

THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE THEOTOKOS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Friday, March 25/ April 7, 2023, the Patriarchate celebrated the Feast of the Annunciation of the Theotokos in Nazareth of Galilee.

On this feast, the Church, and especially the Church of Jerusalem, commemorates God's Providence for the salvation of us men. It commemorates that the Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to the pure Virgin Mary and announced that she was going to become the Mother of the incarnate Only-Begotten Son of God.

When the Virgin asked, "How will that be, for I know not a man", and then added, "Behold the maiden of the Lord, let it done unto me according to thy will", then the One without flesh became incarnate, the bodiless One received a body, the Son of God became also Son of Man, God-man, our Lord Jesus Christ.

This feast was celebrated at the Church of the Annunciation of the Theotokos in Nazareth, where the spring of water is, presided over by His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos. Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were their Eminences, the Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Archbishops, Damascene of Yaffo, Aristarchos of Constantina, Philoumenos of Pella, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, Priests from the neighbouring towns of Nazareth, Fr Dometianos from the Moscow Patriarchate, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Eulogios. The chanting was delivered by a Byzantine choir from Greece, under Mr Balogeorgos in Greek, and by the local choir in Arabic, as the service was attended by a large congregation of faithful Christians from Greece and

other countries.

Before the Holy Communion, His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day” (Psalm 96,1-2), the psalmist exclaims.

Beloved brothers in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims

The grace of the Holy Spirit, who overshadowed the Blessed Virgin Mary, brought us all together in this holy city of the biblical Nazareth, to celebrate the Annunciation of the salvation of us people, that is, the revelation of the eternal Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God from her pure flesh.

That is why the psalmist invites all the nations, all the inhabitants of the earth, to ceaselessly praise and glorify the name “the most excellent name which God the Father has given to His Son, and our Lord, Jesus Christ” (cf. Philippians 2:9). “All the earth sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day” (Psalm 96,1-2).

This “salvation” of God is nothing other than the liberation of people from sin and the corruption of death through Christ. This truth was announced by the loudest Isaiah saying: “ And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Is. 40,5).

Indeed, the glory of the Lord appeared, on the one hand, through the sent Archangel Gabriel saying to the Virgin Mary: “Rejoice, blessed one; the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women (Lk. 1,26-28); on the other hand, by the “New Child” called Emmanuel, which means God is with us (Matthew

1:23), born of the Holy Spirit the Virgin Mary in the cave of Bethlehem.

Interpreting the name "Emmanuel", the divinely inspired Fathers of the Church say; Saint Chrysostom: "The phrase "they shall call Him Emmanuel" shows nothing else but that they shall see God with men; For He has always been with men, but never clearly". According to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, "neither the God of humanity separated by nature, nor man stripped of divinity... God is with us, shows what has been received from us, for us, and preaches the incomprehensible of God the Word".

The Annunciation of the Virgin Mary in place and time is the cornerstone of sacred history in general and of the mystery of the divine Providence in Christ in particular, as Saint John of Damascus teaches, saying: "And being perfect God, He is also made perfect man and the new of all times is made newest, the only new under the sun, through which the infinite power of God appears. What is greater than the fact that God became a man?"

It is noteworthy that the Annunciation of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary was prefigured before the eyes of the God-seer Moses on Mount Sinai, as the Scripture says: "Moses entered the land of God Horeb. And an angel of the Lord came to him in fire, a flame from the bush, and he saw that the bush was burning with fire, and the bush was not consumed" (Exodus 3, 1-2). According to Saint Chrysostom, the visible angel of the Lord is no other than the angel of the great council, that is, the Son of God. According to the Holy Bible "the Lord God is a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24).

Saint John of Damascus, praising the indescribable greatness and glory of the Most-Blessed Virgin Mary, exclaims in a hymn: " 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".

Indeed, my beloved brothers, the whole universe, Angels and men, heavenly and animate and inanimate earthly beings, remain ecstatic at the fact that the Virgin Mary conceived in her womb without a man's seed, the God the Word and the Lord, He who God over all, as Saint Paul calls the Lord and God saying: "one God and father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all of us" (Eph. 4,5).

The response of the Virgin Mary: "I am the Lord's servant, May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1,38) to the angel Gabriel's "Rejoice, the Lord is with Thee" (Luke 1,28), made her, (Mary) according to Irenaios of Lougdunos, " the cause of salvation for herself and all the human race", that is, the cause of deification. This historic and irrefutable event is commemorated by the Holy Church of Christ in the Nicene Creed: "I believe... and in one Lord Jesus Christ...Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from the Heavens and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man".

The Blessed Virgin Mary is the one who confirms and testifies to the great mystery of piety, that is, of the divine Providence, as Saint Cyril of Alexandria declared: "If somebody does not confess that Emmanuel is truly God and for this reason, the Pure Virgin is the Mother of God, for she bore in the flesh the incarnate Word of God, let him be anathema. The Holy Ecumenical Synod of Chalcedon preached that Christ is the perfect God and perfect man in two natures, unmistakably and indivisible, and has thus ratified the contribution of the Virgin Mary to the mystery of the divine Providence, which undeniably for the psalmist is "the capital of our salvation".

We, my beloved brothers, humbly and gratefully agree after the hymnographer, saying: "Hail, Thou who alone brings the sun, Christ, the dwelling place of light." And this is because the

Most Holy and our glorious Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary preached to the world the light of truth, that is, Christ. To this very light we are called to come, all who want the righteousness of God, through repentance, as Saint Symeon the New Theologian says, "Everyone, of those who sit in darkness, are the sons of darkness and do not want to repent. For repentance is the door that leads out of darkness and into the light. Therefore, let us beseech the Theotokos and Mother of God, that by her intercessions we may be worthy to partake of the light of the glorious Resurrection of the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born from her and of the Holy Spirit and made incarnate, to give peace to the world and mercy to souls. Many happy returns and blessed Pascha".

After the Divine Liturgy, there was a magnificent litany around the town, with the presence of the Body of Scouts of Nazareth and many other towns of Galilee.

At noon, His Eminence Metropolitan Kyriakos and the Community Council hosted a meal.

This feast was also celebrated at the Shrine of Gethsemane, presided over by His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias.

It was likewise celebrated at the town Rafidia, at the Holy Church of the Annunciation, presided over by His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba.

From Secretariat-General