

THE FEAST OF PROPHET ELIJAH IN MA'ALULE OF NAZARETH

On Saturday, July 21/ August 3, 2019, the commemoration of the Holy Prophet Elijah the Thesbite was celebrated at his Holy Church in Ma'alule town, suburb of Nazareth.

This Church belonged to the Arab-speaking community of the Patriarchate, who deserted it along with the whole Ma'alule town when the State of Israel was established in 1948. The church remained abandoned until the '90s. Then the Patriarchate asked for its return from the Israeli army which used it until that time, the Church was returned to the Patriarchate and it was restored and renovated by the funding of the Hegoumen of the H. Monastery of the Transfiguration of Mount Tabor Archimandrite Hilarion and of the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth. Ever since the Church has been used for various services of worship and for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on the Feasts of Prophet Elijah and of the Ascension, to which it is dedicated.

For the Feast of Prophet Elijah, one day after the actual feast day, the Divine Liturgy was led 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, and the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, Archimandrite Hilarion, Archdeacon Mark and Deacon Eulogios, under the chanting of the Arab-speaking faithful Christians of Nazareth district.

His Beatitude delivered the following sermon to this congregation;

“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.”

After the Divine Liturgy there was a reception in the courtyard in the shade of the pine trees and at noon the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth offered a meal.

From Secretariat-General