

# THE FIRST STASIS OF THE SALUTATIONS TO THE MOTHER OF GOD AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On the evening of Friday, February 18/March 3, 2023, in the Catholicon of the Church of the Resurrection and in the context of the Service of the Small Compline and the Canon of the Akathist of the Theotokos, the First Stasis of the Salutations to the Theotokos was read, presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the participation in prayer of the Hagiotaphite Fathers, the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras and pious Christians, to whom after the end of the Service His Beatitude addressed the following sermon:

“An Angel and the chiefest among them was sent from Heaven to cry: Rejoice! To the Mother of God. And beholding Thee, O Lord, taking bodily form, he stood in awe, and with his bodiless voice he cried aloud to her such things as these: Rejoice, thou through whom joy shall shine forth. Rejoice, thou through whom the curse shall be blotted out”.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims

Our holy Church established through its God-bearing Fathers, that every week of the Fast of the Holy and Great Lent is fortified through the Akahist Hymn to the most blessed Theotokos and Mother of God, the Ever-Virgin Mary.

And this is because the fasting of Holy Lent is the gate through which we enter, or rather, we return to the joy of the Lord, that is, the joy that shines on the Easter day, that of the glorious Resurrection of our God and Saviour Christ.

The response of the Virgin Mary to the message of the angel Gabriel: "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS", (Luk. 1,30-31). "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luk. 1,38), broke down the barrier of the enmity that existed between God and humans, due to the disobedience of the first-born Adam and Eve. "For he [Christ] is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Eph. 2:14) Saint Paul preaches.

The one that heard the bodiless voice of the Angel, "Hail, gracious", the Theotokos Mary, became the cause of the disappearance of sorrow between the Creator and creation. That is why the hymnographer Saint Andrew of Crete also calls the Virgin Mary "divine intercessor": "Hail, chosen by God before births; rejoice, divine intercessor for people; rejoice, treasure of eternal life." This divine intermediary is none other than the "heavenly ladder, i.e. the Theotokos Mary, through whom God came down to earth, but also the bridge that took those from earth to heaven", i.e. the medium, through which Christ "reconciled in the body of his flesh through death" (Col. 1:21-22). This means that because of the Theotokos, the all-pervading philanthropy of God towards the human race was manifested. God the Word assumed our human flesh from it and deified it "in Himself". As Saint Gregory Palamas says, the Blessed Virgin Mary is "the intercessor between God and the whole human race, she made God the Son of Man, and the humans were made sons of God".

And Saint John of Damascus, praising the incarnation of the Word of God from the pure blood of the Virgin, says: "The whole world was amazed at thy divine glory for thou, O Virgin who hast not known wedlock, hast held in thy womb the God of all and hast given birth to an eternal Son, who rewards with salvation all who sing thy praises" (Katavasie of the Theotokos, Ode 5).

Indeed, my beloved brothers, the divine glory of the Blessed Theotokos Mary causes the admiration of the entire world. The indescribable greatness of the Virgin Mary consists in the fact that in her womb she conceived without seed the Lord, indeed God over all", as the wise Paul preaches saying: "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:6).

Our holy Church not only honours and blesses the Theotokos and Mother of God, but above all invokes her intercessions and prayers to her Son and God, our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is because the Mother of God is inextricably linked with the great mystery of the divine Providence of salvation, albeit of man. From the Theotokos came the Sun of Justice, the light of the world, Christ. And: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12) says the Lord.

This path of light, that is, the life and the walk of those who are of God", as Saint Chrysostom preaches, we too, my beloved brothers, are called to follow during the present stage of the holy and Great Lent of the current time, during which, as the hymnographer exclaims: "The glory of the Fast has shone upon us, putting to flight the darkness of the demons. The solemn time of abstinence has come, bringing with it healing for the passions of our soul" (Thursday in Cheese week, Aposticha of Matins, Troparion 1). As Basil the Great says, "because we did not fast, we fell from Paradise; let us therefore, fast so that we may return to it".

It becomes clear that abstinence and fasting is the safe way, the gateway to the gate of repentance. According to Saint John of the Ladder, repentance means an agreement with God for a new life. "Repentance is the covenant with God of a second life". For even Saint Theodore the Studite instructs us to accept "the gift of fasting as a God-given time of repentance".

Therefore, let us beseech the gracious Theotokos Mother of God, that by her fervent intercession, she directs our prayers to her Son and God, our Lord Jesus Christ. After the hymnographer, we say: "Let us praise the holy mount of God, Mary the immaculate, from whom the Sun of Justice rose to those in darkness, Christ the life of all."

Happy and blessed season of Holy Lent. Amen".

**From Secretariat-General**

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