

THE LAUNCH OF THE RENOVATION PROJECT AT THE HOLY MONASTERY OF PROPHET ELIJAH IN JERUSALEM

At noon on Tuesday, 7th of September 2021, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III, accompanied by the Director of the Patriarchate's Finance Department, His Eminence Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, and Geronda Chief Secretary, His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, visited the Holy Monastery of Prophet Elijah, located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem near the place of the "Seat of the Virgin Mary". The visit aimed to launch the much needed renovation project of the Monastery; where the gratitude of the Patriarchate was also highlighted by His Beatitude for the generous donation extended by the Russian non-profit organization: "Foundation for Support of Christian Culture and Heritage".

The project is, God willing, scheduled for completion before Christmas this year, when the official departure of the Patriarchal Entourage to Bethlehem will take place on the Eve of Christmas celebrations.

His Beatitude and the Patriarchal delegation were welcomed, today, by the good keeper of the Monastery, Monk Achillios.

From Secretariat-General

EPISCOPAL LITURGY AT THE RUINS OF A 5TH CENTURY BYZANTINE CHURCH IN THE ISRAELI CITY ASHDOD (ANCIENT COASTAL AZOTOS)

Around 1921, at the beginning of work at a construction site in a neighbourhood of south Azotos (present Ashdod), the digging machine uncovered mosaics of an old Byzantine Holy Church, with the result that the Archaeological Service of Israel intervened and prohibited the continuation of the works.

Ever since the specific plot remained empty and fell under the ownership of the state. In 2009, the Archaeological Service assigned the responsibility of the excavations to the specific plot to archaeologist Dr Alexander Fantalkin, Lecturer at Tel Aviv University, who specializes in Ancient Greece in the 8th century BC. The excavations were postponed and continued this year.

A building complex with a central temple and chapels of unique spiritual and historical value were discovered during the excavations. There is a possibility that it is associated with the existence of an early form of a Hesychastic Monastery for an Order of Virgin Women with the title Deaconess.

On Thursday morning, 16/29 July 2021, an outdoors Divine Liturgy at the ruins of the ancient Church was officiated by His Eminence Archbishop Theophanes of Gerassa, with the participation of the Reverend Archimandrites; Eudokimos, the Spiritual Father of Saint Savvas' Lavra, Ignatios, Hegoume of Beit Sahour and Beit Jala, Constantine, Hegoumen of the Holy

Monastery of Hozeva, Artemios, Hegoumen of Haifa, Leontios, Hegoumen of Rafeidia of Samaria, Marcellus, Hegoumen of Saint George in Lydda, and Farther Alexander Yasevitch, from the Russian-speaking flock in Beer Sheva.

After the Divine Liturgy, His Beatitude, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos led a Trisagion for the repose of the souls of the departed Fathers of old, whose names are commemorated in the various inscriptions of the mosaic floor as:

Herakleios Bishop

Procopios Bishop

Karos Bishop

Gaianos Presbyter

Stephanos Presbyter

Maximos Deacon

Sophronia or Euphrosyni Mother

Severa Deaconess

Theodosia Deaconess

Gregoria Deaconess

Then, at the presence of the local authorities, namely the Vice Mayor of Ashdod, the team from the Archaeological Service of Tel Aviv University, His Beatitude was guided at the excavation site by Dr Alexander Fantalkin, and addressed those present underlining the importance of the excavation findings as a link between the Old and the New Testament and as a meeting place for researchers, pilgrims and tourists, inspiring to a life of creation, peace and civilization. His Beatitude's address follows below:

“Mr Mayor,

Dr Fantalkin,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for us to be here today at this significant site. This church, established by Bishop Procopios in the 6th century, is important evidence of the fact that Ashdod, known then as Azotos, was among the principal cities on the coast during the Byzantine period.

Ashdod has a long and noteworthy history, and we read about it in both the Old and the New Testaments. According to the Book of Joshua, it was given to the Tribe of Judah as their home (Joshua 15:46), and in the Acts of the Apostles, we read that Saint Philip found himself hereafter baptizing the officer of the court of the Ethiopian queen (Acts 8:40).

These are only two examples from its long history. But they speak to the fact that the Bible is a record of our shared sacred history. And the discovery of this Byzantine church, which is for us Christians a significant holy site, is a testimony to the witness that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has given down the centuries to our sacred history. As the oldest religious institution in the region, the Patriarchate has embodied this sacred history and given it legitimacy.

We appreciate very much that the State of Israel and the Antiquities Authority are sensitive to the diverse civilizations that have existed in this region. This has always been a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious landscape where different peoples have flourished down the ages. And we wish to recognise the hard work and commitment of Dr Fantalkin and the Faculty of Humanities of Tel Aviv University, to which the Department of Archaeology belongs, since the discovery of this site in 2017. They have borne the major burden of the work of this excavation and

brought to light this invaluable heritage.

This site is both a holy site as well as a site of supreme historical and academic value. There is an existence of the Christian presence here even before this Church. We know that one of the bishops of this region, Bishop Silouanos, attended the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in the year 325. There are inscriptions at this church mentioning the name of Bishop Hierakleios, who participated in both the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451.

But we have here a site that, like Madaba and Megiddo, has the power to draw not only scholars but also tourists and pilgrims in large numbers. We have a treasure here that we must preserve and make accessible to the many hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who come to the Holy Land every year. As a site of such significant scientific and religious consequence, this site is of immense value to the City of Ashdod, and it is part of the common heritage of all humanity in the Holy Land.

At this site, many tombs have been discovered, including the graves of several women who bore the title *deaconess*. This confirms for us the existence of this office in the early Church. In addition to this, tombs of holy martyrs have been uncovered, which is proof that this place served as a liturgical gathering place before the 4th century. This is evidence that this place was a place of worship during the time of persecution. According to the writings of Saint John Chrysostom, the tombs of the martyrs were used as the altars where the divine Eucharist was celebrated. This discovery alone will draw the presence of pilgrims, both from the East and the West, who will want to venerate this holy site and who hold the martyrs from the age of persecution in high honour.

We thank you, Mr Mayor, for your care and concern for the preservation of this site that is a witness to our shared sacred history in this region. And we congratulate you, Dr

Fantalkin, on your remarkable achievement in bringing this site to the attention of the world community. The conservation and development of this site by the local authorities would strengthen the existing good relations between the State of Israel and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and, by extension, with the Christian world in general and with the Orthodox world in particular, such as the nations of Greece, Cyprus, Russia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Georgia and others.

In the preservation of this site, today's residents of Ashdod will take pride in the further evidence of the historical and spiritual significance of their beloved city, and if we pay special attention to those who have preceded us and left an indelible stamp of their presence, we would expect future generations to preserve the evidence of our own lives and witness here. As we read in the Book of Psalms:

Then we your people, the flock of your pasture,

will give thanks to you forever;

from generation to generation, we will recount your praise.

(Ps 78 [79]: 13)

It is our fervent hope and desire that this site be preserved intact, and ultimately be made accessible both to scholars and to pilgrims, like all other holy places in our region. This would be a living testimony of the history of this ancient city and would promote peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and mutual respect. This would be a tangible symbol of the words we read in the Bible, that we are to pursue *righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness* (1 Tim. 6:11).

This is the mission of the Patriarchate, and we pledge ourselves to support and assist in this work. MAY this place be a source of both knowledge and spiritual refreshment for generations to come.

Thank you.”

This important event was organized by His Eminence Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba, who is responsible for the Russian-speaking flock of the Patriarchate. In the end, His Eminence offered the Patriarchal Entourage and all present, boiled wheat, refreshments and fruit.

From Secretariat-General

THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW WING OF THE PATRIARCHATE'S ARCHIVES BUILDING

On Monday 11/24 May 2021, after the meeting of the Holy and Sacred Synod, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, accompanied by the Members of the Synod, observed the Service of the Blessing of the Water at the new wing of the Patriarchate's Archives building, which was funded by the Patriarchate. The building is above the old Library, a continuation of the Old Archives building of the Patriarchate.

With this opportunity, His Beatitude underlined the importance of this project for the placement in the new wing the arrangement and digitization of numerous documents, mainly of the period of the Ottoman rule in the Holy Land, ownership documents, of pilgrimage rights, firmans, Berats and others and thanked the Architect of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Mr Theodosios Mitropoulos who conducted the architectural project and completed the structure, along with all who contributed to the completion of this project. His Beatitude

also wished the Archivist Most Reverend Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba success in Archiving the documents with the help of Professor Agamemnon Tselikas, the redactor of the Directory of these Archives.

From Secretariat-General

HIS BEATITUDE'S SPEECH AT THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE BRITISH ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP (APPG) FOR CHRISTIANITY IN THE HOLY LAND.

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III virtually joined yesterday, 30 November, members of the British Parliament and officers of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) which plan to create a new initiative dedicated for Christianity in the Holy Land.

The inaugural meeting, which was held via Zoom, as the world is still severely suffering from restrictions connected with the novel disease of COVID-19, was the fruit of combined efforts from different Members forming an 'All-Party Parliamentary Group' or 'APPG', which is composed of members of parliament in the United Kingdom from all political parties who explore and discuss particular issues and concerns on various relevant topics. This APPG will be for the topic of "Christianity in the Holy Land".

Joined by Archbishop Suheil Dawani from the Episcopal Church, His Beatitude thanked the MPs for their thoughtful initiative and genuine interest in helping Christians in the Holy Land, especially that it is coming during these unpredictable and difficult times, which also comes when we are a few weeks from the greatest gift of all, the birth of our Jesus Christ, the symbol of sympathy and kindness.

“Your support will help the Christian community to flourish and thrive in the future. On behalf of the Council of Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in the Holy Land, I thank you for your support,” His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos addressed the attendees.

“Your support has already had a positive impact at critical times. When the Churches faced unjustified taxation, you spoke up for us. When some politicians proposed legislation to confiscate church lands, you were advocates on our behalf. On both occasions, your interventions were crucial and helped to inspire a just and peaceful resolution.”

The meeting was chaired by MP Steve Double with collaboration of the International Community of the Holy Sepulchre (ICoHS). The initiative comes under the name of ‘Christianity in the Holy Land’ and is expected to shed some light to the international community of the different plights and challenges local Christians face, ways to help maintain that Christian characteristic in the alleys of the Holy Land, and find common ground to empower and strengthen them.

SERVICE OF THE BLESSING OF THE WATER AT THE ANCIENT CHURCH OF SAINT STEPHEN IN RAMALLAH

On Tuesday, November 4/17, 2020, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos officiated the Service of the Blessing of the water for the restart of the Liturgical life of the ancient Church dedicated to Saint Stephen the First Martyr in Ramallah. This Church, with the surrounding monastery olive-pressing mill, bakery and monastic cells, are preserved in the form of ruins which were brought to light after excavations. It is believed that this is the burial place of the First Martyr Stephen (Acts 8:2) in a field which belonged to the Sanhedrin Gamaliel.

This ecclesiastical and monastic area, which is a property of the Patriarchate, has been preserved and recently renovated by the Hegoumen of Ramallah Archimandrite Galaktion, with the donations from the local flock and those of the expatriate faithful Christians. Archimandrite Galaktion has also built a small chapel, which after today's blessing of the water by His Beatitude, will be used for the celebration of the Divine Liturgy for the faithful Christians of the Rum-Orthodox Arab-speaking Community of Ramallah.

For the Service of the Blessing of the water, His Beatitude was accompanied by His Eminence Archbishop and Secretary-General Aristarchos of Constantina, the Master of Ceremonies Archimandrite Bartholomew and Archdeacon Mark. From Ramallah, the service was attended by the initiator of this project Archimandrite Galaktion, the Steward Fr. James, the Mayor of the town of Ramallah, the Caretakers of the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Ramallah and its Byzantine

choir members, along with others who supported this God-pleasing and arduous project, which is the result of those who love the beauty of the house of God.

From Secretariat-General

VISIT OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM AT THE RUINS OF THE H. CHURCH OF ST. STEPHEN IN RAMALLAH

On Tuesday morning, September 2/15, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos visited the Holy Church of the Transfiguration of the Lord in Ramallah, accompanied by His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and Archdeacon Mark, and were welcomed by the Hegoumen Archimandrite Galaktion and the Caretakers of the Community. His Beatitude inspected the ongoing maintenance and restoration work of the ruined Holy Church of St. Stephen which was built in the early years of Christianity. His Beatitude also observed the ongoing Iskan housing project of the Patriarchate which is to host the Rum Orthodox Arab-speaking Community of Ramallah.

From Secretariat-General

MAINTENANCE WORKS OF THE ICONOSTASION & ICONS OF ST. THECLA'S CHAPEL

On Friday, June 13/26, 2020, His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, accompanied by His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, checked the maintenance works held by ARTIS company at the iconostasion and icons of the Holy Chapel of St. Thecla the First Martyr and Equal to the Apostles. The maintenance works were funded by the Typikon Keeper of the H. Monastic Church of Saints Constantine and Helen, Archimandrite Alexios. Photographic material related to the maintenance works is provided below.

From Secretariat-General

MAINTENANCE OF THE ICONOSTASION OF THE H. CHURCH OF SAINTS CONSTANTINE AND HELEN

On Saturday May 10/23, 2020, one day before the Sunday of the blind man, during the Service of Vespers, before the presence of H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, the Iconostasion of the Holy Monastic Church of Saints Constantine and Helen was placed back after the maintenance-restoration work done by ARTIS team, which has also been working on the restoration of the iconostasion of the

Bethlehem Basilica.

From Secretariat-General

THE CHURCH OF SAINTS CONSTANTINE AND HELEN AT KOUFR SMEA IN NORTH ISRAEL

By the help of God and the prayers and blessing of H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, by the moral and financial support of the Patriarchate, and the guidance of the Architect of the Patriarchate Mr. Theodosios Mitropoulos, the Rum Orthodox distinguished Professor of the Arabic Literature and writer, Mr. Yusef Nasser, who has long been a Care Taker of the Greek-Orthodox Arab-speaking Community of Koufr Smea in the Acre district – Ptolemais, in North Israel, continues the project of the completion of the Holy Church of Saints Constantine and Helen, a jewel in the town and the district, as can be seen in the photos below.

For Mr. Nasser and his family the Patriarchate prays “sanctify O Lord those who love the beauty of Thy house” and for its flock and this town wishes to worship and glorify our God in One Trinity, in peace, reconciliation, and unity in Christ.

From Secretariat-General

THE CONSECRATION OF THE STOCKS CHAPEL AND OF JESUS' PRISON

On Tuesday morning, January 9/22, 2019, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos consecrated the Stocks (vinculis) chapel and of Jesus' Prison at the north part of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A very old tradition of the Church witnesses that our Lord was imprisoned in the place of this chapel after he had been at Praetorium and marched through Via Dolorosa carrying the Cross towards Golgotha. Christ had been kept in this prison until the soldiers put up the Cross, on which He was willingly crucified for our salvation.

This chapel which is under the exclusive property and usage of the Greek Orthodox faithful has been totally and beautifully renovated in the last few years by the funding of Mr. Boris Kaoufman and his wife from Ukraine.

On the occasion of the completion of the renovation His Beatitude blessed the area with sanctified water, at the presence of the Most Reverend Archbishop Isidoros of Hierapolis, the Fathers who minister at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Geronda Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Master of Ceremonies Archimandrite Bartholomew and the supervisor of the renovation and architect of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Dr. Theodosios Mitropoulos.

His Beatitude thanked the wife and daughter of the donor who were present and offered them an icon of the renovated Edicule

of the All-holy Tomb.

From Secretariat-General