but from a woman, showing that he had received the Lord in her and that He was a fruit of her womb". And Eusevios of Emesa says: "Because sin was created by a woman, the Saviour came from a woman". "Rejoice, thou through whom joy shall shine forth; rejoice, thou through whom the curse shall be blotted out" the writer of the hymn of the Annunciation proclaims. "Rejoice, O most blessed Maiden, who hast alone kept the seal of purity as in thy womb thou receives the Word and Lord, Who is ere eternity, that He as God might save the race of man from error and deception".

The salutation, "rejoice though who art full of glory" of the Archangel Gabriel to Virgin Mary refers to two things; firstly, to the fact that through the bodiless voice of the

Angel, namely through the coming of the Holy Spirit and the overshadowing of the power of the Most High on her, Virgin Mary became a vessel of the Divine Grace. And the Divine Grace delivered her from every sin and in this manner the hypostatic God the Word, Christ, was incorporated in her and “the mortal nature withheld union with the Godhead”.

Secondly, the “rejoice” of the Angel refers to the fact that the joy of salvation shone upon the world. And this is so because the curse was banished, the curse which kept the forefather Adam and the foremother Eve bound with the bondage of corruption and sin, as Joseph the hymn writer says; “rejoice [Theotokos] O vessel of rejoicing, through whom our first mother’s curse utterly is dispelled” and “thou art Adam’s recovery, rejoice, O All-blameless one, thou art the death-knell of Hades”.

Today my dear brothers, the Holy Church of Christ evangelizes the recreation of the whole world through Theotokos Mary, namely the revelation of the true light in one hypostasis, as the Bible says: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isaiah 9:2/Matt. 4:16). This event is witnessed by the Holy Apostles and Evangelists not only with philosophical terms and metaphysic confirmations but with the uncreated enlightenment of the power of the Holy Spirit. “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16) St. Peter says. While St. John the Evangelist says: “ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:1,3).

Behold why the hymn writer says; “Let creation be glad, let

nature dance for joy; today is revealed the mystery that is from eternity, and the Son of God becometh Son of man. God becometh man that He might make Adam God".

This revealed mystery to Theotokos Mary, which is from eternity, is being witnessed and ministered liturgically and in sacrifice to the point of blood by the "dwelling place of God", the Mother of Churches Jerusalem, the first created monastic order of the Studious Ones, namely the Order of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood.

Our contemporary challenges of lawlessness and apostasy in the world confirm the preaching of St. Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit; "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaleth in pain together until now" (Romans 8:21-22).

The deliverance from the bondage of corruption to the freedom of the glory of our God and Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is being announced to us also today, by the Annunciation of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. Therefore, let us say along with the Archangel Gabriel to Virgin-Mary: "Rejoice O thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee" (Luke 1:28), intercede your Son and God for those who fervently honour thee, grant our souls and our region peace and the great mercy. Amen. Have many happy returns and a blessed Pascha."

After the dismissal of the Divine Liturgy a festal meal was offered to the Patriarchal entourage and many others by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, where His Beatitude addressed all present as follows;

"Evangelize earth a great joy, heavens praise the glory of God"

Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth,

Reverend Fathers and Brothers,

Distinguished Members of the Community of Nazareth,

Dear Guests,

Today the Holy Church of our Fathers celebrates in great festivity the Holy Feast of the Annunciation of Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary; the people of Nazareth also co-celebrate with us.

This festal event holds a special significance for both the Christian community and the other citizens of Nazareth.

And we say this, because the feast of the Annunciation of Theotokos Mary is the annunciation of the philanthropy and the love of God towards all men, His supreme creation.

“God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16). “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

This gospel of God’s love is being ministered throughout the centuries by the venerable Patriarchate of Jerusalem through its monastic order of the Hagiophite Brotherhood, which has never ceased to care for the safeguarding of the All-holy Shrines and for the Christian presence and witness in the Holy Land. The history of the preservation of the All-holy Shrines as well as the history of the preservation and pastoring of our Christian flock and of its identity is the most tangible and true witness of the sacred mission of the Roman Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Today we find ourselves in the pleasant position to make known to you that our common efforts and the close co-operation with the members of your community in Nazareth has given forth its

fruits. And these fruits are the completion of the project of the Patriarchal School in the area of Kaser Al-Mutran. The project of the School is on its final stage.

We take the opportunity in the joy of this blessed feast to thank those who honoured with their presence the feast of the Annunciation of Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary in Nazareth.

We would also like to express our warmest thanks to our beloved brothers and sisters in the Metropolis of Nazareth and to our dear Priests as well as to all those who serve in the Holy Church of Christ. Many Happy Returns. Have a blessed period of the remaining Great Lent and a Happy Pascha! Amen."

The feast of the Annunciation was likewise celebrated at the Shrine of the Tomb of Theotokos in Gethsemane with the Divine Liturgy which was led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Theodosios of Sebastia, in the presence of the Hegoumen Most Reverend Archbishop Dorotheos of Avela, at the Holy Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Ramallah, led by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenopolis and at the Holy Church of the Annunciation in Rafidia with the Divine Liturgy that was led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Theophanes of Gerassa.

From Secretariat-General