

# THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS AT THE HOLY MONASTERY OF MARTHA AND MARY IN BETHANY

On Saturday, April 27/14, 2023, a Divine Liturgy was officiated by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos in the Holy Monastery of Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus in Bethany. Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were their Eminences, Metropolitan Isychios of Capitolas, and Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina. The chanting was delivered by Mr Eustathios Tsoumanis and Monk Joseph from Mount Athos, as the service was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos and the Consul Mrs Anna Mantika, many local faithful and some pilgrims.

Before the Holy Communion, His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“O Lord Thy voice destroyed the dominion of hell, and the word of Thy power raised from the tomb him that had been four days dead; and Lazarus became the saving first-fruits of the regeneration of the world” (Friday Vespers, stichera of the Saint), the hymnographer of the Church proclaims.

Beloved brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims

The grace of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of our God and Saviour Christ, has gathered us all in this town of Bethany, where Lazarus was born, and in this place where Lazarus' sister Martha met Jesus, to celebrate the raising from the dead of the holy, righteous friend of Christ, Lazarus, who was

four days dead.

According to the true testimony of Saint John the Evangelist, Martha said to Jesus: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11,21). "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11,25-26).

In interpreting Christ's words, Saint Augustine says: "The one who believes in Christ will die due to the death of the flesh, but will never die due to the life of the spirit and immortality and resurrection". Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "The one that believes in Him [Christ], will have endless life in the ages to come, full of beatitude and incorruption".

According to the hymnographer of the Church, Christ, along with His disciples, went from the place beyond the River Jordan to Bethany, where His friend Lazarus had died, to certify the abstract energy and power of His divinity. "As true God Thou hast known of the falling asleep of Lazarus and hast announced it beforehand to Thy disciples, giving them proof, O Master, of the infinite power of Thy divinity" (Mattins, Ode 6, Troparion 4), the hymnographer exclaims. Moreover, to confirm before His Passion, the general resurrection. "Giving us before Thy Passion an assurance of the general resurrection, Thou hast raised Lazarus from the dead" (Apolytikion), the hymnographer exclaims again.

Because the redeeming Passion of Christ on the Cross was approaching, He shook the power of the death through the resurrection of Lazarus who had been four days dead. He also foretold His three-day burial and His resurrection.

So, we cannot but wonder; What does the "general resurrection" mean? The general resurrection is the resurrection of our Saviour Christ. The resurrection of the God-man Christ refers to the human flesh that He received from the pure flesh of the

Theotokos Mary through the Holy Spirit. In other words, the general resurrection of Christ means the freedom of all men from the corruption of sin.

It is noteworthy that the "freedom of all men from corruption" should not be interpreted morally or metaphysically, but as a true fact, given that man's death is an undeniable truth.

Through the loud voice of Christ "Lazarus come forth!" (John 11,43), the life-giving power and the mission of the Son of Man are declared, as He assured the faithful, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5,24).

This transition from death to life was declared by the resurrection of Lazarus, who, according to Saint Andrew of Crete, "became the first fruits of the regeneration", that is, of Christ's resurrection.

Today, my dearly beloved, being in Bethany and foretasting the General Resurrection of our Saviour Christ, the Victor over death, let us say along with the hymnographer; By the prayers of the Most Pure Theotokos and the intercessions of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, grant us O Lord to see Your Passion on the Cross and Your glorious Resurrection, O friend of man. Many happy returns, and a Happy Easter. Amen".

A procession around the Monastery followed before the end of the service. Then the elderly Abbess Eupraxia hosted a modest reception in the rectory, with the Mayor of the Municipality of Bethany as the guest of honour.

The procession to the tomb of Lazarus followed, led by His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Capitolas, where the Gospel narrative according to Saint John on the resurrection of Lazarus was read. The feast concluded with the return to the Patriarchate Headquarters.

# **THE FEAST OF THE ADORATION OF THE CROSS AT THE HOLY MONASTERY OF THE CROSS**

On the Fourth Sunday of Lent, April 1/14, 2024, the feast of the Adoration of the Holy Cross was celebrated in the Holy Monastery of the Holy Cross, located in western New Jerusalem near the Jewish Parliament.

Following the Status Quo, this feast was also celebrated in the Holy Monastery of the Cross because of the tradition that the wood of the Cross, on which the Lord was crucified for our salvation, was planted by the righteous Lot in the place where the Holy Monastery is located following the directive of Patriarch Abraham.

On this occasion, Vespers was celebrated on Saturday afternoon by Holy Sepulchre Hieromonks with Archimandrite Ieronymos first in rank. On Sunday morning the Divine Liturgy was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with the co-celebration of their Eminences, Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Archbishops, Aristarchos of Constantina and Methodios of Tabor, the Dragoman Archimandrite Mattheos, the Hegoumen in Madaba, Archimandrite Ieronymos, Priest Ioannis Antoniou and other Priests. The service was attended by the representative of the Greek Consulate General in Jerusalem Mrs Anna Mandika and monks, nuns and members of our flock.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14), the wise Apostle Paul preaches.

Beloved brethren in Christ,

Dear Christians,

The power of the Holy and Life-giving Cross of our God and Saviour Christ has gathered us in this holy place, where the three-composed tree was planted and the Monastery of the Cross was built, so that we may solemnly and in thanksgiving venerate the Wood of the Cross, through which, “God our King, before the ages, he hath wrought salvation in the midst of the earth” (Ps. 73,12) as David prophetically sings.

Indeed, the one who through sufferings, even though he was finished on the Cross [Jesus] became the cause of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb. 5:9), as preached by Saint Paul.

The Holy Cross, which was shown to be the instrument of redemption, is inextricably linked to death, pain, and the blood of Christ, ” In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence” (Eph. 1, 7-8), as the wise Paul says again.

According to the revelation of the Evangelist John, the Cross is the saving tree, i.e. “the tree of life”. ” To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2,7). And in more detail: “To him who will win in the battle against Satan and sin, I will give him to eat from the tree of life. In other words, I will claim him to enjoy the eternal goods in the Paradise of my Father, Who according to my human nature is

also my God", says the Lord.

Athanasios the Great, admiring the plan of God, Who through the cross leads the faithful to salvation and defeats the work of the devil, says: "O divine true wisdom and heavenly thinking! The Cross was set up and idolatry was destroyed. A Cross was raised and a diabolical dynasty was condemned" (P.G. 28, 1056)

The devil was condemned out of God's infinite love for man: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. 5, 1-2), Paul preaches.

It is worth noting that the living offering and sacrifice of Christ was made on the wood of the Cross, which is why the Cross is also called an "altar" where "the Lamb of God [was placed] which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Greater still ... here the gift of the altar is laid and by the gift the altar is sanctified".

In other words, Christ, Who is the gift, is "greater", i.e. superior to the altar, therefore the altar, i.e. the wood of the cross, is sanctified by the offered gift, the sacrificed Christ. According to St. John of Damascus, the wood of the cross is true and venerable, in which Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for us...sanctified by the grace of the Holy Body and Blood", therefore "venerated". Moreover, "we also venerate the type of the honourable and life-giving cross, even if it is made from other material, not honouring the material, not the birth, but the type as a symbol of Christ".

In his homily, Saint Sophronios Patriarch of Jerusalem on the veneration of the Holy and Life-giving Cross in the middle week of Holy Pentecost, says in praise: "Hail, Holy Cross, where the Son and Word of God rested His hands and hugged us and brought us to Heavenly Father ... and in you, Holy Cross,

the divine blood of the Son and Word of the invisible Father was shed".

This Holy Cross was prefigured by the Tree of Life, the one planted in heaven by God (where death is through wood, so through wood life and resurrection are given). "This Holy Cross was prefigured by the tree of life, which was planted in Heaven by God. Because death came through wood, life and resurrection had to come through wood" St. John of Damascus says.

And because our God is the Saviour, all people will be saved (Tim. 1' 2-4) first He planted the tree of life in the middle of Paradise, when the fullness of time had not come, he planted the tree of salvation in the secret Paradise, that is, in the Virgin Mary, from whom Christ sprung from her pure blood, as Saint Cosmas Bishop of Maiuma exclaims in a hymn, saying: "O Theotokos, thou art a mystical paradise, which being untilled hath blossomed forth Christ, by Whom the life-giving Tree of the Cross was planted in the earth. In worshipping Him now through its exaltation, thee do we magnify" (Katavasiae of the Cross, Ode 9).

The fruit of the life-giving tree of the Cross, my beloved brothers, is the body and blood of Christ risen from the dead, of which we are called to eat and drink according to His command: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." (John 6:53). " He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:56).

The wise Paul often refers to the redemptive blood of Christ's Cross. And this is because, through this blood, we are redeemed (Romans 5,9), we are bought (Eph'. 1,7), we become God's property (Acts 20,28) and the unity and communion between believers in the eucharistic cup is declared (Cor. 10,16/11, 25-28). Moreover, the death of the Lord is reported, and His coming is declared "For as often as ye eat this bread,

and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

This is why St. John of Damascus says in a hymn: We glorify your life-giving Cross, Christ God, your three-day Resurrection, for by it you renewed the corrupt nature of men, and raised it to the heavens forever, as the only good and philanthropist.

Let us, my beloved brothers, beseech the Mother of God, who gave birth to the One who was lifted up on the Cross, so that by the great power of the Holy Cross we may reach the luminous Resurrection of our Saviour. Amen. Many happy and peaceful returns".

The Liturgy was followed by the service and procession of the Adoration of the Holy Cross.

Finally, the Hegoumen Archimandrite Christodoulos hosted a modest treat at the rectory.

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE THEOTOKOS AT THE SHRINE OF THE ANNUNCIATION IN NAZARETH**

On Sunday, March 25 / April 7, 2024, the feast of the Annunciation of Our Lady the Theotokos was celebrated in



Nazareth.

On this feast, the whole Church, especially that in Jerusalem, commemorates the fact that the fullness of time has come, God through the Archangel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary in the city of Nazareth that by the Holy Spirit she will incarnate the Only Begotten Son and His Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. In parallel and according to the standard of the fixed calendar, the feast of the veneration of the Holy Cross was celebrated to strengthen us in the struggle of fasting for the reception of Holy Easter.

On the occasion of this holiday, a celebration was held for a Divine Liturgy in the Holy Church-Shrine of the Annunciation of the Theotokos in Nazareth, presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos. Concelebrating with Him were their Eminences, the Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Archbishops; Damascene of Yaffo, Aristarchos of Constantina, Methodios of Tabor, Holy Sepulchre Hieromonks, with first in rank the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, the Head of the Russian Spiritual Mission in Jerusalem (MISSIA) Archimandrite Vassianos, Priests of the area of Nazareth and Acre, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacon Eulogios, at the attendance of a large congregation. The chanting was delivered by the choir of Nazareth and the choir of Beersheba under the Most Reverend Archbishop of Aristovoulos of Madaba in the presence of the President of the Nazareth Community Mr Bassim Asfour, the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel Mr Cezar Marjieh, the representative of the Greek Embassy to Tel Aviv Mr Nikolaos Mavroedis and the representative of Russia to Israel Mr Vladimir Victorov.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (Isaiah 7,14 / Matt. 1,23), Isaiah prophesized and the Evangelist Matthew interprets.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims

The grace of the Holy Spirit which overshadowed the Virgin Mary has gathered us all in this holy place of the biblical city of Nazareth to celebrate the great and redeeming mystery of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, as the psalmist says: “Sing unto the Lord, bless His Name; proclaim from day to day the good tidings of His salvation” (Ps 95,1).

These words of David, “the salvation of God”, are no other than the reply of Archangel Gabriel to the wondering Mariam “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Luke 1,34), “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore, also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1,35).

Both the Old and the New Testament are the holy history, the revelation, the revealing of the eternal wisdom and will of God, which is no other than “the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16,25), which was announced to the Virgin Mary, revealed in Christ and preached by the Apostles. This is the One who “shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1,32). The greeting of the Archangel Gabriel, “Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women” (Luke 1,28), and Mariam’s words, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1,38), made Mariam the Mother of God, a partaker and contributor to “the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the

world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever" (Romans 16,25-27), Saint Paul preaches. And in more detail; this mystery has been revealed now, and it has been confirmed by the prophecies in the scriptures and has become known to all the nations by God's command, so that they may display the obedience befitting to faith. Such an example of obedience of faith was the Virgin Mariam, obeying the words of Archangel Gabriel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1,38). "Obedience is displayed by faith, not by much knowledge. And when God commands to obey, one should not examine how", Saint John of Damascus says.

Moreover, the Lord Himself "became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5,9), while the Virgin Mariam was "Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" (1 Tim. 3,9). That is why the Archangel told her, "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus" (Luke 1,30-31). Saint Theophylaktos says about this, "Righteously He was called Jesus, who came for the salvation of our race; for this name in Greek means salvation, therefore Jesus means salvation".

But what is the salvation, and what does the word saviour mean? "Salvation" is the correction of the foremother Eve's fault, as Saint John of Damascus says, "Rejoice, Mary, thou the only one blessed among women, who has corrected Eve's fault". "Rejoice the only one blessed among women, thou who has raised the humble race of the fallen women". "Rejoice, for through you we have been saved from an unspeakable curse and have been filled with joy".

"Saviour" means the new Adam, that is God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who was conceived in flesh from the Holy Spirit

by the pure flesh of the Virgin Mary. "Rejoice, thou who art full of grace", thou who are above all joy and name, from whom the unspeakable joy Christ, is born unto the world and has become the healing of Adam's sorrow", Saint John of Damascus exclaims.

Adam's sorrow is the sin, the death, which befell upon humankind through the first created Adam, while salvation is bestowed through Jesus Christ, who is the "healing", the new Adam, who was born unto the world, the Son and Word of God. He was conceived in a manner incomprehensible to any mind from the pure flesh of the Virgin Mary, that is why the hymnographer of the Church says, "Today the preludes of universal joy move us to sing the prefestal hymn; for behold Gabriel cometh, bringing the good tidings to the Virgin, and shall cry to her: Rejoice, thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee" (Apolytikion).

It is noteworthy that the grace Mariam received from God is the same grace that God has given to the members of the Church, "Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1,23) according to Paul. In other words, in the most blessed Virgin Mary the Theotokos, we see the mystery of the Church which God loved and sanctified, "as His bride" (cf. Eph. 5,32). "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom" (John 3,29), John the Evangelist says. The bride is the humankind, which is wed to Christ through the Virgin Mary, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says.

This event, my dear ones, shows the strong bond of the mystery of the Virgin Theotokos and of the mystery of the Church. That is why Saint John of Damascus exclaims, "Rejoice, thou who art full of grace, through whom we have become members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church".

We praise and magnify today the Virgin Mary who received the annunciation, "of the salvation of God" and ask her and the theologian John of Damascus: Extend thy mercy most pure Lady,

to those who know thee, and look favourably down upon thine servants and their works, and guide them in the path of peace, for all people's eyes are turned unto thee in hope, and have your intercession to your Son and God and our God, to whom be all glory the power and the might, together with His Father without beginning, and the Holy Spirit of the same one essence, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen. Have a blessed Lent and a holy Pascha, through which Adam returned to Paradise".

At the end of the Liturgy, there was a supplication for the donors of the renovation of the shrine and the whole Church, followed by the scouts' parade.

A small reception followed in the hall of the Metropolis.

At noon, a meal was hosted by the Holy Metropolis in a restaurant in the city. His Beatitude addressed those present at the meal through His following address:

"Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1,28).

Your Eminence, Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth,

Honourable President of the Ecclesiastical Council and respected members,

Dear companions

Today our holy Church celebrates the great universal event of the Annunciation of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and the Adoration of the Precious and Life-giving Cross of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Annunciation of the Theotokos is the "chapter of the

salvation of humankind", while the Precious Cross refers to the salvation of the souls of the people. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8,36) the Lord says. "Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven" (Ps. 85,11), the psalmist proclaims.

This message of truth and righteousness is proclaimed by the Gospel of Christ, which has been preached all over the world by the Holy Apostles of Christ. The Mother of all Churches, our Church of Jerusalem has received this Gospel, as the holy consignment from the Holy Apostles, especially from its first Hierarch, James, the Brother of God.

We say this, because Christ says, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12,46). This light was granted to the world by the Mother of God, who is praised and magnified today. This unwaning light shines in Christ and through Christ in His Church, and in the Church of Jerusalem, which is founded upon the redeeming blood of the Son of God on the Cross.

This event of the mystery of the Divine Providence and reverence is witnessed throughout the centuries by the Christian presence in the Holy Land, in the cities of Jerusalem Bethlehem and Nazareth.

No one can deny nor refute this truth, that is why we, my dear ones preach and confess the God of love and utmost philanthropy, the Sun of Righteousness and peace and are called to remain steadfast and unshakable in our holy mission. This is what the incarnate from the pure flesh of the Virgin Mary Son of God ordered His disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5,16).

We do not exaggerate in saying that the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the guarantee of the safekeeping

of our faith, intact and unblemished, and the undivided unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. In the Holy place of the Church of Jerusalem, at the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1,17). And in the blessed place of Nazareth, the Virgin Mary became a receiver of God's grace, hearing the words, "Rejoice, thou who art full of grace".

Many happy and peaceful returns, and a Blessed Pascha!"

Following this, His Eminence Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth addressed His Beatitude as follows:

"Your Beatitude, Father and Master,

*"Today is the Gospel of joy, virgin festival, those below are joined to those above, Adam is renewed, or Eve is freed from the first sorrow"*! The philanthropy of our Triune God towards us who are made of earth is an inexplicable and unspeakable mystery! The "eternal secret and unknown to angels" through our Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, to us on earth was revealed here, in the Holy City of Nazareth through the Archangel of the Heavenly Powers Gabriel, who was sent to *"bring... the word of salvation"*.

Today we welcome, our Father and Patriarch, like another Archangel Gabriel *"proclaiming the word of truth"*, sealing the archangelic hymn *"Hail, thou who art full of grace"* and presiding over the Feast!

Your Beatitude, we express from the bottom of our hearts gratitude to Your grace, for everything you have contributed to the support of this God-given province. The renovation works in the Holy Shrine of the Annunciation and in the Metropolitan Holy Church of Saint George, following the blessing and exhortation of Your Beatitude, are commemorated here, works which will remain indelible in time, testifying to the glorious governing of the Church of Jerusalem by Your Holy Beatitude.

Your Beatitude, we wholeheartedly pray that the Lord our God, through the intercessions of the Most Gracious Theotokos Mary and the Archangel Gabriel, grant You good health to continue the wise steering of the mental ship of the Mother of all Churches, the Holy Zion! Many returns.”

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **DOXOLOGY ON THE NATIONAL ANNIVERSARY OF MARCH 25, 1821**

On Monday, March 12/25, 2024, at 10.30 a.m. a Doxology was held in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the national anniversary of March 25, 1821.

This Doxology was held as a prayer to God for the repose of the souls of the heroes and all the fighters of the holy war of 1821 and as a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His help to our nation, to shake off the unbearable yoke of Ottoman slavery and conquer not only freedom in Christ but also human freedom.

H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos presided over this Doxology, with the co-celebration of High Priests of the Patriarchate, at the honorary presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos and members of the Hellenic Parish.

His Beatitude addressed those present in the Patriarchate Hall with the following address:

“It is time to shake off this unbearable yoke, to liberate the Motherland... to raise the mark by which we always win! I say



the Cross, so that we may avenge our Homeland and our Orthodox Faith from the impious contempt of the impious." From the proclamation of Alexandros Ypsilantis in Iasion, February 24, 1821.

Your Excellency Consul General of Greece Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos,

Dear Holy Fathers and Brothers,

Beloved brethren in the Lord.

The uprising of March 25, 1821, the anniversary of which we are celebrating, holds a prominent timeless position in world history. And this is because the Greek Revolution marked the ethno-religious rebirth of the Roman race from the ashes of the tyrannical slavery of the Ottomans on the one hand, and awakened the consciousness of peoples and nations deprived of their national freedom and independence on the other.

The enslaved Greeks, inspired by the order of the Apostle Paul: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5,1), rebelled against the unbearable Turkish yoke "Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine" (Ps. 78,65), as the psalmist says, exclaiming with a loud voice, "Freedom or Death". Bishop Palaion Patron Germanos declared the beginning of the liberating struggle blessed and exalted the Banner of the Revolution, whose slogan according to the "Elder of Moria" Theodoros Kolokotronis was "now the struggle for the holy faith of Christ and the freedom of the country".

This irrefutable fact is also proven by the proclamation of Alexandros Ypsilantis in Iasion on February 24, 1821, in which he declares: "It is time to shake off this unbearable yoke, to liberate the Motherland... to raise the mark by which we always win! I say the Cross, so that we may avenge our Homeland and our Orthodox Faith from the impious contempt of the impious".

The special feature of the Revolution of 1821 is the fact that heroes of Patriotism and martyrs of the Faith emerged, so the Greek Romans are recognized as genuine imitators and indisputable continuations of their ancestors, but also guardians of the moral values and truths of the Greek-Christian tradition.

All the enslaved Greek land and space turns into a field of rebellion and hostilities. The now invincible desire for redemption from the sufferings of slavery overcame the fear of a foreign and non-religious conqueror.

It is worth noting that today's anniversary of the national rebirth of 1821 is not only about the celebration of this historical memory but mainly and primarily about the "beginning of knowledge" of this moral and even to the point of blood sacrificial, ethno-religious achievement. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge... and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge" (Prov. 1,7,22), the wise Solomon says.

We say this because the Revolution of 1821 remains an eternal bright light, in our modern world of confusion, ignorance and the desires of hubris, of common universal moral values, especially of national freedom "from the bones of the sacred Greeks" according to the great poet Dionysios Solomos.

The contribution of the Church to the above-all national struggle was universal and decisive through the active participation of its clergy, including members of our Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood. Countless Hierarchs, such as Palaion Patron Germanos, the Bishops Isaiah of Salona and Joseph of Roga, the Archbishop Kyprianos in Cyprus and priests such as the Holy Martyr Cosmas Aetolos and simple monks, watered the tree of freedom with the blood of their martyrdom.

Our Venerable Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood, gratefully honouring and dutifully participating in the sacred memory of the

rebirth of our pious Roman race and nation, came to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre of our Saviour Christ, where we rendered thanksgiving praise to the Holy Triune God. Moreover, we prayed fervently for eternal rest in the land of the living for the blessed souls of those who fought heroically for Faith and Country and fell gloriously, in the holy struggle of our nation.

Therefore, allow Us to raise our glass and exclaim as we should:

Long live March 25, 1821!

Long live the pious and royal race of the Rum Orthodox!

Long live Greece!

Long live our Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood!

This was followed by the address of the Consul General of Greece as follows:

“Your Beatitude,

Your Eminences,

Your Excellency Representative of Cyprus in Palestine,

Your Excellency Representative of Ireland to the Palestinian Authority,

Respected fathers and members of the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood,

Dear compatriots and friends,

It is easy today, 200 and 3 years after the National Uprising of 1821, to often consider the Revolution and its happy

outcome as an inevitable development, which was bound to come, to achieve the liberation of the Greeks and the fulfilment of their desire for independence. This certainty is, in one sense, a measure of the success of our country, which has managed, through the intervening two centuries, to ensure the stability that allows us to look towards the future, stepping on solid foundations.

However, two centuries ago, none of this was a given. Neither the Revolution nor much more its outcome was a necessity imposed by the flow of History. Our Nation's noble Struggle for freedom was undertaken in an international environment of adversity. The agreement between the Great Powers of the time, at the base of the Congress of Vienna, the Holy Alliance, aimed at maintaining the status quo, the absolutist order of things, after the experience of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Every revolutionary movement, whatever its motives, was a threat and had to be suppressed.

Unfavourable were also the circumstances of our Nation, which, for four centuries of cruel tyranny, struggled to preserve its identity, its faith and its values, its very language and its historical consciousness. The work of the Church in this regard was of decisive importance and the gratitude of Hellenism is due to it. As well as the work of numerous learned personalities, inside and outside the Greek territory, and of all those who with patience and self-sacrifice dedicated themselves to the rebirth of Greek education and intellect and to the Greek Enlightenment movement.

The available resources were also weak at the beginning of the Revolution. Little money, equipment and supplies, against the forces of an empire. The compensation for these shortcomings was the patient preparation of the Revolution, the military experience of a few but capable men, the careful utilization of every opportunity offered by the international situation and above all the mobilization of all the forces of the Nation, in the revolted country and abroad, for the

realization of the vision of freedom. And boldness, with unwavering faith in the justice of this vision.

Under these conditions, the Struggle began, in 1821. Its unexpected military successes shook the certainty that it would be crushed. With the mobilization of the forces of the Greek diaspora and people favouring Greece, who believed in the principles of freedom, the developments on the battlefield gradually established the prospect of its success. The Church contributed the most to the support of the Struggle, on a material and spiritual level, as well as personalities who played a leading role in its success. Its sacrifices were similar, from the martyrdom of Patriarch Gregory V to the battlefields.

This is the most brilliant epic of our modern history, which founded modern Greece. Simultaneously with the war on land and sea, modern political institutions were being born, in an era dominated by autocracy. From the very first year of the Revolution, the insurgent Greeks drew up Constitutions, which established a democratic state, with provisions for the separation of powers, individual and political rights, absolute abolition of slavery in Greek territory, and for foreigners who would resort to it. The struggle of the Greeks for their freedom was associated from the beginning with universal values, which throughout time defined the identity of Hellenism.

But let us not forget that it was an inconclusive fight to the end, long, hard and covered in blood. Greek populations in the Greek area, the coasts of Asia Minor, Cyprus and elsewhere suffered massacres in retaliation for the Revolution. And here, in the Holy Land, Greeks, Christians and the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood paid their own price of persecution.

We must also not overlook that the revolutionary struggle has not only bright pages but also painful, dark chapters. The discord sowed its pernicious seed also during the Revolution,

which also experienced civil conflicts, while its survival hung by a thread. Let us also look at these mistakes face to face, soberly drawing their lessons.

The long struggle of Hellenism succeeded. The vision of freedom was fulfilled and in 1830 Greece officially took its place among the sovereign states. After nine years of war, the country was devastated, with widows, orphans, the homeless and the disabled in need of immediate care. Within suffocating borders, with  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the Greeks left outside them. The new Greek state began its course in history, small, poor and bruised.

However, it had been born. In the two centuries that followed, a time of intense developments for all of humanity, Greece, with the same devotion of its citizens that characterized the fighters of the rebirth, managed to overcome, grow and develop, cope with many other challenges and emerge stronger.

Today, it enjoys international respect for its place in the world, with strong friendships and alliances. It progresses by preserving its traditions and its values. Its course is the best justification for the labour and blood of our ancestors, who in 1821, against all odds, attempted what was considered impossible.

Greece can look to the future with confidence equal to the pride with which it reflects on its past. With the same sober confidence, it can work for the promotion of the values of Hellenism in the world and the defence of its timeless priorities and interests. Among them, Your Beatitude remains the preservation of the Christian presence and heritage in the Holy Land and the rights of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

As we celebrate our national anniversary today, let us wish for peace to come to the Holy Land. The war conditions in our region and the respect for human suffering, especially the weak, do not allow solemn celebrations. But they urge us to reflect on the historical experiences of our own country. From

this stems its steadfast support for peace and justice among nations.

Many happy returns. Long live Greece.”

**From Secretariat-General**

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# **THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY AT THE PATRIARCHATE**

The Sunday of the 11th / 24th of March 2024 was celebrated by the Patriarchate as the first Sunday of Lent and as the Sunday of Orthodoxy, that is, as a memory of the restoration of the holy icons after more than a hundred years of unholy and impious persecution against them.

This feast was celebrated as a triumph of the icons due to their return to the Holy Churches by the Patriarch of Constantinople Methodios and the Empress Theodora and her son Michael. Empress Theodora asked God for forgiveness for her husband, Emperor Theophilos the fighter of the icons, through a litany. Since then, the Church unwaveringly and undisturbedly honours the holy icons as a certification and confirmation of the mystery of the incarnation of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This true and redeeming event was celebrated in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with Great Vespers on Saturday afternoon, which is called “parrhesia” and includes a reception and veneration at the Holy Deposition then at the Holy Sepulchre, and the Horrendous Golgotha, ringing of the church bells,

incense offering around the shrines, Great Entry and blessing of bread. The service was presided over by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with Hieromonks and deacons concelebrating, and faithful members of the Church of Jerusalem and a few pilgrims attending the prayer.

On Sunday morning the Divine Liturgy at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was officiated by His Beatitude with con-celebrants their Eminences, Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Archbishops, Theophanes of Gerash, Aristarchos of Constantina, Theodosios of Sebasteia, Dimitrios of Lydda, the Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios and other Holy Sepulchre Hieromonks, the representative of the Church of Russia Archimandrite Vassianos, the representative of the Church of Romania Archimandrite Theophilos, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacons Eulogios and Dositheos. The chanting was delivered by Hierodeacon Simeon and Mr Eustathios Tsoumanis, at the honorary presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos and the Ambassador of Georgia Mr Zaza Kandelaki.

After the Divine Liturgy, there was a litany, thrice around the Holy Sepulchre and the shrines.

At the end of the litany, the Synod of Orthodoxy was read in front of the Holy Sepulchre for the blessed memory of Patriarch Methodius, Empress Theodora and her son Michael and all the Patriarchs and Priests and Emperors, patrons of the saints and venerable icons, venerated not religiously but relatively speaking, as defined by the Canons of the Church and for the condemnation of all those fighting against the Holy icons.

After the Dismissal of the Divine Liturgy, the full congregation returned to the Patriarchate Hall, where His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos addressed those present as follows:



“The uncircumscribed Word of the Father became circumscribed taking flesh from thee, O Theotokos and He has restored the sullied image to its ancient glory, filling it with the divine beauty. This our salvation we confess in deed and word, and we depict it in the holy icons” (Triodion, Matins, Kontakion), the hymnographer says.

Today, the first Sunday of Lent, the Holy Church of Christ celebrates the commemoration of the restoration of the holy icons, by the late Sovereigns of Constantinople Michael and his mother Theodora, during the Patriarchal Office of the Saint and Confessor Methodius.

A hundred years and more, the persecution against the use and veneration of icons by the wicked emperors Leo of Isauros and Theophilos, husband of the pious empress Theodora, devastated the Church of Christ.

The veneration of the Holy icons of Christ, the Theotokos, the Angels and the Saints is a doctrine of the Orthodox faith and theology, formulated by the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea of Bithynia in 787. This doctrine derives from the fundamental doctrine of the incarnation of the second person of the Holy Trinity. The icon of our Saviour Jesus Christ is an irrefutable testimony of the true incarnation of the Word of God.

St. John of Damascus, the pre-eminent theologian of the image of Christ, also refers to Basil the Great and says: “From the beginning, God created man in His image. Whom, then, do we worship each other, if not as created in the image of God? As Basil the Great said, “the honour of the icon is attributed to the prototype”. The original is what is depicted, from which the derivative is made. And again, the Holy Father John of Damascus questions himself: “Of the invisible and incorporeal and indescribable and formless God, who can create an image? It is an extreme insanity and impiety to give shape to the divine... Then God, by His infinite mercy, truly became a man

for our salvation... but also in the essence of a man, He lived on earth “and he was acquainted with men” (Baruch 3.38), he worked miracles, he suffered, he was crucified, he rose, he was ascended in the heavens... and he was seen by men, he was written, (i.e. depicted) for our remembrance and teaching”.

This event of the restoration of the icons, which we solemnly celebrated today in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, was recognized as a triumph of Orthodoxy over false doctrines. Therefore, let us also hear the hymnographer singing and saying: “Celebrate with a feast the Christ-named people of the Lord, seeing the Church shining again the beauty of the divine form, as God was clothed in it, as a man to save us”.

We pray that the beauty of the divine form shines in the hearts and minds of those who govern the earth. Amen, many and peaceful returns”.

**From Secretariat-General**

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# **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**

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## **THE FEAST OF SAINT GERASIMOS OF THE JORDAN**

On Cheese fare Sunday, March 4/17, 2024, the commemoration of Saint Gerasimos of the Jordan was celebrated by the Patriarchate in the Holy Monastery built in his name on the West Bank of the Jordan River just before its mouth into the Dead Sea.

On this feast the Church, especially the Church of the Jerusalem, recalls that Saint Gerasimos was born in Lycia and came to the Holy Land on a pilgrimage in AD 451, initially

living as a monk in an anchorites' monastery by the Dead Sea. Seduced by the Monophysites, he went astray but returned to Orthodoxy under Saint Euthymius the Great. After this, he founded on the bank of the Jordan "a marvellous Lavra" and in it a Coenobion, having as a co-practitioner Saint Kyriakos. His life was marked by many wonderful works. He slept in the Lord in 475, becoming a guide to thousands of monks and lay people in the monastic life and in life in Christ.

According to tradition, on this day, the Cheese fare Sunday, all the ancient ascetics gathered in this Monastery of "Kalamonos", which was founded by Saint Gerasimos of the Jordan, and received the blessing of each Hegoumen and a little food to strengthen them at the beginning of the Holy and Great Lent and then they departed for their ascetic cells, to return again for the feast of Palms.

At the Holy Church of the Monastery, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos celebrated the Divine Liturgy with the co-celebration of their Eminences, Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Archbishops Aristarchos of Constantina, Nectarios of Anthedona, Philoumenos of Pella, the Elder Dragoman Archimandrite Mattheos, the Exarch in Moscow Archimandrite Stephanos, the Exarch in Athens Archimandrite Raphael, Archimandrites, Amphilochios, Claudius, Ieronymos and Kyriakos, other Priests, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacons Eulogios and Dositheos. The chanting was delivered by His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba and the Patriarchal School students, as the service was attended by local faithful and pilgrims from Cyprus and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

"The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry" (Ps. 34,15) "The eyes of the Lord are

turned favourably towards the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer”, the psalmist exclaims.

Beloved brethren in Christ,

Dear Christians,

The grace of the Holy Spirit brought us all to this holy place in the desert of the Jordan, where the Lavra of our holy and God-bearing Father Gerasimos of Lycia is located, so that we may solemnly honour his holy commemoration.

The blessed Gerasimos became one of the great recluses of those who shone in Palestine during the 5th century. During his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he visited the great monasteries of Palestine and settled permanently in the inner desert of the Jordan, where he built a great Lavra, which became marvellous according to the testimony of Cyril of Scythopolis, who writes in the Saint's biography: “Then he blessed Sabbas, in the thirty-fifth year of his age, having fulfilled his age... departed to the eastern desert of Saints Gerasimos the last ten days (= of that time) bright in a way (in a manner) shining and in the desert of the Jordan sowing seeds of piety”.

Indeed, the great Gerasimos shone as a luminary, i.e. he radiated the light of Christ's love and sowed the seeds of piety, i.e. the sanctifying and saving Orthodox faith. This fact is confirmed by the spiritual relationship that Abba Gerasimos had with Euthymios the Great, whom he met in the desert of Rouva during the Great Lent. “And during the time of the holy Lent, the holy Gerasimos received Abba Kyriakos the monk in his Lavra, in the desert of Rouva, who was quiet until the Feast of Palms on Sundays, receiving communion from the hands of the Great Euthymius. Shortly after the passage of time and the end of the Great Euthymius in Christ, Gerasimos among the saints, saw his soul led by angels and taken up to heaven. Abba Kyriakos took him up to his monastery and

returned the body after burying it", Cyril of Scythopolis testifies.

Our Father Gerasimos chose the anchorite's life in the desert according to David's word: "Lo I have fled afar off and have dwelt in the wilderness" (Ps. 54,8), and that was the desert of the Jordan, where Saint John the Baptist was the first to retreat to, preaching and saying: "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3,1-2).

In the desert of Jordan, Saint Gerasimos lived in stillness, that is, he had free time, so that after quietness, food abstinence and unceasing prayer he could know God according to what is written: " Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46,11). Interpreting this word, Athanasios the Great says: "Unless all worldly care is cast out, one cannot know God". "This task, then, is good for the learner and beneficial, quietly encouraging the ascension (knowledge) of the teachings of salvation", Basil the Great says.

And this "taking up, of the knowledge of the teachings of salvation" is none other than the divine wisdom, which according to Solomon: " For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets, for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom (Wisdom of Solomon 7, 26-28). To this "spotless mirror of the working of God" did our God-bearing Father Gerasimos attend to, according to the Evangelist John: " And we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

The divine love towards the heavenly king Christ is the power of the divine energy that reveals itself to those who have a



pure heart, the true light of eternal life, namely the Son and Word of God, Christ. The Saints of the Church are precisely distinguished in this, especially the martyrs and the secluded ascetics of the desert. "My love is crucified" (= Christ has been crucified) and there is no desire (= lust) for love in me; "living water" (John 4:10) and they say to me from within, go to the Father. I have no desire for the food of corruption or the pleasures of this life; I want the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, and I want a drink, his blood, which is incorruptible love", the Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer writes.

Saint Chrysostom, who lived ascetically, says: "I love all the saints, even the blessed Paul... I said this so that I could make you partakers of the potion (of love). Those who love physical love are really afraid to confess... and those who love spiritual love never stop confessing... that love is a crime, this one is a laud".

So this, my beloved brothers, is why we honour and praise the saints, like the blessed Gerasimos who is celebrating today. It is a fact that Christians do indeed participate in divine holiness through the gift of the Holy Spirit and appear "in the holy temple" (Eph. 2:21) and "a holy nation". " But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2,9), the supreme Apostle Paul preaches.

In other words, my beloved, we as Christians as a "chosen generation" must render to God "reason, spiritual worship to God, offering ourselves together with Christ as a "living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God" (Rom. 12,1) according to Paul. In this exact way we become conformed to the call of Christ saying: " Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8,34). On the other hand, let us imitate our holy Father Gerasimos, by whose petitions to God and the intercessions of the Most

Blessed Theotokos we may be worthy to pass through the stage of the fast of Holy Lent in repentance, self-control, humility and patience. Along with the hymnographer let us say: "Saint Gerasimos, as thou appear before Christ with all the saints, pray to him for the peace of our troubled region and the whole world". Amen. Many returns and blessed Lent."

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a festal meal of the Cheese fare Sunday, hosted by the hardworking founder of the Monastery, Archimandrite Chrysostom, who decorated the Monastery and the Church with fine mosaics and built the premises, creating a pilgrimage, working and social centre, a refreshing oasis for the needy and an Old-peoples' home for the Holy Sepulchre Fathers.

**From Secretariat-General**

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# **THE NAME DAY OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III**

On Saturday of the Cheese fare week of the Triodion, March 3/16, 2024, the Patriarchate celebrated by transference for pastoral reasons the Name Day of H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, on the commemoration of the Holy Forty Martyrs, one of whom is Saint Theophilos (celebrated on 9<sup>th</sup> March).

This feast was celebrated according to the Typikon of the Church of Jerusalem and the Status Quo, with Great Vespers on Friday afternoon at the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy

Sepulchre, with the welcoming reception of His Beatitude and the veneration of the Holy Sepulchre. This was followed by the incense offering around the shrines, the Great Entrance and the blessing of bread. The service was presided over by His Beatitude, with the participation of the Holy Sepulchre High Priests, Hieromonks and Hierodeacons.

The Divine Liturgy was celebrated likewise in the Catholicon on Saturday morning, presided over by His Beatitude, with the co-celebration of their Eminences, Metropolitans Isychios of Kapitolias and Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Archbishops, Damascene of Yaffo, Aristarchos of Constantina, Theodosios of Sebastia, Dimitrios of Lydda, Isidoros of Hierapolis, Nectarios of Anthedona, Philoumenos of Pella, Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, and Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba, the Elder Dragoman Archimandrite Mattheos, Fr Vassianos from the Church of Moscow, Fr Ioannis from the Church of Romania, Priests from all places of the Patriarchate's jurisdiction, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacons Eulogios and Dositheos, at the honorary presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos, the Ambassador of Russia to Israel Mr Anatoly Victorov, and the participation of faithful Christians from Jerusalem and other cities.

The Divine Liturgy was followed by Doxology and the reading of the prayer for the boiled wheat in honour of the Forty Martyrs.

After the return to the Patriarchate Hall, the Elder Chief Secretary Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina addressed His Beatitude as follows:

“Your Beatitude Father and Master,

By the Grace of God, we have already completed the third pre-fasting Week of the Triodion, tomorrow is the Cheese Fare

Sunday, and after this we enter the First Week of the Great Lent, to enter "the stage of virtues, which is being opened", as brave athletes. We are fortified today by the example of the geniality and determination of the Holy Forty Martyrs, who confessed Christ, against the persecutor King Licinius in 320; the martyrs who were exposed to the frost of the lake of Sebastia of Pontus overnight, and had their legs torn apart in the morning; they fought well and were crowned.

Today, the entire Church throughout the world honours these all-lauded holy martyrs, for their example to the members of the sacrificial living faith in Christ, while the Mother of the Churches of Jerusalem held a solemn Divine Liturgy and a Doxology in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, especially honouring their co-martyr, Saint Theophilos, in whose name Your Beatitude is honoured.

In honour of these martyrs and of Your Beatitude, we gathered all the members of our Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood, High Priests, Hieromonks, Deacons, and Monks, as well as the pious clergy and the Christ-named congregation from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate in Israel, Jordan and Palestine and in the Holy Eucharist, we prayed for Your health, stability, and strength in the Pastoral Patriarchal work entrusted to You by God.

In our prayers in the Church, here in this historic Hall of the Patriarchate, we add our prayers and thanksgiving for what Your Beatitude has accomplished and continues to accomplish for the good and benefit of our Holy Common.

Let us say at first, that Your Beatitude successfully brought together again under Your leadership in the Patriarchate, the Leaders of the other Christian Churches of the Holy Land and took the initiative to jointly find a way of modest celebration of the Christmas and New Year Feasts while maintaining the Status Quo and taking into account the

difficulties that the Christian Community and the entire people of Gaza are going through as a result of the raging war. In their joint statements, the Christian Churches called for an end to all hostilities and asked for permission to send humanitarian aid for food, sustenance, and survival of those affected by the war, the wounded, the starving, and the homeless. This was particularly underlined by Your Beatitude during the customary visit on the 1st of the New Civil Year to the President of the State of Israel, recalling the continued provision of asylum to the members of our Community in Gaza in the Monastery of Saint Porphyrios. The fruit of this cooperation with the other Churches, at the initiative and leadership of Your Beatitude, was the lifting of the impasse of the interruption by the Armenians of the exchange of holiday visits with us, and the support of the Churches to the Armenians' problem of the opaque multi-year lease agreements for strategically important land within the boundaries of their Patriarchate. The Patriarchate also extended a hand of closer cooperation to the WCC, of which it was a founding member, when its General Secretary Mr Jerry Pillay came and met on the 17th of February in this same hall with all the leaders of the Christian Churches and by Your Beatitude's address, he visited the President of the State of Israel. Hence, a new chapter was opened in their relations for the support of the Christians of the Holy Land and the assumption of a mediating role of the WCC in the prevailing and unhelpfully intensified Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To the representatives of the European Union and other countries who frequently visited You, Your Beatitude recommended and conveyed a spirit of dialogue and reconciliation as a solution to the political problem, whereas, many times, to the Orthodox church leaders You stressed the need to restart the dialogue for the return of the Orthodox Church to the normal way of its existence and life, that is, Solidarity.

Regarding the Pastoral care of the Patriarchate for its flock, let us remember that despite the financial need

created by the war. However, falling short at times, financial assistance came to the needs of the flock of its communities for the completion of renovation works of Churches and adjacent halls of meetings. For the Community of Zdeide in northern Israel, the purchase of a piece of land that increased and protected the property of the Church. Nevertheless, more important than the flock-building projects was the solution of reconciliation provided by Your Beatitude to the prevailing chronic division of the Kufr Smea Community of northern Israel. This was sealed by a solemn Patriarchal Divine Liturgy on the 10th of the past month of February at the Church of Saints Constantine and Helen, which was built in many toils and troubles, where many Orthodox prayed and representatives of other religions also attended. Let us also mention that despite the difficulties of transportation, as from the war, Your Beatitude reached all the desert Monasteries of the Patriarchate, and presided over their feasts.

At the same time, there was the interest of Your Beatitude in the uninterrupted continuation of the conservation of the books of the historical Library of the Holy Cross Monastery and its building premises by the expert conservator of icons and manuscripts from Cyprus Mr Stavros Andreou to house the Research of the Theological Studies Centre in collaboration with the Theological Schools of the Universities of Athens and Thessaloniki. For the promotion of these conservation projects as well as the conservation of the woodcarvings of the Catholicon of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, many efforts were made to find the required resources, thanks to well-disposed donors such as Mr Athanasios Martinos and Mrs Maria Georgallidou.

The things that have been said, Your Beatitude, happen to be only a few words taken from the rich pastoral care of the Patriarchate, mentioned not in a mood of boasting, since we follow the Apostle of the nations saying, "God forbid that I

should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14), but with a disposition to strengthen hope, so that in hope we the Holy Sepulchre Fathers, may continue, inspired by Your example, meeting in brotherly love with each other, obeying You and moving from better to the best, fulfilling and perfecting our sacred mission of Christian Rum Orthodox testimony in the Holy Land.

Raising the glass, Your Beatitude, on behalf of the Holy and Sacred Synod and the Brotherhood, I pray for unflinching health for many years to come and governmental power from on high, so that You may lead the Patriarchate from progress to progress and from glory to glory to the praise of our blessed nation and glory to our Triune God. So be it."

The Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem, Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos delivered the following address:

"Your Beatitude,

I have the honour and pleasure to submit to you the warmest wishes of the Hellenic Republic and me personally and my associates on Your venerable Name Day. As we celebrate Your Name Day, we reflect with feelings of profound respect on Your work and Your struggle, during Your long journey in the Holy Land and at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

You devoted Yourself from a young age to the Church and to a high and arduous mission, to which you have diligently dedicated Yourself with self-denial, serving for decades the work of the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood, to conclude to the holy Jerusalem Patriarchal Throne. Your conscientious efforts to preserve the tradition, heritage and rights of the Patriarchate, to strengthen its prestige and radiance and to protect and restore the holy places of the Holy Land, rightly enjoy international recognition and respect.

In the same way, your high pastoral work is recognized with admiration, for the benefit of the spiritual guidance of a flock that over time faces extremely increased trials and challenges.

We celebrate today under difficult and depressing circumstances, while the war conflict that erupted last October is already in its sixth month, with no visible prospect of an end, the crisis is still threatened to spill over to other fronts and a worsening humanitarian crisis is plaguing the Gaza Strip. Your flock there honours this day under dire circumstances, which threaten the existence of the entire Christian community in Gaza. Our thoughts turn in particular to the Monastery of Siant Porphyrios, in which numerous of our fellow human beings have found precious refuge. I assure you, Your Beatitude, that we will continue to act to protect and assist them.

At this dark time, we express our appreciation and gratitude for Your unceasing efforts in favour of settlement, moderation, peace and alleviation of suffering from the wounds of war. In the Holy City of Jerusalem, Your work to promote unity among the Christian Churches, but also in favour of the peaceful coexistence of the three monotheistic religions, is a guide against intolerance and religious rivalry.

Greece will continue to surround Your Beatitude, the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood and the Patriarchate with its sincere respect and support for Your work.

Please also accept my personal thanks for the always warm and cordial welcome and for our cooperation, for the common benefit of the Holy Institution and the Hellenic Republic, for which the preservation of the rights of the Patriarchate and the Christian presence and heritage in the Holy Land is historically an important priority of all Hellenism.

Together with my colleagues at the Consulate General of Greece



in Jerusalem, I wish You, Your Beatitude, health, longevity, success in Your mission, and many blessed returns.”

Consequently, addresses to His Beatitude were delivered by the Ambassador of Russia to Israel, Mr Anatoly Victorov, His Eminence Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth on behalf of the community of Nazareth, His Eminence Metropolitan Benedictos of Diocaecarea on behalf of the community of Bethlehem, His Eminence Archbishop Damascene of Yaffo, on behalf of the community of Yaffo, the representative of the Moscow Patriarchate, Archimandrite Vassianos, the representative of the Patriarchate of Romania, Archimandrite Theophilos, His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba with the Russian-speaking members of Beer Sheba community and of Haifa, Archimandrite Ignatios on behalf of the Beit Jala and Beit Sahour communities, Mr Yusef Nasser on behalf of the Kufr-Smea community, Priest Stavros Aranki on behalf of the Bir Zeit community, Mrs Panagiota Kafetzi on behalf of Saint Dimitrios School, Priest Farah Bandour on behalf of Saint James Cathedral.

To these all His Beatitude delivered the following address:

“Truly blessed is he who martyred, so that he may be a martyr to the occasion and conclude to be worthy of the same rewards as theirs, without persecution, without fire, without whips, without being scourged” Basil the Great says.

Your Excellency Consul General of Greece Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos,

Dear Holy Fathers and Brothers,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims

The sacred memory of the Holy Forty Martyrs and their co-

martyr Theophilos, who martyred in the city of Sebastia, has dawned like a light in the Holy Land, which is being tested under the darkness of war, where our Lord Jesus Christ God “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2,8).

Imitating Christ’s humility and obedience unto death, the admirable Forty Martyrs also became “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1,10). Because they are recognized as true witnesses of the mystery of reverence, as Saint Paul preaches saying: “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). “For there is not a man of virtue, that is, of piety, leading the path of virtue, that is of reverence, without experiencing sorrow, pain, temptations”, Saint Chrysostom says. “Though condemned to pass the night in the freezing cold in the open air because of the persecutor’s insensate fury, the athletes sang a hymn of thanksgiving unto God” the hymnographer exclaims (Matins, Ode 5, Troparion 1).

Because truly the holy Forty Martyrs had exercised their devotion to Christ and brought forth their love for God, “a hymn of thanksgiving to God without ceasing” and thus denounced the fury of their tyrant, listening to the Lord’s word: “Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh” (Lk 6:21).

Basil the Great, praising the saints, the Forty Martyrs, says: “We do not admire one, not two alone, not up to ten the number of those who are blessed, but forty men, as having one soul in divided bodies, in one mind and unity of the faith as they showed both the inclination towards suffering and resistance for the sake of truth”.

According to Basil the Great, the martyrdom of the Forty Saints is divided into two parts, on the one hand “in the unity of faith”, and on the other “in the resistance for the

sake of truth". Both faith and truth refer to the Son and Word of God the Father, our Saviour Jesus Christ, saying: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). And in another verse, he says: "I am the way and the truth" (Jn. 14,6), "I was born into this and came into the world to testify to the truth." Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (Jn. 18,37).

This means that faith and truth in Christ constitute the foundation of the Church of Christ, and death through martyrdom is the confirmation of Christ's resurrection. In other words, the holy Forty Martyrs sealed the truth in Christ with their blood, i.e. the resurrection of Christ, conforming to the preaching of the wise Paul saying: "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13,14). And "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection... Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6, 5, 8-9).

The holy Church of Christ especially honours the memory of the holy Forty Martyrs, because as Basil the Great says, these "freely of the voice, boldly and courageously, not being suspicious of the men, not overwhelmed by the threats, they declared themselves Christians". This confession also introduced the holy Martyrs to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem and to a myriad of angels, who celebrate and spread joy (cf. Heb. 12,22-23).

This glorious day of the feast of the holy Forty Martyrs and especially of their co-martyr Theophilus, whose name Our Mediocrity bears, is, according to the expression of Athanasios the Great, "a type of the joy above", namely of the heavenly joy of the Angels. And this is because those who loved Christ and were born of His (Christ's) martyred blood

“passed from death to life” (cf. 1 Jn. 3:14), and the life is Christ according to His own testimony: “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25).

The recognized father of the Church, Saint Gregory of Nyssa, proceeds to praise the holy Forty Martyrs, “so that [we] may be convinced that the Martyrs live and are satellites and guardians of God, who today serve and adorn the Church”. According to Saint Asterion of Amaseia, “the holy Martyrs, men immortal by a good death, living forever for they despised life, have changed the kingdom of the blood and transformed the harmful flesh beneficial to the soul”.

Our holy Church in joy and gleefulness honours the martyrdom’s birthday of the holy Forty Martyrs as well as of their co-martyr Theophilos and held in it the place of the Crucifixion, the three-day burial and the Resurrection of our Saviour Christ, the divine eucharist and bloodless sacrifice, presided over by Our Mediocrity and surrounded by the choir of the honourable members of our Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood, High Priests, Priests, Hierodeacons, with the participation in prayer of pious Christians from our tested pious flock.

Moreover, we rendered thanksgiving praise to the Holy Triune God on the occasion of the Name Day of our Mediocrity in the name of the holy Martyr Theophilos, and we blessed Christ the Saviour; “This, the Son of God we worship, while the martyrs, as disciples and imitators of the Lord we love, since they have worthily found insurmountable favour of the king and teacher Himself” the holy martyr Polycarp of Smyrna says.

We should point out that today’s feast of Saint Theophilos, the co-martyr of the Forty Saints, does not only refer to Our Mediocrity but mainly to the Apostolic Throne of James the Brother of God and the God-given institution of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church, which is the body of Christ.

Therefore, we call upon all our brethren in Christ, the Heads of the Orthodox Churches in all places, so that we may work together for the restoration of the community of the Churches according to Saint Paul's advice: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3), but also according to the voice of the great Athanasios "I beg you for Christ's sake, do not allow the members of Christ to be divided, do not believe in prejudices, but prefer the peace of the Lord".

This is exactly what we, my beloved brothers, have been called to, "to the ministry of salvation, indeed of peace, given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18). Let us seek and pursue this peace and settlement of the Lord, especially during the blessed stage of the fast of the Holy and Great Lent, so that by the intercessions of the blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary together with the prayers of the Holy Forty Martyrs and their co-martyr Theophilos, we may be granted to reach the glorious Resurrection of our God and Saviour of our souls, in repentance and peace.

Therefore, we appeal to all those praying with Us and honoring this solemn memory of the holy Martyrs, the power from on high, the free gift of the Holy Spirit, the grace of the Holy and Life-giving Sepulchre, "And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed" (cf. Rom. 5:4-5), expressing warm thanks to those who addressed Us, the Elder Chief Secretary, His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, speaking on behalf of the members of the Holy and Sacred Synod and our Holy Sepulchre brotherhood, His Excellency the Consul General of Greece Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos, the Reverend Archimandrite Vassianos, representative of the brotherly Holy Church of Russia, conveying to us the wishes of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Moscow Cyril, His Holiness Archimandrite Father Theophilos, representative of the brotherly Holy Church of Romania, conveying to us the wishes of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Romania, Daniel, His

Eminence the Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, speaking on behalf of our flock in Nazareth, His Eminence Metropolitan Benedictos of Diocaecarea on behalf of the community of Bethlehem, His Eminence Archbishop Damascene of Yaffo, on behalf of the community of Yaffo, the representative of the Moscow Patriarchate, Archimandrite Vassianos, the representative of the Patriarchate of Romania, Archimandrite Theophilos, His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba with the Russian-speaking members of Beer Sheba community and of Haifa, Archimandrite Ignatios on behalf of the Beit Jala and Beit Sahour communities, Mr Yusef Nasser on behalf of the Kufr-Smea community, Priest Stavros Aranki on behalf of the Bir Zeit community, Mrs Panagiota Kafetzi on behalf of Saint Dimitrios School, Priest Farah Bandour on behalf of Saint James Cathedral and all those who participated in this feast.

To the health of you all!"

The reception was followed by a meal at the refectory of the Patriarchate.

**From Secretariat-General**

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**VISIT OF THE GENERAL  
SECRETARY OF THE WORLD**

# COUNCIL OF CHURCHES TO THE PATRIARCHATE

On Saturday, February 17, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City, welcomed Dr Jerry Pillay, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), at the Jerusalem Patriarchate's headquarters. The meeting was attended by the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, including; Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem; Fr. Francesco Patton, Custodian of the Holy Land; Archbishop Hosam Naoum, Head of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem, and representatives from the Armenian Patriarchate and the Coptic Church in Jerusalem.

The visit of the General Secretary comes during difficult times the Holy Land is going through, therefore Dr Pillay expressed his commitment to ask the millions of Christians, who are members of the Council worldwide, to increase their prayers and support to the churches and the people in the Holy Land, and for peace and reconciliation amid the tension between the different sides.

In recognition of his support, His Beatitude honoured the General Secretary with the medal of the Commander of the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre.

In addition, the Church leaders each took the opportunity to present the General Secretary with the difficulties and challenges facing Christians, churches and their properties, i.e. the Mount of Olives and Gethsemane, that are often affected by the improper actions of radical elements.

During the meeting, His Beatitude took the opportunity to address Dr Pillay on behalf of the church leaders as follows:

*“Dr Pillay,  
Beloved Members of your Delegation,  
Sisters and Brothers in Christ,*

*We welcome you warmly to the Holy City of Jerusalem and to our Patriarchate, and we wish to express our gratitude to you for your visit at this difficult and complicated time for all the peoples of this region, and especially for the Christian community of the Holy Land.*

*Your visit is of such importance, for you bring with you the attention of the World Council of Churches and its members to the situation here.*

*In these critical times, we Christians, both in the Holy Land and around the world, have a mission to uphold the message of the Gospel, which is stronger and more enduring than our human weakness. It is the Gospel that speaks of reconciliation and peace, and this must be our constant commitment. War and violence are always the consequence of human failure. But Christ and his Church proclaim a different truth. In theological terms we affirm that hatred and darkness have no hypostasis; it is only light and life that have a true and enduring existence.*

*Death is not our mission. God-given life is at the heart of the kerygma of the Gospel. As our Lord Jesus Christ tells us, I came that they may have life and have it in all its fulness (John 10:10). We are called to be united in our moral obligation and mission to uphold the sacred values of peace and reconciliation. As we learn from the Prophet Isaiah,*

*They shall beat their swords into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nation;  
neither shall they learn war any more.*

*(Is. 2:4)*



*This is our common human vocation and our common human destiny. The call of the Gospel is to turn the instruments of war into the instruments of peace and reconciliation.*

*Our historical experience in the Holy Land is a powerful and tangible example that synagogue, church, and mosque may exist side by side in mutual respect. Ours is a long-standing multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious landscape which has given rise to a unique civilization, in which Jerusalem remains the beacon of hope for the whole world. There has always been room in the Holy Land for all those who call this region our home.*

*There is no military solution to establish the future of the Holy Land and the wider Middle East. The pattern of disputes, retribution, and retaliation has brought us no nearer to peace and security, and all these frames of reference are bankrupt. For it is written, Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21).*

*With this in mind, we as the Heads of Churches in the Holy Land continue to pray and call for an end to the war so that the humanitarian crisis may be brought to an end, displaced populations may return to their homes, and essential help be brought to all innocent victims caught up in this conflict who are without the basic necessities of life.*

*The present conflict is clear evidence from which we have learnt that that we must face the future with a new resolve. We believe that this is the only way to forge a new pathway to true and lasting peace and reconciliation.*

*The Heads of the Churches remain firm in our opposition to the escalation of violence. We are convinced, as is the World Council of Churches, that it is in upholding and promoting the fundamental values of the Gospel that a way forward will be found, and we invite our fellow Christians, as well as all people of good will around, to join us in this sacred*

*mission. For it is written, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Mt 5:9).*

*As you come to the Holy Land as pilgrims of peace in a time of war, we pray that our risen Lord, the conqueror of death, may bless your work and your endeavours in the cause of the Gospel of peace and reconciliation.*

*Thank You.”*





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# THE FEAST OF SAINT SIMEON THE GOD-RECEIVER AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Friday, February 3rd/16th 2024, the Patriarchate celebrated the feast of the commemoration of Saint Simeon the God-receiver in his Holy Monastery in West Jerusalem near the Monastery of the Holy Cross.

On this holiday, the Church honours Saint Simeon the God-receiver, as he especially ministered in the mystery of the Meeting of Jesus in the Temple, when he recognized Him as the Saviour and exclaimed: "mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, And the glory of thy people Israel" and asked to depart from this world: "now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word", (Lk. 2, 29-32).

For this feast, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated the Divine Liturgy in the above Church, with concelebrants their Eminences, Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, the Archbishops Aristarchos of Constantina, and Methodios of Tabor, Holy Sepulchre

Hieromonks, with first in rank the Elder Dragoman Archimandrite Mattheos, the Archimandrites Claudius and Ieronymos, Vassian of the Russian Spiritual Mission to Jerusalem (MISSIA), Priest Simeon, Archdeacon Mark and Hierodeacons Eulogios, Dositheos and others. The chanting was delivered by Fr Hanna Awad-Antoniou, the Patriarchal School Students and Mr Fadi Abed Al Nour, in the presence of the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Dimitrios Angelosopoulos and the prayerful participation of monks, nuns and members of the Greek Parish.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Luke 2,29-32), the Elder Simeon exclaimed.

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Reverend Christians and pilgrims

The Holy Spirit, Who was with the righteous and pious Simeon has gathered us all today in this holy place where the Saint's tomb lies, to honour his sacred commemoration in joy, and to celebrate the Meeting of the baby Jesus and our Lord and God and Saviour Christ in the Temple.

The Elder Simeon is distinguished among the rest of the holy prophets and people of the Holy Bible because he was deemed worthy to receive in his arms the “salvation of God”, namely Christ, that is why he says: ““Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (Luke 2,29-32).

Interpreting these words, among the established Fathers of the Church, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "It was prepared for Christ even before the beginning of the world, and it was revealed in the end of times". Zigavinos says: "You (God) has provided the salvation before all, so that it may be visible to all". Origen marks the wholistic nature of the salvation, saying: "This which they saw is the salvation not only for the Jews but for the whole world...before the face not only for one nation, not only for Israel but before the face of all the peoples".

Indeed, "the salvation of God", whom the righteous Simeon's eyes saw, refers to the wholeness of the salvation of the human race. And this is so, because "the salvation of God" is no other than the mystery of the Divine Providence, namely the Incarnation of God the Word, as the God-bearing Church Fathers explain. "He called salvation the Incarnation of the Only Begotten Son", Saint Theophylaktos says. "Salvation does the Bible call the Christ of God", Saint Basil the Great says. And according to Saint Athanasios the Great, "salvation means the incarnate presence of God the Word".

Moreover, the prophetic words of the pious Simeon, "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2,32) testify that the Incarnate God the Word, through the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin and Theotokos Mary is the presence of the divine light in the world of ignorance and idolatry. That is why the psalmist proclaims: "In Thy light shall we see light" (Ps. 36,10). The Lord clearly says in His preaching, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8,12). "Christ is the light of the nations because He was bound to enlighten with His teaching the nations that lay in darkness", Origen says. "He became light to those who were in darkness and deluded, and had fallen into the devil's hand", Saint Cyril of Alexandria says. "Being a light to light the Gentiles and those blinded by fallacies; he calls

revelation the ability to see again clearly; to the glory and prosperity of Your people Israel. Glory to them was the sprouting from them according to the human nature. Indeed, His redeeming incarnation enlightened the nations with the knowledge of God and virtue, while it glorified the Jews because He became a native to them (PG 129,893A), Zigavinos says.

Moved by the Holy Spirit, the Elder Simeon told Mariam, the mother of Jesus, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against" (Luke 2,34). Interpreting this word, Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "Emanuel is laid by God the Father a chief cornerstone, elect, precious (c.f. 1 Peter, 2,6). But those who believed in Him were not put to shame; whereas the unbelievers who did not manage to see this mystery in Christ, fell and were crushed. God the Father said again: "Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Romans 9,33, PG 72,505B).

Indeed, my dear brethren, since Christ, the Son and Word of God the Father came into the history of man, He became the reason for the fall and the rise of many; fall to those who did not believe in Him, and rise for those who accepted and believed in Him. That is why up to this day Christ remains "a sign which shall be spoken against" (Luke 2,34). That is what Saint Paul also means when he says, "Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached" (Phil. 1,18). According to Saint John the Evangelist, this precisely "is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" (John 3,19).

To our question, what is that which prevents people from seeing the light of truth, namely Christ? The answer is, two things; on the one hand, it is the free will of man, and on the other, man's evil deeds. For this the God-inspired Apostle

Peter says: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness" (1 Peter 2,24). This means that no one can rely on Christ as the Saviour unless he has abandoned sin and lives with "righteousness".

The way to be free from sin is our encounter with Christ according to the righteous Simeon's example, who "received Christ in his arms" (c.f. Luke 2,28). Our Holy Church calls us to this cause through the hymnographer's voice: "Come let us as well, with songs inspired by God, go together to meet Christ and let us receive Him Whose salvation Simeon hath now beheld" (Vespers, Sticharon 3). "Let us pay heed so that the Lord will not find us asleep", Athanasios the Great says.

Our meeting, my dear brethren, with our Saviour Christ is always feasible within the Church, through prayer and the cultivation of the virtues of humility and repentance, especially through participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist, where the one who has a clear heart is vivified and deified on the one hand, and sees through the eyes of the soul the salvation of God, that is, Christ, on the other. Amen. Many peaceful returns!"

Before the Dismissal, His Beatitude blessed the boiled wheat and held a Trisagion on the completion of nine days since the departure of the blessed Hegoumen Archimandrite Theodoritos, who served for forty-five years with devotion to the Holy Monastery and this Greek Community.

After the Divine Liturgy, Hierodeacon Simeon and nun Maria, who devotedly served the departed father Theodoritos for many years, hosted a reception for the Patriarchal Entourage and the congregation.

**From Secretariat-General**