

THE FEAST OF THE FOREFATHERS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Sunday, December 11/24, 2023, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of the Holy Forefathers.

On this feast before Christmas, the Church commemorates the Forefathers of Christ in the flesh before and during the Law of Moses, especially the Patriarch Abraham, to whom God gave the good tidings that “all nations of the earth shall be blessed in Thee”.

This feast was celebrated at the marvellous Church of the Holy Forefathers in Beit Sahour, presided over by His Eminence Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, with the co-celebration of the Hegoumen of the shrine Archimandrite Ignatios, and the Priests of the parish, Sabbas Her, Issa Mousleh, Ioannis Rishmawi and George Banoura. The parish Byzantine choir delivered the chanting, as the service was attended by a large congregation and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos.

H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos sent the following Sermon to this congregation:

“He that is full is emptied out in the flesh for our sakes, and a beginning doth He receive Who from before eternity is without beginning; He that is rich becometh poor, and though He is the Word of God, he reclineth in a manger of dumb beasts as an infant, working the refashioning of all men from the beginning of time” (Matins Dec. 11, Canon of the Forefathers, Ode 5, Theotokion).

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

Dear Christians,

The grace of the Holy Spirit brought us all together today in the so-called holy Church of the Holy Forefathers, in the blessed place of the "shepherds who kept watch at night praising God", to celebrate their holy memory by singing and changing the angelic hymn and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men" (Luke 2:14).

The loud-voiced Isaiah, prophesying the incarnation of the Word of God, says: " And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1). The root of Jesse referred to here, is the root of the abandoned trunk of the tree, of the Jewish people. And this is because Jesse was the father of David, from whom the Davidic dynasty sprang, from which Christ was born.

And Christ is the fulfilment of the Law of Moses and the Prophets, of the sacred history, of the beginning from the Patriarch Abraham as it is written: "Bible of the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham", (Matthew 1,1). This second Bible of the birth of Jesus Christ, since Jesus Christ is the story of the holy revelation, through which God "made known his ways to Moses, His will to the children of Israel" (Ps. 103, 7); on the other hand, " The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen" (Ps. 98,2).

In other words, the Holy Forefathers are those to whom God revealed His will and through them revealed His justice to the nations, i.e. to the pagans: He showed this to the nations", says the interpreter Theodoritos Kyrou. According to the Evangelist Luke, the prophets are those who foretold the coming of the righteous (Acts 7, 52) as well as the passion of Christ (Acts 3,18). Let us listen to the testimony of the Apostle Peter preaching: " For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall

be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3, 22-26).

These words of Saint Peter demonstrate that the prophets, as well as many other personalities of the Old Testament, spoke and announced the child of God, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Behold, the Virgin has given birth and is giving birth to a son, and you shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14), the Prophet Isaiah exclaims. The prophet David says: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Ps. 110,1).

The above prophecies refer to the Messiah Christ, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all the ages and incarnated by the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin. The hymnographer of the Church also proclaims this fact, saying: "Abraham's descendants became divine and most wise Prophets, fervently heralding in the Spirit Him that was to be born of Abraham and of Judah, event eh Word of God" (Matins, Ode 9, Troparion 3). "O ye who love the Father's choirs, let us all leap for joy today, with songs and hymns let us honour Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...from whom came Christ the Lord...in His exceeding compassion" (Exaposteilarion 1).

Today's celebrated memory of the Holy Forefathers is due precisely to this fact that "Christ the Lord seen in the flesh". Jesus Christ, my beloved brothers, is without genealogy according to the divinity. The generation of Christ

according to the divinity is unexplained, Saint Gregory Palamas teaches, saying: "Unexplained, then, is the generation of Christ according to the divinity; it is genealogical according to man, the offspring of man and the son of man suffers to be born as man to save man".

How is it possible to beget the incomprehensible God, Who is without beginning and eternal? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was to God and God was the Word" (John 1:1), Saint John the Theologian says. The Word of God did not have predecessors, and together with His Father, He has the name "above every name and every word", (Cf. Philippians 2:9), Saint Gregory says again when asked: "How is He genealogized?" the one in the beginning "I am", and existing to God and being God, and being God's Word and Son? and having not a Father before Himself, and a name after the Father, who is above every name and every word?"

It is noteworthy that the Holy Forefathers, those enlightened by the Holy Spirit, testify and preach that Christ, as Saint Chrysostom also says, is the fulfilment of the Law and the prophets, the one who fulfils all the Patristic Providence. In this fullness of God's Fatherly Providence, we the faithful participate as members of the body of Christ and His Church. For even Saint Paul commands, saying: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Col. 2, 8-10).

Interpreting this word of Paul, Saint Theophilaktos says: "There our (human) nature was united to God and we in Him received communion by nature." Therefore, let us beseech the Holy Forefathers, so that their prayers and the intercessions of the most blessed Theotokos may be honoured to celebrate the metropolis of holidays, the divine nativity of the God of the Word and our Savior Christ in the cave of Bethlehem. Amen.

Many happy returns and blessed Christmas.”

At noon, a meal was offered.

From Secretariat-General