

THE FEAST OF SAINTS JOHN AND GEORGE THE HOZEVITES

On Thursday, 8/21 January 2021, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of Saints John and George the Hozevites.

On this Feast, the Church, and especially the Church of Jerusalem commemorates Saint John. He abandoned the general pastoral care and retreated in the valley of Chorath, at the hermitages of the first ascetic fathers, Zenon, Elias, Eandas, Ganneos and Promos. Saint John made the former hermitage a Monastic centre and a famous Monastery due to his holiness and guided thousands of Monks in asceticism. Saint George came from Cyprus and reconstructed the Monastery after the 614 AD Persian raid.

The two Saints are considered to be the founders of the Monastery due to their mission there.

Their commemoration was celebrated with an All-night Vigil, officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

Welcoming His Beatitude, the Hegoumen and renovator of the Monastery, Archimandrite Constantine said the following:

“Your Beatitude, Father and Master,
with Your Reverend Entourage

The Holy Founders of this Holy Lavra, John and George the Hozevites, came in the desert of Judea, a desert, arid and harsh land, having first renounced the world. Through their asceticism and cleansing from the passions, they stroke the devil very hard, right here, at the centre of his kingdom, the desert!

It is with great emotion that I always remember the inspired

words of our father, Hieromonk Anthony, the memorable predecessor of my mediocrity, who told to a pilgrim in 1991 about the monastic, ascetic life and of the Hozevite Saints.

Among other things, Fr Anthony had said: "...we are never alone. You feel the presence of the Saints here. And you feel much security...There is a different kind of grace in the Desert, and we are very peaceful! And we are always optimistic!

God is with us, when, of course, we are on God's path, and when we strive...

We have to be ready at first, and then God comes. We invoke Him. And the Fathers here, of course, have much to tell us. The Saints set an example with their lives, they showed us ways and paths, so that we may easily gain the life ever after, the eternal one, the life that "endures forever" and exchange the temporary things with the eternal ones...

Christ is the Truth, the Way, the Life, Everything!

Surely for many people the monastic life is strange, a challenge, how can one live by himself, without comforts, without a homeland, without relatives, without all these things that seem to be the meaning of life in our days...Nevertheless, where Christ is, there is no need whatsoever for anything...

We have the Mother of God here, the Protector. And the prayers of the Saints, of the Holy Fathers!

Because they showed us the way, they unmasked the devil with their lives, with their manner of living, they renounced the world completely, not out of hatred for the world, but out of love for the world...And out of love for God...Here the Fathers exist. The Fathers' books exist, we open, read them and choose...

It's either Christ or chaos!!"

Such words, Your Beatitude, came from our Father Anthony then, and bringing his words to the present day, amidst the horrible pandemic, which is a plague for the world, we draw hope, patience, serenity and optimism from our faith in Jesus Christ, His Most Holy Mother, the Holy Founders of this Monastery, John and George the Hozevites, and from all the Saints.

As Your Sons, we welcome Your Beatitude, wishing: Happy Feast!"

Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were their Eminences; Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, as the chanting was delivered by the Monastery Monks and Mr Vasilios Gotsopoulos.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

"Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands: Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious"(Psalm 66:1-2), the psalmist proclaims.

Beloved Fathers and Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians

The grace of our Holy Father George has gathered us all in this sacred place of the Jordan desert, of Hozeva, in order to rend glory to the Holy Trinitarian God, on the sacred commemoration of His Saint, the one that Lord sanctified; the Lord, who sanctifies those who love Him.

Today, Christ is born in Bethlehem of Judea and is baptized in the Jordan, the Church of the nations is mystically purified and puts on clothing of divine light. The truth has come, God hath appeared to those who sit in the shadow, He who was born from the Virgin has come to save our nation; Saint Andrew of Crete says.

Our Holy Father George longed to be dressed in this garment of the divine light, hearkening to Saint Paul's words: "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked" (2 Cor. 5:2-3).

These clothes of the New Testament's grace, namely of Christ's light, did Saint George find in this deserted place of Hozeva, the Jordan district, where "our Lord God, having seen us naked, hath appeared to clothe us in the first robe again. Christ hath appeared, for He truly willeth to renew all creation" (Minaion January 2, apolytikion).

Saint John the Baptist's preaching for repentance turned the Jordan desert into the New Adam's Paradise, namely, a garden of repentance and spiritual progress and development, where numerous ascetics retreated "Seeing [that they] have purified their souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit" (1 Peter 1:22). The Lavra of Monks that was founded by our Holy Father George became a dwelling place, in which those who longed and still long for "the salvation of the Lord and the studying of his law" (Psalm 119:174), come to know the dynasty and the glory of the majesty of His Kingdom (Psalm 145:12). And this is because, according to the psalmist, "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth" (Psalm 145:18). And according to our Lord Jesus Christ, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6).

Interpreting these words of the Lord, Zigavinos says: "the birth is not carnal, but spiritual...the carnal birth is felt by the senses; while the spiritual one is noetic, and there is no need to examine the noetic with the senses, nor in a human manner that which is divine". And Saint Theophylaktos says: "the baptized does not become a divine spirit, but he is deemed worthy to receive the adoption and the grace and the honour in Spirit".

This very adoption in the Spirit and the grace and the honour did Saint George and all those who followed him in his ascetic striving receive, such as Saint John, Bishop of Caesarea of Palestine, and our contemporary Saint John the New Hozevite from Romania, whose fragrant relics rest before our eyes. These Holy Hozevite Fathers, who illumined the whole world with their miracles, say along with Saint Paul: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:3-5).

The Holy Church of Jerusalem rejoices and is glad because God is miraculous in the protection of His Saints. "God is wondrous in his saints" (Ps. 67:36), King-Prophet David chants. Indeed, God makes his Saints victors over death and corruption, as the hymnographer of Saint George says: "Thou didst utterly despise every delight of this life, O marvellous Father, for the sake of heavenly delight and glory; for thou wast diligent to quench the furnace of the passions with a hard way of life and with thy many tears, O George, august adornment of monks" (Minaion January 8, Ode nine, Troparion 1).

Yes, my dear Brethren, Saint George scorned every delight, arrogance and luxury of this world for the heavenly glory. Therefore, along with Saint Paul and the other Holy Fathers, he says: "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:20-21). This great truth is being witnessed by the incorrupt relics of all the Saints, Fathers and Ascetics who illumined this Holy Lavra of

Hozeva.

This redeeming message of Saint Paul, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21), is what our Holy Father George along with all his Hozevite co-ascetics saying to all of us. And with the hymnographer, let us say: "To the Lord God Who did descend to the Hebrew Children in the fiery furnace and did transform the flames and the burning heat into dew, chant praises and hymns, O all ye works of His, and exalt Him greatly to ages and all ages" (Minaion, January 8, Ode nine, Heirmos). Amen. Many happy returns!"

The Vigil was followed by a Monastic meal.

From Secretariat-General