

“The Theotokos has been, is, and will always be the protector of our Nation and the Champion General of our City”



On the occasion of the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew presided on Monday, 8 September 2025, at the Divine Liturgy in the celebrating Church of the Nativity of the Theotokos in Palaio Banio, in the Diplokionion (Beşiktaş) district.

In his address, the Ecumenical Patriarch noted that, particularly every August and at the beginning of September, our thoughts and hearts turn in a special way to the Lady Theotokos, “who has been, is, and will always be the protector of our Nation and the Champion General of our City.”

He continued: “We have also come here to draw from her ever-burning lamp the oil of hope, which we need so greatly today, especially in times when messages of despair and voices of hopelessness are heard, primarily from the irresponsible. Do not, beloved children, follow the false prophets who predict that “the end is near”

and urge flight, saying, "Tomorrow it will be too late." We repeat and insist: No, do not follow them! Do not be misled! But draw hope and courage from our Most Holy Theotokos and celebrate her with joy and exultation, she who overcame even death and lives among us, she who, "in her Dormition, did not abandon the world," and, above all, she who bore Christ, who trampled death by death and destroyed its power."

Subsequently, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the September events of 1955, the Ecumenical Patriarch stated: "Instead of another commemoration, we have chosen, as a form of remembrance, to repeat the words of our late predecessor, Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, who, in a memorandum to the then Prime Minister of Türkiye Adnan Menderes, thoroughly examined the calamities that befell the local Greek Community and our Ecumenical Patriarchate: "A legacy of centuries, an entire civilization, a source of pride for the country and a universal human heritage, was struck in its most vital parts; the sacred and holy of our faith were desecrated. Of our eighty churches and holy sites, seventy suffered terrible destruction, and many were burned. Precious sacred vessels and vestments were destroyed. The eyes of sacred icons were gouged out. Historical works of art of inestimable value were annihilated. The most holiest of our churches were defiled, mocked, and looted shamefully. Graves were dug up, including patriarchal tombs. Fresh relics were mutilated. Piles of bones were removed from their resting places and burned. Clergy were sought out everywhere, mistreated wherever they were found, threatened with death, and some were executed. Scenes of horror unfolded... These terrifying events bore the character of persecution against the Church and its Christians and represented a grave blow in the history and life of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.'"

The reminder of these tragic events is not intended to stir up past wounds, but rests on the firm conviction that memory is a decisive factor in preventing their repetition. The Queen of Cities (Constantinople) stands as an exemplary model of centuries-long harmonious and peaceful coexistence of peoples, cultures, and religions. If this was true during the Ottoman Empire, all the more so do we expect the same within the framework of a modern rule-of-law state. We are all bearers of equal rights and responsibilities. There can be no second-class citizens, no "children of a lesser god."

For us, the Orthodox faithful of the City, the Theotokos, Mother of God, who has specially protected our Nation throughout the centuries and has allowed it to be represented even today by us few but countless Romioi, is indeed our only hope and salvation, a source of joy and strength. In this regard, the despair of our

community after the dreadful destruction of the 'September events' of 1955 was gradually transformed by God into hope for better days, always through the intercession of the Theotokos."

The Ecumenical Patriarch congratulated His Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras of Kydonia, supervisor of the Bosphorus District, "for the rich spiritual, pastoral, and liturgical work he carries out." He also bestowed his paternal blessing on Archimandrite Gedeon Magriotis, the Parish Priest, as well as the Church Committee of the Community and their supporters, "for their efforts and contribution to the continuation of Community life and our history here in Palaio Banio of the City of Constantine, under the protection of the Theotokos."

Earlier, the Patriarch was addressed by His Eminence Metropolitan Athenagoras of Kydonia.

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