

THE FEAST OF THE APPARENT SIGN OF THE CROSS IN HEAVEN

On Saturday, May 7/20, 2023, the Feast of the Sign of the Cross Appearing in Heaven was celebrated by the Patriarchate.

On this feast, the Church, especially that of Jerusalem, remembers that in the year 351, on the days of the Priesthood of the Archbishop of Jerusalem Cyril and on the days of Holy Pentecost, around the third hour of the day, a cross of bright stars appeared, extending from the Horrendous Golgotha until the Mount of Olives, becoming visible to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Archbishop Cyril himself is the source of this fact in his letter to Constantius the king, son of Constantine the Great.

In honour of this event, a Divine Liturgy was performed at the Horrendous Golgotha, presided over by His Eminence, Archbishop Theophanes of Gerassa, concelebrated by the Priests of the Church of the Resurrection and Archimandrites Nektarios, Meletius and Claudius, Fr Hader, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Dositheos. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and the Patriarchal School of Zion students, as the service was attended by a congregation of local faithful and pilgrims.

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a litany starting from the Holy Deposition shrine and marched three times around the Holy Sepulchre, with the participation of the High Priests of the Brotherhood and the whole congregation.

After this, the Holy Gospel of the Resurrection was read in front of the Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre, and the letter of Archbishop Cyril, in Greek and Arabic, describing this event, which is quoted here as follows:

“Epistle of Saint Cyril Archbishop of Jerusalem to Constantius

The Most Pious King

*On the appearance of the sign of the Cross covered in light,
visible in Jerusalem*

To the Most Beloved by God and Most Noble Constantius Augustus

Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem,

Rejoice in the Lord

In the days of the Most Beloved by God Constantine of blessed memory, your Father, the redeeming wood of the Cross was found in Jerusalem, as divine grace allowed the hidden holy places to be discovered by someone who truly seeks reverence. But in your days, Most Pious King, who surpasses ancestral piety with greater reverence for God, miracles do not come from the earth, but from heaven, and the trophy with which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ won death, that is, the Holy Cross, became visible in Jerusalem, shining with radiating beams of light.

Because in these holy days of the Holy Pentecost, in the first nine days of May, at about the third hour of the day, an enormous Cross, formed of light, appeared in the heaven above Holy Golgotha and extended to the holy Mount of Olives; it was not seen by one or two only, but was made manifest with perfect clarity to the whole multitude of the city; not, as one might suppose, rushing swiftly past as it were a figment of the imagination, but it was seen openly above the earth for many hours in plain sight, overcoming the beams of the sun with its dazzling rays. Because the Cross would really be overshadowed by the sun if it were not for its brightness to be stronger for those who saw.

As a result, at the same time, the crowds of the city rushed to the holy Church in multitudes, overwhelmed by divine fear

but also with joy; young and old, men and women of all ages and even the secluded maidens; locals and foreigners, both Christians and the visiting pagans in the city. And unanimously all, as if it were one mouth, praised Je-sus Christ our Lord, the Only Begotten Son of God, the miracle worker, realising in practice and with personal experience that the Christian Doctrine is of the highest reverence, not because it is confirmed with words of wisdom, but in proof of Spirit and power; and it is not only confessed by men but it is also testified by God from the heavens.

In the year of our salvation three hundred and fifty-one."

The service concluded with the return of the Episcopal Entourage at the Patriarchate Hall, where they paid their respects to His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

From Secretariat-General