

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST THE SAVIOUR AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Saturday, August 6/19, 2023, the feast of the Transfiguration was celebrated by the Patriarchate on Mount Tabor where the event of the Transfiguration took place.

During this feast, the whole Church, especially that of Jerusalem, to which Mount Tabor belongs as a place of pilgrimage, remembers singing and glorifying the event of the Transfiguration of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ in the Gospel accounts (Matthew 17:2 – 8 and Mark. 9, 2-8), because, a short time before His passion, the Lord took the three distinguished disciples and went up with them to Mount Tabor, and He was transfigured before them.

As the Fathers of the Church explain, He hid His human nature and revealed, as far as they could see, the glory of His divine nature.

His face shone brighter than the sun and His clothes became white as light and Moses as the representative of the sleeping and Elijah as the representative of the living appeared conversing with Him, while a bright cloud descended upon them and a voice was heard from the Father "This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him".

The Lord revealed this mystery to His disciples, so that, having seen His glory, they would be strengthened at the time of the cross and to show them what glory the righteous will enjoy in the resurrection of the dead.

In honour of this exquisite mystery, there was an all-night Vigil from midnight to 3 a.m., which was presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with

the co-celebration of their Eminences, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Metropolitan Theodosios of Tomis from the Patriarchate of Romania, Metropolitan Nikolaos from the Patriarchate of Georgia, and Archbishop Makarios of Qatar, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nektarios, Archdeacon Mark and many Priests from Orthodox Churches and Arabic-speaking Priests from the Galilee district. The chanting was delivered by Mr Angelos Gianopoulos in Greek on the right and Priest George from the Metropolis of Elia in Arabic on the left from the Byzantine choir of the blessed Archimandrite Philotheos. The vigil was attended by tens of thousands of pilgrims from various Orthodox countries who went up the mountain on foot due to the unacceptable restrictive measures by the Israeli police.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude blessed the grapes and delivered the following Sermon in Greek and Arabic:

“Thou wast transfigured on the mountain, O Christ our God, showing to Thy disciples Thy glory as each one could endure. Shine forth Thou on us who are sinners all, Thy light ever-unending, through the prayers of the Theotokos. Light-bestower, glory to Thee”.

Beloved brothers in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims,

The divine Grace of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, brought us all to this Holy Mount Tabor, so that we may thankfully celebrate His Transfiguration, listening to the call of the hymnographer saying: “Behold, we ascend to the mountain of the Lord, and in the house of our God, that we may behold the glory of His Transfiguration, glory as the only begotten of the Father, so that we may receive light, and being born together in the spirit, let us praise the Trinity forever and ever”.

The Transfiguration of our Saviour Christ is an event, during

which the greatness of the Mystery of the divine Providence, the mystery of the salvation of man, the “mystery hidden from the ages in God” was revealed in all its depth and breadth (Eph. 3.9).

The second great mystery of godliness, (1 Tim. 3:16) is Christ manifested in the flesh, “who in the form of God is not raptured, he is equal to God, but he emptied himself in the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men and being found in the form of a man, he humbled himself by becoming subject to death, death on the cross”, as Saint Paul preaches.

This confession of the Apostle Paul expresses with precipitation and interprets the words of the hymnographer for the reason of the transfiguration of Christ: “On the mount Thou wast transfigured, and Thy disciples, as much as they could bear, beheld Thy glory, O Christ our God; that when they should see Thee crucified, they would know Thy Passion to be willing, and would preach to the world that Thou art in truth the Effulgence of the Father” (Kontakion).

In other words, during the Transfiguration of the Lord on this high place, the revelation of His theanthropic hypostasis, the mixing of the two natures in the person of Christ, but also the revelation of the glory of God, that is, the dawning of God, was born. The ‘Effulgence of the Father’ means the radiance or the shine as the hymnographer says: “The changeless nature, having been mingled with mortal nature, **shone forth past all telling**, and in part revealed unto the Apostles the Light of Its own Immaterial Godhead” (Ode 5, Troparion 3). And again, “being perfect God, Thou becamest perfect mortal, mingling manhood with the entire Godhead in Thine own Hypostasis, which Moses and Elias saw in his two natures on Mount Tabor” (Ode 3, Canon2, Troparion 3).

Saint Gregory of Nyssa, interpreting the words of Paul “Christ as the effulgence of the glory of God” (Cf. Heb. 1,3) says “Just like the ray of light is related to the sun and to the

lamp, likewise the effulgence of light is related to the Father". This example is used by the Holy Father Gregory of Nyssa, to make it clear that the Son and Word of God is the same as the Father and the Holy Spirit, therefore the "Father's dawned light" is the inaccessible and uncreated light of the Holy Trinity.

Saint John of Damascus, dazzled by the mystery of the Transfiguration, says: because the Word 'became flesh' and the flesh the Word, even though it had not come out of His divine nature. A miracle that surpasses all understanding. The body did not acquire the glory from without, but it went from within itself from the inexplicably united with Him during the existence of the transcendental divinity of God the Word.

It is worth noting that during the Transfiguration of Jesus in this holy place, "the face of Jesus shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light" (Matthew 17,2). On the other hand, "Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice from the cloud said: This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matthew 17:5).

According to Saint John of Damascus, the bright cloud that overshadowed Jesus symbolizes the light of the Holy Spirit. "Clouds and light overshadowed the aurora of the Spirit." Regarding the voice from the cloud, Saint John of Damascus says: "Voice of the Father from the cloud of the Spirit was heard"; "This is my beloved Son". "This is the man we see, the man born yesterday, the humble one we associate with, whose face now shines." As for the divine command "Hear ye him," he says: "The one receiving Him, receives me, the one who sent me, not in a despotic way but in a paternal way. As a man is sent away, as God abides in me, I am in him. He who does not honour my only begotten and beloved Son does not honour the Father, who sent Him." "Hear ye him", has eternal life words. This is the conclusion of the completion, this is the power of the mystery." [And in more detail: Whoever accepts Him, Jesus Christ, accepts Me who sent Him not as Lord (authority) but as

Father. He is sent as a man, in whom as God he dwells in me and I in Him. Whoever does not honour my only begotten and beloved Son, does not honour the Father, I who sent him. "He is the one you should listen to" because he has the words of eternal life. This is the conclusion of what is happening, this is the power of the mystery of the Transfiguration].

It is precisely this power, that is the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we too, my dear brothers, are called to see, not with physical eyes, but with the mental eyes of a pure mind and a pure heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they see God" (Matthew 5:8), says the Lord. To this end we are again called to imitate Christ's disciples, who "were heavy with sleep", they were overcome by heavy sleepiness, but in a little while they woke up and saw His glory. " and when they were awake, they saw his glory" (Luke 9:32).

So let us also, my beloved brothers, shake off from ourselves the sleep of ignorance; standing up after the hymnographer, let us say: " Shine forth Thou on us who are sinners all, Thy light ever-unending, through the prayers of the Theotokos. Light-bestower, glory to Thee". Many peaceful returns!"

In the morning, a Divine Liturgy was celebrated in the Central Church of the Transfiguration, presided over by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, with the co-celebration of Holy Sepulchre Hieromonks and Arabic-speaking Presbyters and the participation of local Orthodox pilgrims.

At midday, the renovator of the Monastery and of the icons of the Holy Church, Hegoumen Archimandrite Hilarion, offered a meal to the Patriarchal and Episcopal entourages and many others.

The Feast of the Transfiguration of the Saviour was celebrated in the Holy Shrine of Gethsemane with a Divine Liturgy presided over by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Isychios of Capitolas, along with the Priests of the Holy Shrine and the

Hierodeacon Eulogios at the attendance of faithful pilgrims, and of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras.

After the Divine Liturgy, a reception was hosted by His Eminence Metropolitan Joachim of Hellenoupolis at the rectory.

It was also celebrated with Vespers in the evening and Divine Liturgy in the morning in the Holy Church of the Transfiguration in Ramalah, presided over by the Most Reverend Archbishop Christophoros of Kyriakoupolis, along with the priests of the Church under the chanting by the Community Choir and the participation in prayer of the local believers.

From Secretariat-General