

CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE COULD BE THE ANSWER TO RESTORE LIFE TO THE HOLY LAND

An article by: Heba Hrimat

Whether it is for getting clarity in times of difficulties, or going in the footsteps of Jesus where the miracles of Christmas and Resurrection occurred, the reasons of pilgrimage may vary, but pilgrims to the Holy Land may not realize that their intentional, or sometimes unintentional trips, form a monumental contribution to the Christian existence in the Holy Land, where Christians are undeniably suffering from all sorts of problems, but mainly an existential one.

In a complex region such as the Middle East, where religion and politics clash all the time, pilgrims are considered a blessing to the Holy Land and an element of stability, not only because they allow a population that is mostly Jewish and Muslim to breathe a different air, but they are also significantly different from tourists, because they have a horizon of faith that moves by looking at God and the people they meet.

That unfamiliar sight of watching the streets of the Holy Land and mainly Jerusalem and Bethlehem, which used to hustle and bustle with endless tourists' movement, empty, for the past two years have shut down life as we knew it for families and brought unimaginable suffering to communities which were 100% dependable on income from pilgrims. Hotel employees, tour guides, restaurants' workers, souvenir shops' owners and handicrafts makers lost their chances of making any profit and were pushed to the corner with no way out.

Despite the efforts of the Churches of the Holy Land to financially and spiritually aid the different Christian

communities (and in many cases the non-Christians as well), the Churches themselves were suffering from the same issue; No real income was pouring in and expenses kept piling up drying out sources of the Churches.

And while everything in the time of Covid seemed possible to be replaced with a virtual alternative; learning at schools and universities swapped with online classes, shopping in stores with online shopping, etc. one thing remained irreplaceable: pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and the after effects of that will unfortunately remain for years to come.

Christians used to account for the largest percentage of annual tourists to the Holy Land. In fact, before the beginning of the pandemic, and specifically at the end of 2019, a whopping 2.5 million Christians visited Israel that year alone, out of the total 4.5 million, according to data from the Israeli Tourism Ministry.

With most pilgrimage aimed at Jerusalem; it comes as no surprise that 85% of the pilgrimage to the Holy Land is focused towards the Holy City.

But there's a silver lining, both Israel and Palestine have been slowly emerging from the pandemic with the prime focus of bringing back tourism 'hopefully' to where it once was.

The Israeli Prime Minister's office recently announced that starting the beginning of this month Israel is allowing tourists who are vaccinated against COVID-19 or have recovered from the virus, to enter its territories. Meaning that groups of tourists will be allowed to enter the country without Covid booster shot, to further encourage tourism.

On the other hand, the Palestinian Territories, which had almost two years of zero pilgrimage income; completely paralyzing the local economy in tourism-based cities like Bethlehem, which was affected more than the others, is now given (since November 6) the green light to allow tourists for

overnight stays.

A gradual recovery is now expected for the first time since the pandemic, people are finally starting to hope again, to believe again. Churches and communities of the Holy Land have never been so eager to warmly welcome back pilgrims who now have the opportunity to visit from around the globe.

RESTORATION WORK OF THE CISTERN OF THE HEGOUMENEION OF BEIT JALA AND THE BROADENING OF THE MAIN STREET

In October 2021, under the technical supervision of the Patriarchate's Architect Mr Theodosios Mitropoulos and the Mayor Mr Nicola Hamis, that is the co-operation of the Patriarchate with the Municipality of Beit Jala, the cistern of the Hegoumeneion of Beit Jala was restored and carved a little. This was necessary due to the broadening of the main street to facilitate the traffic for the Beit Jala inhabitants. Details on the restoration work are in Mr Mitropoulos' article below:

"The historic cistern (Well) of the Abbeys residence of Beitzala

By Architect Dr Theo Mitropoulos

This cistern is located northeast of the Abbeys residence of Beitzala 1 * where it is adjacent to it, occupying the entire subterranean area of the garden while its mouth is located

inside the garden. This cistern has a rectangular plan of dimensions (5X8X6M) and is carved in the rocky subsoil of the area while its vaulted roof is made of limestone and hydraulic mortar. This technique is also found in the cisterns of David located in Bethlehem, which are also made in the same style.²

* Internally, the cistern is lined with a thick layer of kurasani 10cm thick. to prevent water leakage. This cistern is very ancient, and historically, it must be related to the cisterns (wells) of David located in Bethlehem. The Abbeys residence of Beitzala will be built after 1862 (year of construction of the Church of Panagia in Beitzala) in this historic site of this cistern. With the current configuration of the road around Abbeys residence (Igoumenio), a large rocky mass of the cistern will be excavated (removed) and in its place, a stone wall over 4 m high will be constructed in order to hold the hydraulic pressures coming from its waters. Because the overflow port of the cistern was covered by the outer perimeter wall, this resulted in the water level rising very high inside the cistern resulting in increased pressures on the stone walls and the creation of vertical alarming faults. stone dome of the cistern. Today, the City Hall of Beitzala, which is carrying out reinforcement work in collaboration with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in this cistern, is proceeding with the partial removal of the existing cracked stone structure and its reconstruction from reinforced concrete with concrete and stone. With this intervention of the restoration of the cistern, its water supply should be stopped and this area should be utilized by the Patriarchate both archaeologically and for tourism (religious tourism) due to its great historical value.

1*. The construction of the Igoumenion dates back to 1862 during the patriarchate of Cyril II (1845-1872) and the abbot Christoforos, a monk of Cyprian. The 19th century. The 19th century is the period when there is a great upsurge in the construction and decoration of Orthodox churches in the Ottoman Empire where the conditions for Orthodoxy change and

become more favourable after the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829 and especially after the Hati Serif of 1839 and the Hati Humayoun of 1856, where the change in the internal policy of the Ottoman state with the establishment of the equality of all its subjects can be seen. The construction of magnificent temples in Asia Minor, Smyrna, Constantinople, Cyprus and the Middle East began more systematically. 2* The cisterns in Bethlehem will stop being used for drinking water after 1200 when a Saracen woman fell into the well and drowned, since then the water has only been used for drinking, according to the travelogues of the time.”

From Secretariat-General

THE MONASTERY OF ST. ONUPHRIUS ON THE FIELD OF BLOOD

An article by: Heba Hrimat

“And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.” Matthew 27:6-8

Akeldama, an Aramaic name meaning the field of blood, is the piece of land known as the potter's field, according to the Holy Gospel, which the priests bought with the thirty pieces of silver that Judas Iscariot returned, and they allotted it to be a cemetery for strangers – the non-Jewish.

It is the same place where Judas hung himself, after he was filled with remorse and tormented with guilt following his betrayal of the Lord Jesus Christ, which eventually led to His crucifixion. Thus, it was called "Field of Blood" and the ancient name lived on. (Matthew 27:8 and Acts 1:19).

The Greek Orthodox monastery of St. Onuphrius stands today on the same plot of land known as the Potter's Field. The traditional site of this field, which dates back to the era of Jerome in the fourth century, is on the southern side of the Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem, and may have been the same or close to it, because the area contains porcelain stone. It was used as a burial place for the dead for a long time, and many Crusaders were buried there as well.

The hills on which the monastery stands are full of caves and burial tombs, some of which hold the bones of pilgrims of past centuries who came to Jerusalem but died before they could return to their homelands. Among the many tombs in the monastery is the tomb of Saint Juvenalius, the first Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem (442-458).

In the Byzantine era, many monks and hermits took a number of these caves as homes and places for worship. Sixteenth century tradition suggests that eight of the apostles hid there after Christ was captured in Gethsemane before his crucifixion.

The Monastery of Saint Onuphrius, built in 1874 over the ruins of a former church, now can be seen occupying the southern facade of the valley, facing Mount Zion and the walls of the old city.

The monastery bears the name of the monk Saint Onuphrius, who came from Egypt to the Holy Land during the third or fourth century, and was ascetic in a cave in the desert for over sixty years in strict isolation.

Besides his holiness, Onuphrius was famous for his very long and luxurious beard, which was his only clothing beside an apron of leaves, as he can be seen portrayed in his icons.

Today, the monastery is being taken care of by a small number of Greek Orthodox nuns from the Jerusalem Patriarchate.

The annual feast of St. Onuphrius is held in his monastery on June 25 every year, in a beautiful divine liturgy that is normally led by His Beatitude Patriarch of the Holy City, Metropolitans and Fathers from the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre.



Monastery of Saint Onuphrius



Entrance to the monastery



Courtyard of the monastery



Tombs cut into the wall, which can be seen inside the monastery



Tomb of Saint Onuphrius



Tower bell of the church of Saint Onuphrius



Entrance to the Tomb of Saint Juvenalius, the first Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem

FEAST OF SAINTS CONSTANTINE AND HELEN, EQUALS TO THE APOSTLES

An article by: Heba Hrimat

Constantine was the son of Constantios Chloros, the ruler of the westernmost parts of the Roman empire, and his consort, Helen. He was born in the year 272 in Naissus of Dardania, a city on the Hellespont. By the age of 34 his father died and thus Constantine was proclaimed successor to the throne.

Six years later, Constantine learned that Maxentius had joined forces against him, and so he marched into Italy, where, while at the head of his troops, he saw in the sky after midday, beneath the sun, a radiant pillar in the form of a cross with the words: "By this shalt thou conquer."

The following night, Jesus Christ appeared to him in a dream

and declared to him the power of the Cross and its significance. Upon arising in the morning, Constantine immediately ordered that a labarum be made in the form of a cross (labarum: a banner or standard of victory over the enemy), and he inscribed on it the Name of *Jesus Christ*.

On the morning of October 28, Constantine attacked and conquered Maxentius, who drowned in the Tiber River while fleeing.

The following day, Constantine entered Rome in triumph and was proclaimed Emperor of the West by the Senate, while Licinius, his brother-in-law, ruled in the East. But out of malice, Licinius later persecuted the Christians.

Constantine fought him once and again, and utterly destroyed him in 324, and in this manner, he became monarch over the West and the East. Under him, and because of him, all the persecutions against the Church ceased. Christianity triumphed and was announced the main religion of the Empire and idolatry was overthrown.

In 325 he called the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, which he himself personally addressed, to create the Creed that forms the belief system of Christians. In 324, in the ancient city of Byzantium, he laid the foundations of the new capital of his realm, and solemnly dedicated it on May 11, 330, naming it after himself, ***Constantinople***.

Since the throne of imperial rule was transferred to Constantinople from Rome, it was named New Rome, the inhabitants of its domain were called Romans, and it was considered the continuation of the Roman Empire.

Saint Constantine died on May 21 or 22 in the year 337, having lived sixty-five years, of which he ruled for thirty-one. His remains were transferred to Constantinople and were buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles, which had been built by him.

As for his holy mother Saint Helen, after her son had made the faith of Christ triumphant throughout the Roman Empire, she undertook a personal pilgrimage to Jerusalem and found the Holy Cross on which our Lord was crucified.

After this, Saint Helen, in her zeal to glorify Christ, erected churches in Jerusalem at the sites of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, in Bethlehem at the cave where Christ was born, another on the Mount of Olives where ascension occurred and many others throughout the Holy Land, Cyprus, and elsewhere.

She was proclaimed "Augusta," her image was stamped upon golden coins, and two cities were named Helenopolis after her, in Bithynia and in Palestine. She died of old age in either in 330, or in 336.

To honor their monumental contribution to the Christian Orthodox faith, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem dedicates a church within its walls in the Old City of Jerusalem, which holds both names of the Saints: the Church of Saints Constantine and Helen; where an annual patriarchal divine liturgy takes place on June 3rd to celebrate their memory.



Icon of Saints Constantine and Helen, at their church inside the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.



Patriarch of Jerusalem, Archbishops and Priests of the Jerusalem Patriarchate gathering after June 2nd vespers.

MONASTERY OF ST. GERASIMUS OF THE JORDAN

An article by: Heba Hrimat

The 5th Century Greek Orthodox monastery is located close to the north side of the Dead Sea, and is one of the earliest monasteries in the area. Also known as 'Deir Hijla' in Arabic,

the monastery was founded in 455 AD by Saint Gerasimus, a monk from Lycia in modern-day Anatolia, Turkey.

Saint Gerasimus was an Abbot of a community of 70 monks in the area east of Jericho and used to maintain a strict rule of asceticism. He's regarded as one of the second-generation leaders of the Judean desert hermits, who followed the founders Euthymius and Chariton.

The encounter of St. Gerasimus with the lion is a central theme in the paintings and sculptures in the monastery. According to tradition, the Abbot met the lion near the Jordan river, roaring in pain because of a thorn was stuck in its paw. After removing the thorn, the lion became tamed and joined the community (of the hermits). The lion is often illustrated with a donkey and camel, its friends from the Monastery.

The saint, also known as St. Gerasimus of the Jordan, died in 475 and his burial place remains unknown due to the destruction of the Byzantine structure. Our Greek Orthodox Patriarchate holds an annual Feast for the Saint at his monastery in the Judean desert on March 4/18.

The monastery of St. Gerasimus was built in the form of a Lavra, meaning that a cluster of caves and cells are built for the hermits while keeping a common center. The monks would meet in the center on Saturdays and Sundays, while on the rest of the days they would live in seclusion. This form of Lavra was also established in the Judean desert monastery of Mar Saba as well as other places in the Judean desert.

Near the monastery are the ruins of the Biblical city of Beth Hogla. This city, which was recently excavated and seen near the highway, was located on the border between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Joshua 15 1, 6: "This then was the lot of the tribe of the children of Judah by their families...And the border went up to Bethhogla, and passed along by the north of

Betharabah". And Joshua 18 19-20: "And the border passed along to the side of Bethhogla northward: and the outgoings of the border were at the north bay of the salt sea at the south end of Jordan: this was the south coast. And Jordan was the border of it on the east side. This was the inheritance of the children of Benjamin, by the coasts thereof round about, according to their families".

The original structure was built in 460, but was destroyed during the Persian conquest in 614, where all the monks were butchered. Their remains can be seen inside the monastery enclosed within glass frames in the crypt on the lower floor.

Crusaders later rebuilt the monastery, and most of the existing structure dates to the 13th century. Since that time, the monastery went under frequent rebuilding and reconstructions due to different reasons including periodic earthquakes, including the severe earthquake of 1837.

Most recently, the area around the monastery underwent a restoration, in 2009. Today, the monastery is a very vibrant place where it hosts thousands of pilgrims every year, and includes a spring and dozens of palm trees, which are used to supply the basic needs of the hermits.

ST. CHARALAMBOS THE HIEROMARTYR

An article by: Heba Hrimat

He was an Orthodox priest who earned his sainthood solely by

his steadfastness to the Christian faith in the face of prolonged agonies. No single martyr was recorded to have endured as much physical punishment as Charalambos.

Charalambos lived in the town of Magnesia in Asia Minor during the second century. He was ordained a priest at an early age to serve his hometown, in a province fiercely hostile to Christians. His reputation as a preacher and man of God placed him as the leader of the tiny Christian body that grew steadily under his influence in spite of great odds. A man of the people, Charalambos brought the light of the Lord's love to everyone in his community. He also brought down upon himself the envy and wrath of those in power.

The provincial governor, Lukianos, had little regard for the welfare of his people; for the Christians he had nothing but utter contempt. A confrontation between the governor and Charalambos was inevitable, as was the result of their meeting. After a brief exchange of formalities, the governor unequivocally declared that Charalambos must renounce Christ or be punished. This set the scene for a long period of human suffering in the name of the Saviour.

When he refused to worship the idols, his persecutors began a planned assault on his body, and Lukianos took the chance to unleash his merciless hatred for Christians. Charalambos was first lashed to a post in the public square to be held up to public scorn and ridicule. Then they slashed him repeatedly with sharp knives, taking care that no wound would be fatal. When Charalambos refused to denounce the Lord, they cut him down and dragged him through the streets by his beard. He endured the extremely painful grating of his skin by the pebbled surface as well as the merciless kicking of sandaled feet. Finally propping him up on his feet, they demanded that he renounce Jesus; once again he refused.

After a systematic series of cruelties that spanned several months, the derision of the pagans turned to wonder at the

power and the faith of this Christian. When their methods of punishment only served to draw converts to Christianity, Charalambos' enemies sought to put him quickly to death.

The local people, however, rose in opposition to his planned death. Charalambos had helped many afflicted people who were brought to him. The matter was brought up before Emperor Servius, who ordered the battered priest to be brought to Antioch, Syria. Once there, Charalambos was led through the streets with a horse's bit in his mouth. Then they nailed him to a cross. Not only did Charalambos refuse to relent, but he also refused to die. Then they ordered him to be beheaded. Just as his executioners were about to carry out the sentence, a voice said, "Well done, my faithful servant; enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." At that moment he died without a blow being struck, thus denying the pagans their revenge. The two executioners were immediately converted. He died for Christ in A.D. 192.

After his death, St. Charalambos body was placed in a golden coffin and many of his relics are preserved in Greece, e.g. a large portion of his sacred skull is treasured by the Monastery of St. Stephen, Meteora, where it performs miracles to this day. Also, his wonderworking hand (photographed above) is treasured at the Monastery of the Mega Spileon (the Great Cave) in Kalavryta, Greece.

Our Patriarchate holds an annual feast on February 23 to honor Saint Charalambos at the monastery named after him, which is located in the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, north of the Holy Sepulcher.

THE THREE HIERARCHS AND ECUMENICAL TEACHERS: BASIL, GREGORY, AND JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

An article by: Heba Hrimat

During the reign of Emperor Alexius Comnenus (1081-1118), a debate arose in Constantinople between men of knowledge and faith about the Church Fathers Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, about who surpasses the other in explaining the mysteries of faith, and rose to angelic rank by his virtues.

Partisans of St. Basil argued that he was the founder of monastic life and the leader of the church in its struggles with heresy, that he was strict and was the patron of Christian morals, in him there was nothing base or of the earth. Therefore, in their view, he was superior to Saint Chrysostom who was by nature more easily inclined to absolve sinners.

In response, partisans of Saint John Chrysostom argued that the Archbishop of Constantinople was no less enthusiastic than Saint Basil in fighting vices, bringing sinners to repentance and raising the entire people to the perfection of the Bible. Their argument was based on the fact that the golden-mouthed shepherd of matchless eloquence has watered the Church with a stream of homilies in which he interprets the divine word and shows its application in daily life with more accomplished mastery than the two other holy teachers.

As for the third group, they preferred Saint Gregory the Theologian over others for the majesty, purity and depth of his language, and for his possession of absolute sovereignty

over the ancient Greek wisdom and eloquence, so they said that no one was able to express the doctrine of the Holy Trinity perfectly as he.

As a result, the entire Christian people were soon caught up in the dispute which resulted in endless distress and controversy. Then one night, the three priests appeared in a dream of Saint John Morbus, separately at first, then together and, speaking with a single voice, they said: "As you see, the three of us are with God and no discord or rivalry divides us. Each of us, according to the circumstances and according to the inspiration that he received from the Holy Spirit, wrote and taught what befits the salvation of mankind. There is not among us a first, a second or a third, and if you invoke one of us the other two are immediately present with him. Therefore, tell those who are quarreling not to create divisions in the Church because of us, for when we were on earth we spared no effort to re-establish unity and concord in the world. You can conjoin our three commemorations in one feast and compose a service for it, inserting the hymns dedicated to each of us according to the skill and knowledge that God has given you. Then transmit it to the Christians with the command to celebrate it each year. If they honor us thus as being with and in God, we give them our word that we will intercede for their salvation in our common prayer".

Immediately, Saint John gathered the Christian people and informed them of this revelation. And because he was respected by everyone for his virtue and strong rhetoric, the three parties reached peace and unity, and they urged the saint to choose a day to celebrate a joint feast of the three fathers as soon as possible. Thus St. John chose 30 January (according to the Eastern calendar) to hold the Synaxis, since January contains the feasts of the three saints: St. Basil on January 1st, St. Gregory on January 25th, and St. John (the transfer of his relics) on January 27th.

We are taught through the three holy Fathers, or the earthly

trinity as they are called in some of the wonderful troparia of their service, in their writings as well as in their lives to worship and glorify the Holy Trinity, the one God incarnate in three persons. These three saints shed light on true faith, denouncing the dangers and persecutions. And they left us, their descendants, this sacred inheritance with which we can also achieve utmost blessings and eternal life.

The month of January in the Eastern calendar is a busy month that includes the sanctification of the memory of many bishops and confessors, in which the Church summarizes the memory of all the saints who testified to the Orthodox faith through their writings and their lives. And at the end of this month, that is, on the joint feast of the Three Fathers, the ecclesiastical teaching service honors what it encompasses in lighting the hearts and minds of the believers by commemorating all the church fathers and the models of evangelical perfection established by the Holy Spirit and the Church's supporters and the pillars of prayer.

Feast of the synaxis of the three holy Fathers and Ecumenical teachers, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom takes place at the Patriarchate on annual bases in the Church of the Holy Trinity, which is inside the School of Zion, adjacent to the Orthodox cemetery, on January 30/February 12, and is often led by his eminence Archbishop Isidoros (the Chairman of the School Board), the school director Archimandrite Matheos, deacons and monks of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher, with the chanting of the students of the school.

ST. EUTHYMIUS THE GREAT

An article by Heba Hrimat

Born to pious parents after long years of childless marriage, his parents heard in a vision a voice saying "be of good cheer! God will grant you a son, who will bring joy to the church." Thus, the child was named Euthymius (good cheer). And because of his ascetic life and firm confession of the Orthodox Faith, he's called 'the Great'.

Devoted to church since a young age, St. Euthymius was eventually entrusted with the supervision of all the city monasteries. During Great Lent, he would withdraw into the wilderness. Due to the fact that his responsibility for the monasteries weighed heavily upon the ascetic and conflicted with his desire for stillness, he secretly left the city and headed to Jerusalem.

The saint settled into a solitary cell in the Tharan lavra, near Saint Theoctistus (September 3) who also lived in asceticism. They shared the same zeal for God and for spiritual struggles, and each strove to attain what the other desired. They had such love for one another that they seemed to share one soul and one will.

People seeking spiritual benefit began to flock to the hermits and brought them food. Gradually, a monastic community grew up around them. Several monks came from the Tharan monastery, among them Marinus and Luke. Saint Euthymius entrusted the supervision of the growing monastery to his friend Theoctistus.

In these years Saint Euthymius converted and baptized many Arabs. Among them were the Saracen leaders Aspebet and his son Terebon, both of whom Saint Euthymius healed of

sickness. Aspebet received the name Peter in Baptism and afterwards he was a bishop among the Arabs.

On the other hand, word of the miracles performed by Saint Euthymius spread quickly. Unable to bear human fame and glory, he secretly left the monastery, taking only his closest disciple Dometian with him to the Rouba desert and settled on Mt. Marda, near the Dead Sea.

In his quest for solitude, the saint explored the wilderness of Ziph and settled in the cave where David once hid from King Saul. Saint Euthymius founded a monastery beside David's cave, and built a church. During this time Saint Euthymius converted many monks from the Manichean heresy, he also healed the sick and cast out devils.

Visitors disturbed the tranquillity of the wilderness. Since he loved silence, the saint decided to return to the monastery of Saint Theoctistus. Along the way they found a quiet level place on a hill, and he remained there. This would become the site of Saint Euthymius' lavra, and a little cave served as his cell, and then as his grave.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate runs the monastery of St. Euthymius in the Old City of Jerusalem, which is two-minutes walk from the headquarters of the Patriarchate, next to the Monastery of our Lady of Sednaya.

COMMEMORATION OF THE HOLY MARTYR TRYPHON IN NEOCHORION

OF BOSPORUS

On Monday, 19 January/ 1 February 2021, the commemoration of the Holy Martyr Tryphon the Unmercenary was celebrated in Neochorion of Bosporus.

On this occasion the Representative of the Holy Sepulchre in Constantinople His Eminence Archbishop Nectarios of Anthedona has sent to the Patriarchate Website the following announcement from Neochorion Community:

“Today, 1 February 2021, an old tradition of Neochorion has been revived after several decades, as the Dependency of the Holy Sepulchre in Neochorion of Bosporus honoured the commemoration of the Holy Martyr Tryphon the Unmercenary. An icon and sacred relics of the Saint are kept at the H. Church of Saint George.

The Feast was officiated by the Representative of the Holy Sepulchre in our town, His Eminence Archbishop Nectarios of Anthedona. After the Divine Liturgy there was the blessing of bread, a trisagion was read for the repose of the souls of the old gardeners of the Community, along with prayers for the boiled wheat of the Saint, the fruits of the vine, and finally the blessing of the water for the vanishing of the insects that harm the vines.

Present at the festivities were the Sariger Mayor, Mr Soukrou Gents with his colleagues the Manageress of the Environment of our Municipality, Mrs Gioultzan Maltzi, the President of the Sariger Agricultural Chamber Mr Biglin Tsakiroglou, gardeners of the Sariger Municipality and of our Community, as well as a large crowd of parish members who honoured the Saint.

The tradition in the City of Cities is here to stay. Many Happy returns! From Neochorion Community”.

ST. THEODOSIUS THE GREAT

An article by Heba Hrimat

He was the founder of cenobitic monasticism, and the cave he settled into for over thirty years was, according to tradition, the place where the three Magi spent the night on their way back from the Nativity of the Lord.

Born in Cappadocia to pious parents, Saint Theodosius who lived in the fifth-sixth centuries, was gifted with a beautiful voice; he zealously toiled at church reading and chanting. However, deep in his heart he always yearned for the solitary life, and therefore he returned to the Holy Land which he had visited once in his youth, to permanently settle there, coincidentally in the same cave which hosted the three wise men.

When the cave could no longer hold all the monks, Saint Theodosius established the first cenobitic monastery, or Lavra (meaning 'broad' or 'populous'). Soon the Lavra of Saint Theodosius became renowned, and up to 700 monks gathered there.

A certain miracle would take place at the Lavra repeatedly every time Saint Theodosius wanted to help the destitute. It first started when there was a famine in Palestine and a multitude of people gathered at the monastery, Saint Theodosius gave orders to allow everyone into the monastery

enclosure. His disciples were annoyed, knowing that the monastery did not have the means to feed all those who had come. But when they went into the bakery, they saw that through the prayers of the Saint, it was filled with bread.

Saint Theodosius was extremely compassionate. He built a home at the monastery for taking in strangers, separate infirmaries for monks and laymen, and a shelter for the dying. Seeing that people from various lands gathered at the Lavra, the Saint arranged for services in the various languages: Greek, Georgian and Armenian. All gathered to receive the Holy Mysteries in the large church, where divine services were chanted in Greek.

The Saint along with his monks suffered persecution on the hands of the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius (491-518). A period where the sacraments nor the clergy were recognized. The emperor accepted the false teaching, and the Orthodox began to suffer persecution. Saint Theodosius stood firmly in defense of Orthodoxy and wrote a letter to the emperor on behalf of the monks, in which they denounced him and refuted the heresy with the teachings of the Ecumenical Councils. The emperor showed restraint for a short while, but then he renewed his persecution of the Orthodox. The holy Elder then showed great zeal for the truth. Leaving the monastery, he came to Jerusalem and in the church, he stood at the high place and cried out for all to hear: "Whoever does not honor the four Ecumenical Councils, let him be anathema!" For this bold deed the monk was sent to prison, but soon freed after the death of the emperor.

The area of Palestine witnessed numerous miracles during the time of the holy Saint. He once destroyed, through his prayers, the locusts devastating the fields in Palestine, soldiers were saved from death, and he also saved those perishing in shipwrecks and those lost in the desert.

Saint Theodosius died at the age of 105, exactly three days

after revealing to his beloved bishops that he would soon depart to the Lord. His body was buried with reverence in the cave in which he lived at the beginning of his ascetic life, now enclosed underneath the large monastery named after him on the road to Bethlehem.

More about the monastery of Saint Theodosius:

Known in Arabic as the monastery of Dossi or Ibn Ubayd, the monastery is located 10 km east of Beit Sahour, and is built on the ruins of the monastery founded by Saint Theodosius himself in the year 465 AD. The cave in which the three wise men rested from their journey, remains as one of the most important parts in the monastery. During the 5th and 7th centuries, the monastery witnessed its best era where it contained four churches with 700 monks living inside the Lavra, while 2500 monks and nuns lived around the monastery.

Besides the main church where the service was held, there used to be a school for theology, workshops, animal stables and other facilities, all of which were short-lived due to the Persian invasion of the region in 614 CE, which also resulted in the massacre of 5,000 monks. The monastery slowly returned to prosperity in the 11th and 12th centuries. In the time of Crusaders in the 15th century, the monastery became a refuge for Bedouin tribes of Ibn Ubayd, hence the name.

In 1881 AD, the director of the Holy Cross Theological School purchased the ruins of the monastery from the Bedouins, and in 1896 AD the Patriarch of Jerusalem at that time laid the foundation stone for the new monastery. The current building dates to 1952 AD.

Annual Patriarchal vigil is held at the monastery on January 10/23 to commemorate the great Saint Theodosius, while the monastery opens its gates to believers and visitors daily from

8 am – 3 pm.