

THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR MOST BLESSED LADY THEOTOKOS

On Tuesday, March 25/ April 7, 2020, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of the Annunciation of our Most Blessed Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary.

On this Feast the Church commemorates the event when Archangel Gabriel was sent by God the Father to announce to the Virgin Mary of Nazareth the good news, that she was to conceive and give birth to the Only Begotten Son of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit. When Mary replied, "behold the servant of God, let it be done unto me according to thy word", instantly "the Son of God, become Son of the Virgin" for the salvation of men.

This Feast was celebrated by the Patriarchate as follows;

1. At the Monastic Church of Saints Constantine and Helen, with the lead in prayer of H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.
2. In Nazareth, the town of the Annunciation, led by His Eminence Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth. H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos sent the following Sermon to the celebrating flock;

"Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad; for the co-eternal and co-beginningless Son of the Father, Who is of one throne with Him, taking pity and filled with man-befriending mercy, condescended unto the emptying of Himself according to the good pleasure and Will of the Father, and He dwelt in the Virgin's womb, which was purified before by the Spirit. O wonder! God is among men, the Uncontainable is the

womb, the Timeless One is in time; and wondrous it is that the conception is without seed, and the emptying ineffable, and the mystery so great! For God emptieth Himself, and becometh flesh, and is fashioned, the Angel having declared the conception unto the pure Virgin: Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with Thee, even He that hath great mercy” St. John Damascene proclaims. (Minaion March 25, sticheron at the end of Matins).

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Noble Christians and pilgrims.

Today the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church rejoices and is glad with the holy feast of the universal event that took place in Nazareth, namely of the Annunciation of our Lady Theotokos, the Most Blessed and Ever-Virgin Mary, by the Archangel Gabriel who greeted her with the words; “Rejoice Thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1:28).

The hymn writer says; “Today is revealed the mystery that is from eternity, and the Son of God becometh the Son of man; that in partaking of what is worse, He may impart unto me of what is better. In ancient times Adam was cheated of his hopes, and he became not God as he desired. God becometh man, that He might make Adam God”. (Matins praises, Glory both now).

In other words, the eternal mystery which was revealed to us men, is no other than the mystery of the divine Providence, which is the incarnation of God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, through the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Mary. This mystery was foretold by the prophets in the Old Testament, especially by Prophet Isaiah by saying; “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). Regarding this, St. John Damascene says in his

praise to the Annunciation; "Rejoice, thou who have been foretold by the prophets of old. Rejoice the conclusion of the Old Testament!" And Prophet-King David chants; "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 salvation of the Lord refers to the incarnate God the Word, Christ the King of Heaven, as St. John Damascene denotes with the deepest theological meaning of the feast of the Annunciation with his hymn; "The King of Heaven, because of His love for mankind, appeared on earth and dwelt with men. He took flesh from the pure Virgin and after assuming it, He came forth from her. The Son is one, two natures yet one person. Proclaiming Him as perfect God and perfect man, we confess Christ our God! Entreat Him unwedded Mother to have mercy on our souls" (Octoechos, Theotokion tone 8).

On the one hand, it is undeniable that the fall of man which happened by his own free will through the working of the devil, introduced the world into death and corruption, namely into sin. On the other hand, the ineffable love and philanthropy of God the Father, did not forsake His creature, and therefore sent the pure and Virgin Mary and made her womb a paradise with the divine light, where Christ our Saviour dwelt. Christ is the new Adam who was born through the pure flesh of the Virgin without corruption, namely without sin, in contrast to the old Adam, who was made of earth, as the psalmist says; "For he [God] knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14).

Through the Full of Grace Virgin Mary, my dear ones, we have found the way, namely the gate of light, through the eyes of our hearts which have been opened. Through the Annunciation of Theotokos, our unwise and darkened mind has been lit up with the wondrous light of the Son of God who becomes Son of the Virgin.

Behold therefore why St. John Damascene addresses the Mother of God praising her; Rejoice thou through whom the One who is full of mercy for man was made manifest to us, becoming a man. Rejoice, thou alone blessed among women, who has corrected the fault of our foremother Eve.

The correction of Eve's fault does not have a mere theoretical and moral-logical character, but an essential meaning, referring to the very meaning of the mystery of the divine Providence, namely of the salvation of man through Christ. "I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32) says the Lord. "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" prophet Joel says (Joel 2:13).

The coming of the Holy Spirit and the overshadowing of the power of the Most High (Luke 1:35), have made the Full of Grace Virgin Mary of Nazareth the New Eve, "through whom we were redeemed from the curse" according to St. John Damascene. In other words, the New Eve, the Most Blessed Theotokos Mary, announced to the world of the curse and of sin the joy of repentance and of salvation; and this is so, because through Virgin Mary, the Lord God united Himself with the human nature, as St. Theodore of Studion says: "through thee incorrupt, unwedded Virgin Mother, God assumed my nature, He who created the time and united Himself with the human nature".

Through today's feast of the Annunciation, our Holy Church calls every single man to his own annunciation, namely to the fact that "God gave repentance to life" according to Apostle Peter (Acts 11:18), and "life" is our Lord Jesus Christ who became incarnate through the full of Grace Virgin Mary.

Let us entreat my brothers, the Theotokos Mother of God and our Mother, along with St. John Damascene and say; Prolong your mercy All-good Lady to those who know you and look down upon your servants and guide us all to the path of peace [and

repentance] and deliver us and the whole world from the corona virus pandemic, as our eyes are turned to you in hope, and we have you to intercede to your Son and our God, to Whom belongs the glory and the power, along with the Father without beginning, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen. Many happy returns, blessed Great Lent and Happy Easter.”

3. At the Holy Church of Theotokos’ Tomb in Gethsemane, led by His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba with the participation in prayer of the Hegoumen Most Reverend Archbishop Dorotheos of Avela.

4. At the Holy Church of Rafidia Community, by Jacob’s well, led by Archimandrite Leontios.

From Secretariat-General