

THE FIRST STASIS OF THE SALUTATIONS TO THE MOTHER OF GOD

On Friday evening of the first week of Lent, 9/22/ March 2024, at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre the service of the Small Compline was held with the Canon of the Akathist and the first Stasis of the Salutations to the Mother of God. This is a theological and poetic composition praising the Most Blessed Theotokos and the mystery of the incarnation of our Saviour Christ which was accomplished through her.

This contrite service was presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, who recited the first Stasis. The Holy Sepulchre Hieromonks participated in the service, with first in rank the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and Mr Eustathios on the right and Fr Ioannis Antoniou on the left, as the service was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos and members of the Church of Jerusalem.

At the end of the service His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“An Angel and the chiefest among them was sent from Heaven to cry: Rejoice! To the Mother of God. And beholding Thee, O Lord, taking bodily form, he stood in awe, and with his bodiless voice he cried aloud to her such things as these: Rejoice Height Hard to climb for human thought. Rejoice, Depth hard to explore, even for the eyes of Angels” the hymnographer exclaims.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians,

Indeed, it is hard for human thought to understand the Most Blessed Theotokos, as she is joined with the mystery of the Divine Providence, that is, the incarnation of our Saviour Jesus Christ through her pure blood.

Saint John of Damascus describes this hard-to-climb and incomprehensible mystery in his homily to the Theotokos, where he writes: "Rejoice, O Lady Theotokos from whom the self-born is born for our sake and the self-generated sprouts and the perfect grows. Rejoice, O Lady Theotokos, from whom for our sake the incorporeal receives body, He who is without beginning receives a beginning and the Immortal God is contained within you.

The Holy Bible, both the Old and the New Testament, constitutes Sacred History, that is, the revelation, the manifestation of the divine wisdom and will of God. The eternal wisdom and will of God is none other than the "eternal mystery" (Cf. Rom. 16, 25), that which was revealed in Christ and through the Gospel of Christ, as Saint Paul teaches.

Participant and accomplice of the "revealing of the mystery of the ages of eternity, manifested and now... and known to all nations", (Rom. 16, 25-26), also happens to be the Theotokos and Mother of God, the eternal Mary.

This is why our holy Church of Christ, in hymns honours and magnifies but also beseeches the Mother of God at all times and at every hour, especially during the fasting stage of the holy Lent: "Hail, the only Mother of God, the venerated to the ages and glorified to the ages and to the endless ages... and to all generations of generations under angels and men alike in fear thou art magnified", Saint John of Damascus says.

The Virgin Theotokos Mary holds a prominent position among the personalities of Sacred History, of the salvific so-called Evangelical preaching, especially of women, because she is the one who corrected the error of our mother Eve, as Saint John

of Damascus once again praises: "Rejoice alone among blessed women, thou who hast corrected the error of Eve".

To this very thing, my beloved brothers and sisters, our holy Church calls us, to the correction of our mistakes through the path of fasting and repentance. "Come, O ye people and today let us accept the grace of the Fast as a gift from God and as a time of repentance in which we may find mercy with the Saviour" (Triodion, Monday of the 1st Week, Matins, Canticle 1, Canon 2, Troparion 1). "The Fast has come, mother of chastity, accuser of sins, advocate of repentance, life of the angles and salvation of men" (Triodion, Monday of the 1st Week, Matins, Aposticha 1), Saint Theodore of the Studion exclaims.

It is worth noting that "this gift of fasting of forty days" was not invented by the holy and God-bearing Fathers of the Church, but He Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ, showed us, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterwards and hungered"(Matthew 4:1-2), as the Evangelist Matthew testifies.

We also walk this path of holy self-control, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the sympathy of the most blessed Theotokos, so that we may be gloriously worthy and pure in heart to arrive at the Holy Three-Day Resurrection of our Saviour Christ, which shines incorruption to the world. Amen. Blessed and happy Lent".

From Secretariat-General