

THE FEASTS OF THE FOREFATHERS AND OF SAINT SPYRIDON AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Sunday, December 12/25, 2022, the Patriarchate celebrated in accordance with its Typikon the feasts of the Holy Forefathers and of our Holy Father Spyridon the Miracle Worker, Bishop of Trimythus.

During the feast of the Holy Forefathers, celebrated on the 1st Sunday after December 11, the Church commemorates and honours the pre-Law and post-Law Forefathers of Christ in the flesh, who were pleasing to God, that is, Adam the Forefather, Enoch and Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve Patriarchs, Moses, David and Daniel and the three Children, Zechariah and John the Forerunner and a multitude of others.

On this occasion, a Divine Liturgy was held in the Church of the Holy Forefathers in the Shepherds' Village / Beit Sahour, presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the co-celebration of their Eminences, the Metropolitan Isychios of Capitolas, the Archbishops; Aristarchos of Constantina, and Methodios of Tabor, the Metropolitan Joachim of Hellenopolis, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, and the Hegoumen of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour Archimandrite Ignatios, the Priests of this community, Fr. Issa, Fr. Savvas, Fr. Ioannis and Fr. Georgios. The chanting was delivered by the Community Byzantine choir, as the service was attended by the full congregation of this parish, the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras and the Mayor of the city Mr Haik.

His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon to this congregation:

“The genealogy of Christ according to the divinity cannot be phrased, however, His lineage according to man is possible, as He became a descendant of man, He who is also the son of man in order to save man”, Saint Gregory Palamas preaches.

Beloved brethren in Christ,

Dear Christians,

The Grace of the Holy Spirit brought us all together today in this holy place of the Village of the Shepherds, where the angel of the Lord gave the good news to us the people of great joy and where there was a multitude of heavenly hosts with the angel praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men” (cf. Luke 2:10-14), so that we may celebrate in Eucharist the memory of the Forefathers in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ before the Law of Moses and according to the law; especially of the Patriarch Abraham, in whom first the promise was given, when God said to him “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

Indeed, as the Holy Bible says, Abraham was given the promise, that is, the promise that, because he obeyed God’s command, through Christ, Who would be one of his descendants, all the peoples of the earth will be blessed. “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:18).

And according to the psalmist: “His name shall endure forever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed” (Psalm 72:17). The land of the promise is none other than the land of blessed Palestine and the city of Bethlehem, where, according to the true testimony of the Evangelist Luke, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11).

The holy Church of Christ honours the memory of the holy

Forefathers, in order to demonstrate through the mouth of the Apostle Peter that: "we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16). The Forefathers in general and the Prophets, in particular, refer to this very majesty of the power and presence in human history of the Son and Word of God according to the Father, and of the Son of man according to the Mother.

From the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Mary and from the Holy Spirit, the incarnation of God the Word of our Lord Jesus Christ is a universal and irrefutable event, witnessed by sacred and secular history; at the same time, it is also a great mystery, impossible to be understood by the human mind, that is, by human logic: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. 3:16), Saint Paul preaches.

St. Gregory Palamas, referring to this great mystery of piety, of the so-called divine Providence, asks: "How to form a lineage for the One Who was from the beginning, and was God, and with God, and also was the Word of God, and the Son of God", (Cf. John 1:1) and He did not have a Father prior to Himself and has a name after the Father "the name above every name" (Phil. 2:9) and "every word?"

Indeed, my beloved brothers, Jesus Christ has a lineage according to His human nature, that is, the human form, which He assumed for the salvation of us humans. "Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13), the wise Paul says.

According to the interpreter Zigavinos, the Word God, becoming a man, did not avoid "our disgrace", that is, he did not despise certain human weaknesses which were not sinful. He

assumed the whole of human nature, except for its sin: "For Christ came for this reason also, not to flee (=avoid) our disgrace, but to receive it and relieve it through his own virtues. For He came as a doctor, not as a judge."

As for the divine nature, i.e. the divinity of Jesus Christ, it is unapproachable and indefinable. "No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18), the evangelist John teaches. "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. 6:16), Saint Paul preaches. "For there shall no man see me, and live" (Exodus 3:20), says the Lord. In the next life, however, those who have reached perfection shall see Him. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8), says the Lord again.

We are also called to this, my beloved brothers, to purify our hearts and properly approach and worship the born Christ, Who "sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready" (Luke 14:17), as we listened to today's Gospel reading.

Interpreting the above words, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "God and Father in Christ has prepared for those on earth, the goods given to the world, the forgiveness of sins, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the splendour of adoption, the kingdom of heaven." And Saint Paul says: "But when the fullness 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).

Let us also listen to the hymnographer: "Since Thou art the God of peace and the Father of mercies, Thou hast sent unto us Thine Angel of Great Counsel, granting us peace. Wherefore, having been guided to the light of divine knowledge, and watching by night, we glorify Thee, O Friend of man" (Katavasia of Christmas Ode 5).

This Angel of the Great Council of God the Father, the illumination, as it were, of the knowledge of God (Eph. 2:14), our Savior Jesus Christ, Whom the Forefathers prepared and the Prophets foretold, let us also hasten and come in repentance, so that by the intercessions of the Most Blessed Theotokos Mary and the prayers of our holy Father Spyridon the Wonderworker, who is celebrated today, we are blessed with our spiritual rebirth on the one hand and physical renewal on the other. Amen. Many Happy returns and blessed Christmas."

This was followed by the parade of the Boy Scouts and a reception at the Hegoumeneion, where H.H.B addressed those present through the ministering Priest of the Church, Dean Priest Issa Mousleh as follows:

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1), exclaims the psalmist.

Dear Mr Mayor,

President and honourable members of the Ecclesiastical Council,

Holy Fathers and Brothers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Beloved brethren in Christ,

Today's solemn commemoration of the holy Forefathers is the harbinger of the great Feast of Christmas.

The truly joyous and universal event of Christmas was overshadowed for a moment by the tragic and sudden death of two innocent and angelic infants, brothers of your biblical Village of the Shepherds. And the psalmist says "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth" (Psalm 103:15) and our Lord Jesus Christ says: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me,

though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

The Birth of Christ refers to the rebirth of us believers and His resurrection, which is a sure guarantee that our hope will not be denied, but we will also be resurrected, as the Apostle Peter preaches saying: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3-4).

This means that the Church of Christ, and especially the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem constitutes the physical and spiritual Ark, which throughout the centuries guarded and continues to guard the Christian congregation of the Middle East in general and of the Holy Land in particular. The political and social crisis created by the occupation situation and its consequences, the uncertainty and the impasse is enough to demonstrate that the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the only institution that guarantees not only the religious but also the cultural identity of those in the wider area of living Christians.

What is noteworthy in this regard, is the fact that the present Patriarchate, whose ecclesiastical and spiritual jurisdiction includes the State of Palestine, the Gaza Strip, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Emirate of Qatar and the State of Israel, consists of one point of reference, that is, to belong, but also "the unity of the spirit of Christ's flock in the bond of peace; one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling", (Eph. 4, 3-1) according to Saint Paul.

We want to assure you, my beloved brothers, that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has never ceased to care as much for the protection of the Holy Places and the divine worship

performed on them, as for the various needs of its pious flock: "Ask, and it shall be given to you, seek, and you shall find, knock, and it shall be opened to you", Matthew 7:7), says the Lord. Nevertheless, "let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40), the Apostle Paul orders.

In conclusion, we wish a blessed Christmas to all of you, and to the parents, tested by great sorrow, of their beloved children who unfortunately and unjustly fell asleep in the Lord, we express our deepest condolences, assuring them that "whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). May the Lord God, give rest to the infant angels who have passed away in the Father's arms. Amen".

At noon, a meal was offered.

From Secretariat-General