

THE FEAST OF SAINT GEORGE THE GREAT MARTYR IN LYDDA

On Thursday, November 3/16, 2023, the Patriarchate celebrated in Lydda the feast of the glorious great martyr George the Trophy-Bearer.

On this day, the Church, especially the Church of Jerusalem, remembers that according to his wish, after his martyrdom in Rome, the relics of Saint George were transported and buried in Lydda by his servant. This is the city of his mother's origin.

When piety shone upon Constantine the Great, Saint Helen came to the Holy Land and erected a magnificent Basilica Above the tomb of Saint George. The consecration of that Church was held on November 3, thus we commemorate and celebrate that event along with the repatriation of the Saint's relics on this day.

In this Basilica, the celebration of the repatriation of the holy relics of Saint George took place during Vespers in the evening, presided over by the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis. The Divine Liturgy in the morning was officiated by our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, along with their Eminences, the Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Metropolitan Joachim of Helenopolis and the Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba, the Archimandrites; Nectarios, Ieronymos, Niphon, and Christodoulos, Priest Hader Baramki, Archdeacon Mark and the Hierodeacons Eulogios and Dositheos. The chanting was delivered by the Community Byzantine choir as the service was attended by pious people who came despite the warlike situation. The service was also attended by the Ambassadors of Serbia and Albania to Israel.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the

following Sermon:

“Thou hast gone up into the mount of martyrdom, O prizewinner George, and hast received a crown from the hand of the Lord; for this is the reward of the Martyrs. Wherefore, as is meet, we all magnify thee” (Minaion, Matis, Ode 9, Troparion 5), the hymnographer of the Church exclaims.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims

Today the universal feast of Saint George has gathered us all. Today the grace of the Holy Spirit which has established brave George, the faithful servant and martyr of Christ’s love has gathered us all in the biblical town of Lydda to celebrate the commemoration of the consecration of his Church and the translation of his holy relics.

Saint George was the son of a rich and noble family from Cappadocia and served as a commander in the Roman army during the reign of Diocletian (AD 284-305). “When the emperor declared a severe persecution against the Christians, George declared himself to be a Christian, condemning the vanity of the idols and those who believed in them. Saint George suffered his martyrdom in Rome, or in Diospolis of Palestine, later named Georgioupolis, which is the current Lydda, where his tomb lies in his magnificent Church” according to Pasikratis, the Saint’s biographer.

Saint George, who had connected the confession of his faith to the crucified and risen from the dead Christ and the Holy Land, became a righteous cultivator of the mystery of the Divine Providence as his hymnographer proclaims: “Thou hast lived worthily of thy name, O soldier George, for taking the Cross of Christ upon thy shoulders, thou hast cultivated the earth that had become barren because of diabolic deception; and uprooting the thorny religion of the idols, thou hast planted the vine of the Orthodox faith. Wherefore, thou

gushest forth healings for the faithful throughout the world, and hast proved to be the Trinity's righteous husbandman" (Vespers, Glory).

Precisely because Saint George uprooted the thorny religion of the idols and planted the vine of the Orthodox faith, he became known all over the world, shining like the sun and like a bright star. The proof of this is that Saint George is the patron Saint of many peoples and nations until today.

Saint George is distinguished among the Church Saints because, like another Apostle, he became the preacher of truth, of Christ's gospel, not only by words, but with his very martyr's blood. Inspired by the Lord's prompting words, "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10,28), and "And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say" (Luke 12,11-12), Saint George was assayed by the fire for the love for Christ. That is why the hymnographer says: "For longing conquered nature, persuading the lover to pass through death to the Beloved, even Christ God, the Saviour of our souls" (Matins, Glory of praises).

In other words, Saint George had the divine zeal in his heart and delivered himself to death, a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (c.f. Romans 12,1), paying heed to Saint Paul's words: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1,21). That is the reason why Saint George became an imitator and communicant of Christ's passion. "He that abideth in me, and I in him" (John 15,5).

It is noteworthy that the martyrs of the love of the Righteous Christ, who suffered "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with

the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented" (Hebrews 11,36-37), had only one sole goal; the kingdom of God, His glory and righteousness. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit they beheld Christ, – according to His promise-, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14,18-19).

These words of the Lord, "but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14,19), are addressed to us also, my dear brothers and sisters, through the martyrs, and thus, the great martyr George, and through our holy Church, which is the body of the crucified and resurrected Christ.

We say this, because, during our Church services and especially during the service of the Holy Eucharist, we have with us, in our midst, present the living Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, the God of love and peace. Moreover, we have the living testimony of the translation of the holy great martyr George's relics, in his tomb that lies here. "Having been disciplined a little, Saint George received great good, because God tested him and found him worthy of himself; [6] like gold in the furnace he tried him, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted him" (c.f. Wisdom of Solomon 3,5-6).

Today, just like the light of the holy glory, we are illumined by this solemn event of the commemoration of the consecration of Saint George's Church and the translation of his relics, amidst turbulence and hostilities in the Holy Land.

Let us pray, my dear ones, to our Father of lights, that by the intercessions of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and those of the Holy great martyr George the trophy-bearer, the light of the infinite philanthropy of God may enlighten the minds of those in power and guide them in the path of peace and conciliation. Amen! Many happy returns."

A reception and lunch followed.

This feast was also celebrated in the Old City of Jerusalem in the Holy Monastery of Saint George at the Jewish Quarter, with the Divine Liturgy in the morning, hosted by Nun Kyriaki, in place of the renovator of the Church Abbess Marianna. The Abbess is currently in Cyprus due to the ongoing war.

The feast was also celebrated in the Holy Monastery of Saint George of the Hospital with Vespers in the evening and the Divine Liturgy in the morning, presided over by the Dragoman Archimandrite Mattheos, under the chanting of Hierodeacon Simeon and His Eminence Archbishop Dimitrios of Lydda helped at Vespers. The celebrations were hosted by the Abbess of the Monastery, Nun Pansemni.

From Secretariat-General