

THE FEAST OF SAINTS CONSTANTINE AND HELEN AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Friday, May 20 / June 2, 2023, the feast of the glorious and God-crowned great sovereigns and equal to the apostles Constantine and Helen was celebrated by the Patriarchate with a transference of the actual feast date.

On this feast, the Church honours Constantine the Great as an apostle, because with the decree of the Milanese of the year AD 312, he recognized Christianity as the freed religion of the Roman state, and allowed the construction of Churches for the worship of the true God through Christ, His incarnate Son. The Church also honours his mother Saint Helen on this day, because, following her son as king, she came to the Holy Land and erected the Church of the Resurrection on the Holy Sepulchre and the Martyrdom on the Horrendous Golgotha and the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem and other churches in different places of the incarnate presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This holiday was celebrated by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem through the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood in the central monastery's Holy Church of Saints Constantine and Helen, its patrons.

The feast was celebrated in the afternoon during Vespers, presided over by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the co-celebration of the Typikon keeper of the Church Archimandrite Alexios, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nektarios, the Exarch of Athens Archimandrite Raphael the priests of the Church Archimandrites; Stefanos and Amphilochios, Epiphanius, Claudius, Meletius and Dionysios, Arabic-speaking Priests,

Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Dositheos, under the chanting of Hierodeacon Simeon and the members of the Brotherhood.

After Vespers, the Brotherhood sat down in the courtyard of the Epitropikon and received the boiled wheat and the bread with wine.

On the morning of the feast, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem officiated the Liturgy in this Church, with the Typikon Keeper Archimandrite Alexios, the ministering Priests of the Church as above, as well as the Archimandrite Ieronymos, Priest George Baramki from Saint James Cathedral and Fr Youssef Hodali, ministering Priest in Beit Jala, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Dositheos, with the co-prayer of representatives of the Patriarchate of Moscow and Romania, two Bishops of the Patriarchate of Serbia, John and Damascene, in the presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem, Evangelos Vlioras, the Consul Mrs Christina Zacharioudaki, member of the Consulate and Mrs Zozonakis representative of the E.U. after her husband and many local believers and pilgrims from various countries.

After dismissal, His Beatitude the priests and clergy and the people, chanting in unison, went to the Patriarchate Hall, receiving, according to the custom, the bread of blessing from the hands of the baker Abbess Seraphima in the aisle towards the Throne Hall.

At the Hall, His Beatitude spoke through His following address:

“Raising up thy perception to Heaven’s heights, and considering the comeliness of the stars, through them, thou wast brought to know the divine Lord of all that is; for amidst them the weapon of Christ’s Cross shone brilliantly; the words: Conquer and rule in this sign, were inscribed thereon. Wherefore, having opened thy soul’s eyes, thou didst read there the words written for thy sake, and didst learn

what way thou shouldst take, O all-venerable Constantine. Intercede with Christ our God that forgiveness of all their transgressions be granted to them that with longing keep thy holy memory" (Matins sessional hymn after Ode 3), the hymnographer of the Church proclaims.

Your Excellency Consul General of Greece Mr Evangelos Vlioras,

Dear Holy Fathers and Brothers,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims,

Today the Holy Church of Christ of the East, especially the Church of Jerusalem, honours the Holy memory of the glorious Saints, God-crowned and equal to the apostles, the great sovereigns Constantine and Helen.

The leadership personality of Constantine the Great undoubtedly contributed effectively to the reshaping of human history through the recognition of the Christian faith and the mission of the Church in the world. The First Ecumenical Council under him in Nicaea in AD 325, of the three hundred and eighteen godly Fathers is a landmark in the institutional organization of the Church on earth.

Saint Gregory, extolling the political and religious significance of the work of Constantine the Great, of the reconstruction of the state into a single Empire of East and West, thanks to the freedom granted to the Christians and the Church, says: "...he increased the matters related to the Christians and joined the state with Christ's presence".

The hymn writer of the Church, speaking of the inextricable link of the reverence of Saints Constantine and Helen to the Holy Land, says: "Let us faithfully honour Constantine with his mother Helen?" for hearing the words of the Prophet, who spoke of cedar, pine and cypress, thy understood him to refer to the tripartite Cross, whereby the saving Passion was accomplished" (Matins, Oikos). "With divine deeds thou didst

build up thy heart as a temple of God, O Helen? and thou didst raise up unto Him sacred temples at the places where He suffered for our sakes the immaculate Passion in the flesh" (Matins, Ode 7, Troparion 3).

The acceptance of the Christian faith by Constantine the Great, which resulted in the Christianization of the Roman Empire, created the wonderful culture of Romiosyni, whose spiritual greatness was reflected in the peoples and nations of the Mediterranean, but also in the Middle East and especially in the Holy Land and its centre, the Holy City of Jerusalem, which bears the indelible imprint of his seal.

A true witness of this fact is the Church of Jerusalem after the Order of the Studios (Spoudaioi), of the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood, which throughout the centuries has guarded and ministered to the Holy Places by erecting magnificent Temples, such as the Church of the Nativity and Resurrection of our Saviour Christ.

Therefore, we dutifully performed a Patriarchal Divine Liturgy in the monastic Church of the glorious Saints, great Sovereigns and equal to the apostles Constantine and Helen, surrounded by the honourable members of our Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood and having as part of our prayers the faithful members of our Christian flock, as well as the visiting pilgrims.

The venerable memory of the redeemed Constantine and his mother Helen, we solemnly honoured, having prayed to them, so that with the intercessions of our Most Blessed Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, they may not cease beseeching the Lord for us of the Holy City of Jerusalem and for the peace of our region and the whole world. Amen. Many happy returns".

At noon, there was a meal at the Patriarchate's refectory, for our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, the Holy Fathers, Mr Vlioras and other guests of honour.

From Secretariat-General