

THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS IN BEIT JALA

On Sunday, September 11/24, 2023, the feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos was celebrated by transference in Beit Jala.

On this feast, the Rum Orthodox Arabic-speaking community of Beit Jala commemorates that the Theotokos was given to the Ancestors of God Joachim and Anna as a gift for themselves and for the whole of humanity so that Christ our Saviour would be born in the flesh from her.

This feast was celebrated at the beautiful 19th-century Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos.

His Beatitude had a very warm welcoming reception by the Hegoumen of Beit Jala Archimandrite Ignatios, the priests and the scouts.

The Divine Liturgy and all the feast were presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, along with their Eminences, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Archimandrite Ieronymos and the Priests of the community, Fr Boulos, Fr Yusef and Fr Elias, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Eulogios. The chanting was delivered by the community Byzantine choir as the service was attended by a large congregation praying in joy and reverence.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following sermon:

“Thy Nativity, O Theotokos, hath proclaimed joy the whole world; for from thee hath dawned the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, annulling the curse and bestowing the blessing, abolishing death and granting us life everlasting” (Apolytikion).

Beloved brothers in Christ,

Dear Christians

The grace of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High, who overshadowed the Virgin Mary, brought us all together in this magnificent Church, to celebrate her Nativity, listening to the exhortation of our Holy Father John of Damascus: "Come all nations, every race of people and every language and age and every position, let us celebrate with joy the nativity of the universal joy".

It is indeed an event of universal rejoicing the Nativity of our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, because as the hymnographer says to her "In thee O immaculate Maiden is the mystery of the Trinity praised and glorified. For the Father was well pleased and the Word dwelt among us, and the Divine Spirit overshadowed Thee" (Matins, Ode 6, Glory).

The Nativity of the Theotokos Mary marked the "beginning of salvation for the world", that is, the lifting of the curse on the one hand and the abolition of death on the other. Both Adam and Eve were under the law of sin, curse and death due to their disobedience to God's commandments. On the contrary, through the gracious Virgin Mary, who became the Mother of the Sun of Righteousness, the joy of Christ was proclaimed to the whole world.

The Nativity of the Theotokos brought joy to the whole world because as Saint John of Damascus says, the Virgin Mary gave birth to the world of a treasure of goods that cannot be taken away because with Her the Creator transfigured/transformed all nature through the human nature of Christ. That is to say, if the man who stands in the middle of mind and matter is the link of all visible and invisible creation, the word of God since He was united with the nature of men, through Him has been united with all creation.

The birth of the Virgin Mary heralded the freedom not only of

man but also of all creation from the slavery of decay and death. This is why Saint Paul preaches saying: " Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8,21).

Moreover, the birth of the Virgin Mary revealed the energy of "the mystery hidden from ages and from generations", (Col. 1,26) " Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel", (Is. 7:14) exclaims the prophet Isaiah. This so-called Son Emmanuel is none other than the manifested Christ, as the hymnographer says: "We faithfully celebrate and worship thy holy nativity, which came of a promise, O immaculate Virgin, whereby we were delivered from the curse of our first father when Christ appeared" (Matins, Ode 7, Canon 2, Troparion 1).

Also noteworthy is the use of the Prophet Amos saying: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen" (Amos 9:11). In this prophetic word of Amos, Saint Cyril of Alexandria discerns the resurrection in Christ of the human tabernacle, that is, of the human flesh, saying: "For we are a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) according to the scriptures, for his sake; and death dug down (Amos 9:11) all [people's] tabernacles, and God the Father in Christ rebuilt them."

The hymnographer of the Church at the birth of the Virgin Mary discerns the pattern of the salvation of man in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ saying: "The prophecy of the Lord is fulfilled, let it be; I will raise up the tabernacle of the holy David, in you, They were prefigured, through whom the companion of men, in the flesh of God, was incarnated."

The birth of the Virgin Mary, who protected her chastity and virginity, has a special significance for the Church of

Christ, which according to the great Paul is the body of Christ (Col. 1, 18) and he is the saviour of the body of the Church (Eph. 5:23).

In other words, in the person of the most blessed Mary, we consider the mystery of the divine Providence, according to which "the whole of earthen men was incarnated in the flesh of the pure blood of the Ever-Virgin Mary under the Son and Word of God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ. "It was well-pleasing to the Father so that not from a physical connection, but from the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin, supernaturally the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us", preaches Saint John of Damascus.

Today, my beloved brothers, our Holy Church calls us through the righteous Joachim and Anna, who were ambassadors of the world's salvation with the birth of their All-Holy daughter Theotokos, to celebrate this great gift of our God to mankind and assign all hope in Him. And after the hymnographer, we say: "O Adam be made new again; our mother Eve, be magnified, ye Prophets with the Apostles, dance in delight with the righteous. Today the world is filled with joy common to Angels and to men: From chaste and righteous Joachim and godly Anna is born now the Theotokos and Virgin" (Exapostilario 2). Alone, and only her introduced Christ into the world for the salvation of our souls.

Many happy returns and blessed the new year of the very goodness of the Lord. Amen".

After the Divine Liturgy, a litany took place around the Church accompanied by the Scouts' parade.

After this, a treat reception took place in the hall next to the Church, and finally, a meal where the Patriarchal Entourage, the Mayor of the city and representative of the Head of the Ecclesiastical Supreme Palestinian Committee, Mr Ramzi Khouri were present.

From Secretariat-General