

Pilgrimage of Archbishop Makarios of Australia to the Holy “Garden of the Virgin Mary”



His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia made a holy Pilgrimage to the “Garden of the Virgin Mary” upon the invitation of Elder Ephraim, Abbot of the Holy Royal Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of Vatopedi for the celebration of the Monastery’s main church (katholikon) on the Feast-day of the Annunciation of the Theotokos by the Julian calendar.

On Friday, 5 April, His Eminence arrived at the renowned and historic Monastery of Mount Athos, where he was officially received at the entrance by Abbot Ephraim and his brotherhood. An official Doxology service was held in the katholikon, at the end of which The Very Reverend Archimandrite Ephraim welcomed the Archbishop of Australia with warm words, praising his personality and virtues, as well as his pastoral ministry on the fifth continent. After briefly describing his acquaintance with His Eminence and their subsequent and ever-growing spiritual connection, he focused on the multi-faceted work of the Orthodox Church in Australia under the leadership of Archbishop Makarios. Moreover, he wished for God to grant him

strength to continue the testimony of Christ in Australia and to guide the Christ-loving plenitude of the local Church towards spiritual progress. Finally, The Very Reverend Ephraim expressed the joy of the Athonite monks at the recent proclamation of St Paisios as Patron Saint of the Holy Archdiocese of Australia, as well as of all of Australia. Furthermore, as a sign of this great spiritual joy, the Dismissal Hymn of St Paisios the Athonite was chanted earlier in the day during the Archbishop's official reception.

"I am happy to hear here on Mt Athos, where St Paisios lived and struggled spiritually, his dismissal hymn being chanted; a hymn which connects the holy Athonite State with the Holy Archdiocese of Australia," responded a clearly moved Archbishop Makarios. "We desire to spiritually connect our people with this ecclesiastical and spiritual centre, which is unique in the world, and which is the Holy Mountain", he stressed in another part of his response.

Additionally, the Archbishop of Australia wholeheartedly thanked the Abbot and the monastery's brotherhood for the honourable and magnificent welcome they granted him. "I am grateful and indebted for your love and the honour given to my unworthiness", he noted, "which I accept with much modesty and humility, not because I am worthy of such manifestations of your loving heart, but because all these have their reference to and their culmination in our common nurturer and Mother of us all – the Holy and Great Church of Christ, and our common Father and Bishop of us all, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew."



On the eve of the feast, in accordance with the monastic order and Athonite tradition, in the katholikon of the Holy Great and Sacred Monastery of Vatopedi, which is dedicated to the event of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos, a Festal Vigil Service was held, in a solemn atmosphere, for the Feast of the Annunciation. Along with His Eminence Makarios were the Abbot of the Monastery of Hilandar, Elder Methodios; the Abbot of the celebrating Monastery, Elder Ephraim; and representatives of the Monasteries of the Athonite State.

During the course of the vigil, the Archbishop performed the Service of the Small Blessing of the Waters at the monastery's fiali (fountain), followed by the procession of the holy icon of Panagia Vimatarissa around the monastery. The vigil service culminated with the celebratory divine Liturgy, which was presided over by the Archbishop.

The chanting of the celebratory holy services was rendered by Archimandrite Fr Cherubim Tsinoglou, Preacher of the Holy Metropolis of Edessa, Pella and Almopia with his entourage, and the Vatopedi Fathers with Musicologist Dr George Constantinou. Among the many pilgrims was, among others, the former Civil Administrator of Mt Athos, Mr Athanasios Martinos.

The holy Feast concluded on Sunday afternoon with the service of the post-festal Vespers and the Memorial for the repose of the souls of the blessed Founders of Vatopedi Monastery. Archbishop Makarios presided over the service and also

present were His Grace Metropolitan Ioustinos of Nea Krini and Kalamaria, the Abbots of the Holy Monastery of Xenofontos, Elder Alexios, Stavronikita Monastery, Elder Tychon, and Pantocrator Monastery, Elder Gabriel and other Athonite Fathers.

It should be noted that during his stay on Mount Athos, the Archbishop of Australia successively visited the Holy Monasteries of Iviron and Stavronikita as well as the Holy Community.

At Iviron Monastery, he received a warm welcome from Abbot Elder Nathnael and his brotherhood as well as by the former Abbot Elder Vasilios Gontikakis, with whom he discussed, in a cordial atmosphere filled with emotion, about his past visits to Australia and especially his blessed visit in 1977, together with St Paisios. With great reverence, His Eminence also venerated the miraculous icon of Panagia Portaitissa, which is treasured and housed in the Holy Monastery of Iviron.

At Stavronikita Monastery, His Eminence received an equally warm welcome from Abbot Tychon and the brotherhood. After venerating the miraculous icon of St Nicholas and the other sacred treasures of the monastery, he had a friendly discussion with the Abbot and the fathers, while everyone was clearly moved by the canonisation by the Holy and Great Church of Christ of the Monastery's founder, St Jeremiah.

His Eminence's visit to the administrative centre of the Athonite State was equally touching, where he was warmly welcomed by the Protopostasis Elder Stefanos Hilandarinos, and the Epistates, Elders Nikodimos and Paisios from the Holy Monasteries of St Paul and St Gregoriou. After the Protopostasis and Epistates welcomed the Hierarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, they offered him a copy of the icon of the Virgin Mary, "Axion Estin", and wished him strength and Panagia's intercessions in order to govern the Christ-loving plenitude of the fifth continent with love, self-sacrifice and for the glory of Christ and the Church.

His Eminence Archbishop Makarios departed "The Garden of the Virgin Mary" filled with emotion, having previously wholeheartedly thanked the Brotherhood of Vatopedi Monastery and especially Abbot Ephraim for the Abrahamic hospitality they provided him, and after holding a special meeting with the Australian monks, to whom he gave his blessing and asked for their prayers for the people of the Holy Archdiocese of Australia. It is noteworthy that 14 Australian monks reside at Vatopedi Monastery.

Departing from Mount Athos, the Archbishop prayed for Panagia to support the Australian people and grant peace and unity to the Greeks of the fifth continent,



lit a candle for the Christ-loving



















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