

# The peak of the Church of Jerusalem

From the period of Great Constantine and on, the Church of Jerusalem started to experience days of prosperity and drew the attention not only of the simple faithful but also of the Christian kings of the Byzantine Empire.

## **A) The rise in the position of honour of the Church of Jerusalem.**

At the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Episcopal throne of the Church of Jerusalem was occupied by Makarios 1<sup>st</sup> (314-333), a wise and diligent hierarch. Following the declaration of the order of Mediolan in 313 and the substantial triumph of Christianity, the overall state of the Church of Jerusalem changed radically, the authority of her Bishopric had increased significantly. In the beginning Makarios together with other Bishops of Palestine took part in the First Ecumenical synod (325) where he was accorded a position of honour among the different thrones of Palestine. There, after meeting with the emperor Constantine, he succeeded in the turn over of the holy shrines to Christian worship and he enriched with buildings worthy of their sanctity. However it was not conferred on the Bishop of Jerusalem, the metropolitan or patriarchal office as some have suggested, but the Jerusalem Bishop simply assumed out of custom and early tradition, a certain principle, namely a retinue of honour between the other bishops of Palestine saving for the Metropolis of Caesaria, the proper metropolitan claim. As example in the synodic meetings of the Bishops of Palestine, the Bishop of Jerusalem would preside in honour, even though the actual office of the metropolitan of Palestine belonged to the one at Caesaria.

## **B) Erection of imposing churches in the Holy Lands**

One year after the completion of the First Ecumenical Synod, the pious mother of the emperor Constantine, Saint Helen, came to Jerusalem, her arrival acted as a point of departure for her ensuing historical flourish. Under her instigation, excavations were carried out in the Holy City, which brought to light the modest and all holy martyrdom of the Resurrection, namely, the All Holy Tomb, the rock of Golgotha and the Holy Cross. All these were included in the majestic Basilica of the Resurrection which was built later on the same place. This area during the time of the Passions of Christ was outside the wall of the City. Its inclusion in the City occurred later with the addition of a third wall by Herod Agrippa. During the period of the Roman rule of Jerusalem and the terrible persecutions against the Christians, Adrian covered Golgotha and the all Holy Tomb with earth, with the result that these shrines were preserved intact with the passing of time. This way, after the excavation activities, the hill of Golgotha and the cave of the All Holy Tomb were uncovered. At a short distance together with the two crosses of the robbers, the Holy Cross was discovered having been recognized in a miraculous way. It is certain that a segment of the discovered Cross of Martyrdom remained in Jerusalem while a section from it was sent to the emperor Constantine who ordered the erection of majestic churches.

According to the predetermined plans in the area of the All Holy Tomb and of Golgotha as well as on the spot of discovery of the Holy Cross, provision was made to build a complex of majestic Christian Churches. The work for the erection of this building complex started in 326 and was completed about 10 years later. Their description was saved by the historian Eusebios of Caesaria (260-340) but significant information was also provided by the pilgrim Etheria, who lived in the Holy Lands from 381-384.

During this period most of the holy shrines of Jerusalem were discovered and recognized and in parallel many imposing

churches were built at different areas, sanctified by the Lord, not only around the holy City but in the broader area of Palestine. During this period Saint Helen was visiting throughout Palestine and according to the wish of the emperor, she was erecting churches at different areas. So, two more churches were built at the same time, the one at the attic of Sion, the Church of the Apostles, as it was called, and the second Basilica at the cave of the Nativity of Christ in Bethlehem. Also Churches were built at the place of Ascension of the Lord, in Bethane and elsewhere around Jerusalem. After saint Helen, great piety towards the Holy Lands was shown by Eutropia , mother –in-law of Great Constantine, whose interest brought about the immediate replacement of ethnic temples and idols at Hebron with imposing Christian churches which were built according to royal edict. Successively twenty five more churches were built at historical and sanctified places, such as at the Tomb of the Theotokos in Gethsemane, at Hebron by the “oak of Mambre”, at the well of Jacob, at the place of residence of John the Theologian in Capernaum, at the place of Annunciation in Nazareth, at Cana in Galilee, at mount Tabor and other familiar Christian shrines.

Later the Church of the great martyr George was built at Lydda, which accorded great importance to that city. Most of these Churches were erected with the direct overseeing by Saint Helen, with rich internal decorations, mosaics and marble works. The inauguration in fact of the two churches, that of the Resurrection and of Golgotha were performed in the presence of clerics and the public on September 14, 335, and the celebration lasted for eight days. With such activities, the Holy Places were projected further, with the result to gradually becoming universal shrines.

### **C) The Development of monastic life in Palestine .**

Parallel to the undertaking of the holy shrines and the spreading of Christianity in Palestine, monastic life developed very soon. The monastic ideal was originally

illuminated by the first great inhabitants of the desert, Hilarion and Charitou. Saint Hilarion, otherwise hierapostle of Christianity in Palestine, during his sojourn in Alexandria came to know Saint Anthony, whom he followed in the desert. On his return to his country, he chose a desert area between Gaza and Maiouma, where he lived ascetically. His first monastic centre was in 328, the Great Lavra of Saint Hilarion, which consisted of a complex of many cells spread across the desert. Saint Hilarion tried not only to coordinate the monks into a coenobium (common living) but also to bring them in beneficial contact with the outside world, thanks to the rule of the Christian principals. During the same period, Saint Chariton was also a regulator of the monastic life in Palestine, started one more ascetic form of the Church of Jerusalem. Chariton, coming from Iconium to Jerusalem, was abducted by robbers and was brought over to their hiding place in the desert of Faran near Jerusalem. After his miraculous release, he returned to Faran where in 330 he built a First Lavra in the Judean desert. It was inaugurated by Bishop Makarios of Jerusalem. Later Saint Chariton departed from the monastery and went over to Mount Sarantariowhere he founded a new Lavra, the Lavra of Duka, while later he departed again for the desert of Judea where he retired in the caves of Tekoa. The fame of his sanctity drove many monks near him, and for their benefit he built the third Lavra, the Lavra of Souka, the one known as the old Lavra.

In the following years, the monastic system was adopted also by the Churches of Jerusalem. It is understandable that the numerous holy services, required the existence of a monastic order in the clerical deaconate, especially at the Church of the Resurrection. This brought about the Brotherhood of the All Holy Sepulchre, which consisted of a special monastic Order, dedicated to the continual holy deaconate. By the work that these monks performed, studying in chanting and in the day and night services in the All Holy Church of the Resurrection, they received the name "The Important Ones" or

the Order of the Outstanding. This Order was instituted since the founding of the Church of the Resurrection or even earlier during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, by the Bishop of Jerusalem Alexander. The Order received the label Important Ones due to the virtuous and ascetic life of its members, for the word Important is identical in meaning with the words virtuous, industrious and in general it is used for the virtuous ascetic monks of the 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries in Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch.

Similar monastic orders were created at the rest of the Churches in the Holy Lands, like the Important Ones of the Basilicas of the Holy Sion at the Mount of Olives and of the Nativity in Bethlehem. These Orders are not only responsible for the performance of the Holy Services and Vespers but also for the care and beautification and guarding of these bright monuments of Christianity. From testimonies of that period we are informed of the existence of the office of the custodian or guardian of the holy equipment, as well as that of the guardian of the Cross and the one entrusted with the guarding of the holy wood of the Cross.

#### **D) Reinforcements by the emperors**

In the mean time the Church of Jerusalem continued her ascending course. The radical change during the pastoral care of Makarios, continued with the election of his successor Maximian 3<sup>rd</sup> (333-348) who contributed substantially in the spreading of Christianity in Palestine. In 335 the churches of Jerusalem were inaugurated in the presence of all the Bishops who had taken part in the Synod of Tyre. The Holy City of Jerusalem got a new magnificence and the Mother of All Churches became an acclaimed centre of spiritual life, equal to the other centres. Immediately after a great disturbance occurred in Palestine by the Arian heresy. The repeated Synods tossed around the Church of Jerusalem and Bishop Maximos, even though he had no metropolitan authority, called a Synod in 346 in support of Great Athanasios. This action of his caused a

great displeasure to the heretics, who succeeded in bringing about his exile (347-348) during which he reposed.

During that period the Bishopric throne was adorned by the magnificent catechist Kyrill 1st (350-386) who repeatedly clashed with the heretics as well as with his personal adversaries. His Orthodox spirit, monastic form, ecclesiastic spiritualism, affability and his continuous struggle against the heretics, had the consequence for Jerusalem to again draw the pious' attention of the entire Christian world.

At the same time the premeditated overlooking of the Bishop of Jerusalem by the Metropolitan of Caesaria, Acacios, due to great differences in important dogmatic matters as well as due to the magnificence that the Holy City gradually acquired, had the consequence to disrupt the relationship between the metropolitan and the Bishop. The latter could no longer ecclesiastically submit to the continually declining Caesaria. In fact after the Second Ecumenical Synod (381) which condemned the various heresies and justified the Patriarch Kyrill, the Church of Jerusalem continued to gain a continuous spiritual ascent. That period all the emperors maintained undiminished their interest on the Holy Places with a single exception, the hopeless attempt by Julius the Transgressor (361-363) to return to idolatry.

At this point it should be pointed out that worthy to the magnificence of the majestic churches were the imposing holy services. It is a blessing the fact that extensive descriptions were saved from the earliest times to present. In the travel-guide of Etheria, as well as in the catechism of Saint Kyrill, there are important details on the holy services which were chanted daily and on Sundays in the then three Churches of the Resurrection, Golgotha and of the Passions, but also during those of the Holy Week and the Sunday of Pascha. Testimonies from the travel-guide of Etheria, appears that the holy services were performed exclusively in Greek and only at specific occasions the readings were translated in

other languages. From testimonies it appears that after the end of the persecutions and from the beginning of the 4th century the Christian faith was consolidated as the official religion of the Roman Nation, while the Church of Jerusalem assumed a Greek character and hypostasis as Greek was the liturgical language used.

From the beginning of the 5th century and beyond and while the Bishopric throne of Jerusalem was occupied by the luminous hierarch John 2nd (386-417) the local Church enjoyed great prosperity with the support of the Byzantine emperors. During his time the most significant event was the fall of ethnicity in Palestine which was mainly due to the apostolic activities of Bishop Porphyrios from Thessaloniki. Particularly the empress Eudoxia not only did she grant a respectable sum of money and architectural plans for the construction of the Christian Church in Gaza but she also shipped from Constantinople construction materials, precious columns and marbles together with the mechanic Roufino from Antioch. This Church replaced the idolatric Marneion. And in honour of her august it was named Eudoxiana (407). Even the emperor Theodosios 2 nd (418) helped the successor of John, Bishop of Jerusalem Praylio (417-422) with a respectable sum of money for the poor and gold stone encrusted cross for holy Golgotha.