

# THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Monday, August 6/19, 2019, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## 1. On Mount Tabor

On this feast, according to the Gospel narratives, the Church commemorates the event that our Lord went up on Mount Tabor before His Passion; the mount is in Galilee and there, before the eyes of His disciples Peter, James and John, He was transfigured, His appearance changed, His human nature was concealed and His Divine nature was revealed in glory. A bright cloud surrounded Him and Moses and Elisha appeared next to Him, conversing with Him about His Passion which was going to happen in Jerusalem, while the Father's voice was heard from heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased; hear ye him". Petrified the disciples fell on the ground and Peter asked the Lord to make three tents so that they would stay on the mount. After this vision which was according to the standard of the Resurrection, the Lord commanded the disciples not to tell anyone before His Resurrection.

This event was primarily celebrated at the place where it happened, on Mount Tabor, with an all-night Vigil which was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with co-celebrants the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks and visiting clergy from various Orthodox countries. The chanting was delivered by Priest George on the right and by the choir of the Patriarchal representative in Acre Archimandrite

Philotheos on the left in Arabic, at the presence of a large crowd of faithful who prayed in contrition at the outdoor night atmosphere.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude read the following sermon;

“Christ took Peter, James, and John, into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. And there appeared Moses and Elias talking with Him. And a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud, which said: This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.” The hymn writer of the Church says.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims,

The grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us all in this holy Mount Tabor, where the Lord's feet have stood, in order to celebrate the annual commemoration of the Holy Transfiguration of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The event of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ holds a special place in the great mystery of the Divine Providence, namely of the infinite philanthropy of God the Father, for the salvation of mankind. And this is so, because on the one hand, on Mount Tabor Christ revealed His Glory to His disciples before His Passion on the Cross; and on the other, He revealed it to those who follow and believe in Him, in the Kingdom of Heaven, and in addition, that Jesus Christ Himself, is the Son of God as the hymn writer of the Church delivers in precision and clarity; “Before Thy venerable Cross and willing Passion, taking the divine disciples whom Thou hadst preferred, O Master, Thou wentest up with them into Mount Tabor, wising to show them Thy glory openly. And as they all looked on Thee transfigured wondrously an shining forth brighter than the sun, they cast themselves down being amazed at thy might and

Sovereignty; and they cried out: Thou art the Timeless Light and the Father's Effulgence, though Thou, O Christ, of Thine own will, without change, art made manifest now in the flesh".

The glory Christ showed and revealed His disciples is no other than the timeless light and brightness of God the Father, namely His Divinity united in one hypostasis with His human nature. "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12) says the Lord. And St. Paul preaches; "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past...Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Hebrews 1:1-3). Moreover, this is being witnessed by the Evangelists who say: "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5).

And the "timeless light" the one that is beyond time and pre-eternal, or else, the uncreated light, is according to St. Paul "the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. 6:15-16). This means that God alone has in Himself immortal and uninterrupted, eternal life, and dwells in a light that no man can ever approach, a light that no man has ever or ever will see. "For there shall no man see me, and live" the Lord says (Exodus 33:20). And the hymn writer of the Church adds; "O Changeless Light of the Light of Thine unbegotten Begetter, today O Word, have we now seen in Thy Light's manifestation the Father and Holy Spirit as Light on Tabor, guiding with Light all creation."

God the Word, Christ, as the hymn writer says, is a "changeless Light". This means that Christ did not receive something He had not already possessed, nor that He was transformed into something He was not, but that He revealed to

His disciples exactly what He was, as St. John Damascene says; "Not that He received something that He did not have, nor that He was transformed into something He was not, but He appeared to His disciples exactly as He was" (Vol. 9, p. 38).

In other words, Christ's disciples who were present on His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor were found worthy of the experience of the vision of the glory, namely of the divine Light of the Transfiguration. And according to St. Chrysostom, not only did the disciples behold the unapproachable and uncreated Light, but they also experienced its energy, as the hymn writer says; "Shining faintly upon Mount Tabor today, Christ laid bare before the disciples the image of His divine brightness as He promised." And again; "The changeless Nature, having been mingled with mortal nature, shone forth past all telling, and in part revealed unto the Apostles the Light of Its own Immaterial Godhead." This means that the disciples, while being men "as we are" (James 5:17) did not see the incomprehensible Nature of God, but His uncreated energy in the human nature of God the Word, Jesus Christ.

In this point, my dear brothers and sisters, we should stress that Christ's disciples saw His Transfiguration provided that they themselves had been transfigured spiritually, which means that they had accomplished their "catharsis" (cleansing) from sin, and therefore were able to accept the Light, or better say, the energy of the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit, according to Jesus' words; "ye are clean" (John 13:10).

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, said on the sermon on the mount: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Interpreting these words, St. Cyril of Alexandria says that pure are those " who having renounced every kind of love of the flesh, have been united with God in the Spirit of the Son, and have differentiated themselves from the worldly pleasures, and while having denied their own lives, they have commended themselves only to the will of the Spirit, leading a by all means pure life in Christ."

This means my dear ones, that the divine and uncreated light which shone upon mount Tabor is Christ, while the cloud that overshadowed the disciples is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Not everybody became communicants and participants of this vision of the uncreated light and the overshadowing cloud from which "a voice was heard", but only the disciples and the prophets that were present.

Let us who co-celebrate this uninterpreted mystery of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ, pray that the light of Christ's Transfiguration may shine in our minds as St. Paul also says; " But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). Amen! Many happy returns!"

Immediately afterward the faithful received the Holy Communion.

Before dismissal His Beatitude read the prayer for the blessing of the grapes.

At the end of the Vigil the Hegoumen and renovator of the Holy Monastery Archimandrite Ilarion offered a reception.

On the morning of the feast day, at the ample light of Tabor, the Divine Liturgy inside the Church was led by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, with co-celebrants Hieromonks and Priests from the Galilee district, in the presence of a large congregation, pilgrims from Greece, Russia, Romania and local Palestinians from the borders of Galilee, and Acre-Ptolemais.

## 2. At Gethsemane

The commemoration of the Holy Transfiguration was celebrated at the sacred shrine of Gethsemane Theotokos' Tomb, according to the Status Quo. The Divine Liturgy was led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Demetrios of Lydda, with co-celebrants

Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, the ministering Priests of the Shrine of Gethsemane Archimandrites Meletios and Dionysios, while the chanting was delivered by Hieromonk Euphrosynos at the presence of a noble congregation.

After the Divine Liturgy, the Hegoumen of Gethsemane Archbishop Dorotheos of Avela offered a reception at the hegoumeneion.

### 3. In Ramallah

The Transfiguration of the Lord was also celebrated at the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration that belongs to the Patriarchate in Ramallah, led by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, the presence of a large congregation of the Orthodox faithful of the city in contrition and prayer.

After the Divine Liturgy, the Hegoumen of the Monastery Archimandrite Galaktion offered the Episcopal entourage a fasting festal meal of fish.

**From Secretariat-General**