

THE FEAST OF PROPHET ELIJAH AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Friday July 20/ August 2, 2019, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of Prophet Elijah the Thesbite in his historic Holy Monastery, which is located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, near the ancient Monastery of Theotokos' Seat.

On this feast the Church projects Prophet Elijah as a person full of strong and extreme zeal for the name of God, for which reason God graced him with the Divine power so that he was able to work many miracles and perform signs, as recorded in the books of Kings in the Old Testament and in St. James Epistle in the New Testament.

Worth mentioning among these is that he entreated God to stop the rain and there was no rain for three years, until he asked again and then it rained (James 3:17-18). With his prayer God sent down fire and burnt down the altars of the false gods on Carmel Mount near Haifa. He was ascended in heaven in a fiery chariot and threw his fleece down to his disciple Elisha who stood watching by the river Jordan and then Elisha stepped on the fleece and walked on the waters, crossing the river as if it were land.

For this great Prophet, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated in his Monastery, officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Most Reverend Archbishop Philoumenos of Pella, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, the Hagiotaphite Archimandrites Ignatios and Meletios, and Arab-speaking Priests. The chanting was delivered by Fr. George Banoura in Greek on the right, and St. James Cathedral choir under Mr. Rimon Kamar in Arabic on the left, as the service was attended by representatives of the Greek Consulate, and a congregation

of Greek, Russian pilgrims and local Arab-speaking faithful from Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude read the following Sermon;

“Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (James 5: 17-18), St. James the Brother of God says in his epistle.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and Pilgrims

The Divine Grace has gathered us all in this biblical place, which is related to Prophet Elijah, in order to honour his annual commemoration.

Prophet Elijah is distinguished not only for his prophetic office, but also for his Godly zeal, the harsh ascetic life in the desert and the apostolic ministry he developed, fighting the idolatry to which the people of the moral monotheism, namely of the Law of Moses were drawn. Elijah's weapon in this mission was the power of prayer, as the Holy Apostle James mentions in his epistle.

The unceasing prayer of the heart is the special characteristic by which the prophets of the Old Testament achieved the experience of deification, namely the vision of God's glory, just as it happened with the Disciples and the Prophets who were present on Mount Tabor on the day of the Transfiguration of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And the experience of the deification, or the vision of God's glory was being confirmed by both the vision of the uncreated divine light and the hearing of the voice of God the Word, as

St. Simeon the New Theologian says; "the prophets' vision was the hearing and the hearing of the Lord's word by the prophets was a vision." And according to King-Prophet David the Prophets were calling upon the Lord and "He answered them. He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar: they kept his testimonies, and the ordinance that he gave them. Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions" (Psalm 99:6-8).

Moreover, the true Prophet was distinguished from the false one because the former had had the experience of the Living God, the God of the revelation, and not the god of the philosophical wisdom, of the human invention and thinking. The true Prophet is the righteous man of God, for whom the Psalmist says: "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart" (Psalm 97:11). Interpreting this psalm, St. Cyril of Alexandria says: "the noetic and divine light rises in the mind and heart of everyone who is benign and righteous".

This noetic divine light of the Trinitarian God which rose upon Elijah's mind and heart, made him a vessel of the Lord's Will and a preacher of the truth of the religion of the moral monotheism, which monotheism was being threatened by the idolatry, namely the comparative religion of magic, superstition and pan-theism in his era.

In other words, Elijah's prophetic mission was the fight against the false prophets on the one hand, and the proclaiming of the true and Living God on the other. Elijah accomplished this, not only through his prophetic word, but also through the wondrous signs he performed as proof of these words, among which was the coming down of fire and the burning of the evening sacrifice of a cow, when he prayed on Carmel Mount, as we read in the Bible; "And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and

of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God" (3 Kings 18:35-39).

Speaking on the gift of the prophets, St. Gregory Palamas says: "the prophets know God's will, which has always existed in Him before it was ever accomplished". In other words, the Prophets of the Old Testament, according to St. Gregory Palamas' remarks, used to behold God the Word before He became Incarnate and simultaneously foresaw and foretold Christ's incarnation and could see the Incarnate Divine Word being born by the Virgin at the appointed time. Prophet Elijah also had this experience, who was present on Mount Tabor on the day of Jesus' Transfiguration according to the witness of the Evangelists and Disciples Matthew (17:1-9) and Mark (9:2-9) and as the hymn writer very clearly says; "As a seer of God, the Thesbite with Moses beholdeth upon Tabor that which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, and which the heart of the earthborn men hath not considered, even the Almighty Lord incarnate".

"A true seer of God", namely a communicant of God's glory, our Prophet Elijah has joined the synaxis of the chosen and beloved children of God, who have become citizens of the heavenly Church as St. Paul says: "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12-22-23).

This means that Elijah the Thesbite has a great boldness towards God, and God listens to him. Behold what his hymn writer says; "We know thee to be a vessel containing the Divine Spirit, and an Angel upon the earth, breathing the fire of divine zeal, turning away impiety and reproofing kings, anointing Prophets, and cutting down with the sword the priest of shame, O Elijah". For this reason our Holy Church especially honours and venerates his sacred commemoration.

As far as we are concerned, my dear brothers and sisters, let us try to imitate his Godly zeal, namely his great and steadfast faith, and ask him to deliver us through his prayers from every sorrow, every illness of the body and soul and every treachery of the evil one. Amen."

Finally, the Hegoumen Archimandrite Paissios offered a reception and a meal.

From Secretariat-General