

THE FEAST OF THE FOREFATHERS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Sunday, 13/26 December 2021, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of the Forefathers at their Holy Church in Beit Sahour, where the shepherds were keeping the night watch and they received the calling from heaven to go to Bethlehem and see the new-born infant, the Redeemer of the world.

On this feast, the Church commemorates the before and after the Law Righteous Forefathers of the Nativity in the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

In honour of the Forefathers, the Divine Liturgy in this Church was officiated by the Patriarchal Representative in Bethlehem, His Eminence Metropolitan Benedict of Diocaesarea with the co-celebration of the Hegoumen of the Monastery of the Shepherds Archimandrite Ignatios, the ministering Priests of this community, Fr Issa Mousleh, Fr Sabba Her, Fr Ioannis Rismawi and Fr George Banoura and Hierodeacon Athanasios. The chanting was delivered by the Beit Sahour community Byzantine choir as the service was attended by a large congregation and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras and Mr Athanasios Abou Aeta.

Before the Holy Communion, the following Sermon of His Holy Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem was read on His behalf:

“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth...put off the old man and his bad habits...and put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in

all" (Col. 3:4-11).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians

"Light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79), the Sun of Righteousness our Lord Jesus Christ has risen and has gathered us in our Church to participate in His Eucharistic and Despotic supper, the supper of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our Holy Church prepares us to celebrate the great and universal event of the Incarnation of God the Word through the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Mary, namely the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), the Evangelist John says.

This Sunday is dedicated to our Forefathers, who are commemorated in the Old Testament in the Holy Bible. These Forefathers of ours are Christ's forefathers on His human side. And this, because the Son and Word of God, namely Christ, is without genealogy according to His divine nature. Saint Gregory Palamas says that "Christ's genealogy cannot be narrated according to His divinity; He has a genealogy though according to His human nature, as He became a descendant of men and Son of man in order to save the man".

God without beginning, the invisible, incomprehensible, indescribable and unchangeable cannot have a genealogy: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1), meaning Christ. Regarding these words of Saint John, the Evangelist, Saint Gregory Palamas says: "How would have a genealogy the One who was in the beginning, and was with God, and was God and God's Word and Son, and He did not have a Father before Him and His Name is by the Father, a name above all names (Phil. 2:9), and above

every word?"

Referring to "the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25), which is the Nativity of Christ, Saint Paul says that the preaching, the gospel of the people's salvation, was long ago promised by God to Jesus' ancestors, who were the righteous and especially the prophets, who wrote all the prophecies in the God-inspired Scriptures. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:1-3).

Christ, my dear brethren, took upon himself all our human nature, with flesh, bones, blood and soul, but without sin, and saved it, namely He glorified it, through the abolishment of the death of corruption and sin. He saved our human nature and glorified, or better say, deified it through His resurrection.

The salvation of man and his co-resurrection in Christ are achieved only through the Church, which is the body of Christ. And Christ is the head of the Church and He is the redeemer of the body (Eph. 5:23), Saint Paul preaches.

Behold, therefore, why our Host, namely the Lord has made a great supper and invited many, and sent His servant at the appointed time to call the guests, saying, Come, for I have prepared all things (ref. Luke 14:16-17). Interpreting this word of the Gospel, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "The Creator of all and Father of Glory set up a great supper, which means, He worked a universal feast."

In other words, my dear ones, Christ calls every man "living on earth, in the universe", to become a partaker of His body, the Church, and consequently a partaker of the Kingdom of God "Come; for all things are now ready" (Luke, 14:17), the Lord

says.

To our question, "what were the things that the Host had prepared?" Saint Cyril replies they are the remission of sins, the adoption, the Kingdom of Heaven and the communion with the Holy Spirit.

"God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4), the wise Paul says. The knowledge of this truth did God reveal in the cave of Bethlehem, through the Nativity of His Only-begotten Son, Christ, in order to save us from the bondage of sin and of the law. "But when the fulness 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" (Gal. 4:4-5).

Come, therefore, my brethren, let us prepare ourselves so that we may accommodate in the cave of our souls the Light of knowledge, the Sun of righteousness, our God and Saviour Christ. And let us say along with the hymnographer of the Church: "He that is full is emptied out in the flesh for our sakes, and a beginning doth He receive Who from before eternity is without beginning; He that is rich becometh poor, and though He is the Word of God, He reclineth in a manger of dumb beasts as an infant, working the refashioning of all men from the beginning of time" (Minaion, Sunday of the Forefathers, Ode 5 Theotokion). Amen. Many happy returns and blessed Christmas!"

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a meal, hosted by the Community.

From Secretariat-General