29/12/2025

The Sunday of the Forefathers at the Patriarchate



On Sunday, 16th/28th December 2025, the Patriarchate celebrated the commemoration of the Holy Forefathers, that is to say, those “Forefathers of Christ according to the flesh, before the Law and under the Law”, and especially the Patriarch Abraham, unto whom the promise was first given, when God said unto him: “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; 22:18); as well as the commemoration of the Three Children in Babylon, whose furnace an Angel transformed into rest and refreshment, because they did not venerate the work of men’s hands.

This feast was celebrated in the magnificent and beautifully adorned church dedicated to the Forefathers, belonging to the Patriarchal Community at the Village of the Shepherds (Beit Sahour).

In this church, the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by His Beatitude our Father and

Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Theophilos, with co-celebrants their Eminences, Metropolitan Hesychios of Capitolias, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, and Archbishop Philoumenos of Pella; together with Hieromonks of the Holy Sepulchre Brotherhood, including the Hegumen of the Monastery of the Shepherds in Beit Sahour and of Beit Jala, Archimandrite Ignatios; the Hegumen of the Holy Monastery of the Cross and Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod, Archimandrite Christodoulos; local Presbyters, namely the parish priests of the church, Fr Sabbas, Fr Issa, and Fr John; the Hierodeacons Eulogios and Athanasios; in the honourable presence of the Consul of Greece in Jerusalem, Mrs Anna Mantika; with the chanting of the Byzantine choir of the village, and the devout and prayerful participation of a great multitude of the local faithful.

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

“Let us today, rejoicing as lovers of the fathers, celebrate the memory of the fathers; having come together, let us duly praise Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; from whom Christ the Lord appeared according to the flesh, through His great compassion,” the hymnographer proclaims.

Beloved brethren in Christ,
Devout Christians and pilgrims,

The grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us all together in this sacred place of the shepherds abiding in the fields, where “a multitude of the heavenly host praised God, saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men” (Luke 2:13–14), that we might festively honour the Holy Forefathers, and in particular the blessed Abraham, who came from the land of the Chaldeans and occupies a prominent place in the history of the mystery of the Divine Providence—that is to say, of the salvation of mankind.

Today our Holy Church commemorates the Forefathers of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh, before the Law and under the Law; and especially the Patriarch Abraham, unto whom the promise was first given, when God said unto him: “In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; 22:18), as testified by the Book of Genesis.

The Evangelist Matthew likewise notes that from the seed of Abraham and David Christ sprang forth, saying: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). Interpreting this saying, Zigabenos writes: “He called Christ the Son of David, and David the son of Abraham, leading the minds of the hearers to the remembrance of the promises. For long ago God

promised both to Abraham and to David that He would raise up Christ from their seed. And since the hearers were Jews, they knew these things."

In other words, Abraham was the first and David the last among men to whom the promise concerning the Messiah was given. For this reason, Christ was called the Son of David, since David was also His immediate ancestor; and He is the true and only descendant of Abraham—yet One who is "greater than Abraham" (John 8:53). And as the unique descendant of Abraham, Jesus Christ fully inherits the promises, according to the divine Apostle Paul, who says: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

Interpreting this passage, Theodore of Mopsuestia says: "That which was spoken concerning his seed… we find fulfilled precisely in Christ… yet also in all those who trace their descent from him, though chiefly and truly fulfilled in Christ Himself." Here it is noteworthy that "the promises to Abraham" concern not only Christ, but also the true land of promise—that is, the heavenly city, which has true and unshakable foundations, whose builder and maker is God Himself: "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10), the divine Paul proclaims.

In other words, my beloved brethren, all who believe in Christ are able to partake of the blessings of Abraham, as the inspired Paul says: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law… that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:13–14). It is faith that renders us spiritual descendants of him who believed and "became the father of all them that believe" (Rom. 4:12); for "ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus… and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:26–29).

This is further testified by the hymnographer of the Church, who chants:

"By faith Thou didst justify the Forefathers, betrothing through them the Church from among the Gentiles. The Saints glory in honour, for from their seed there hath come forth a renowned fruit: she who seedlessly bare Thee. Through their supplications, O Christ God, save our souls."

And again:"Seedlessly, by the divine Spirit, and by the good pleasure of the Father, thou didst conceive the Son of God, Who was begotten of the Father without a mother before the ages, and for our sake became without a father from thee; thou didst bring Him forth in the flesh and didst nurse Him as an infant. Wherefore cease

not to intercede, that our souls may be delivered from dangers.”

Now the Saints who glory in honour that from their seed there has come forth a renowned fruit—she who seedlessly and by the Holy Spirit gave birth to Christ, namely the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary—are none other than the Forefathers of our Saviour Jesus Christ according to the flesh, before the Mosaic Law and under the Law of Moses, the Son of David and the Son of Abraham (cf. Matt. 1:1). These Saints are the Forefathers who, on the one hand, prefigured the coming of Christ, and on the other proclaimed to the world His ineffable Birth from the Virgin. “Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel” (Isa. 7:14) … and again, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Angel of Great Counsel, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6), the most eloquent Prophet Isaiah proclaims.

Here, the Prophet Isaiah foretells the coming of the Righteous One, that is, the Nativity of Christ from the Virgin. This prophetic testimony is also invoked by the Deacon and First-martyr Stephen in his defence, when he says: “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Righteous One” (Acts 7:52). The Apostle Peter likewise, in his homily exhorting the people to repentance, says: “Brethren, God hath thus fulfilled those things, which He shewed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer” (Acts 3:17–18). And the divine Paul makes mention of the same Gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, which was made “according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the prophetic scriptures, according to the commandment of the everlasting God” (Rom. 16:25).

This mystery, foretold by Adam, the Forefather of us all, and by his descendants—especially the prophets—and kept hidden since the ages, is none other than the transcendent mystery of the Divine Providence: namely, the Nativity of our Saviour Christ from the pure blood of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, in the Grotto of Bethlehem.

Therefore today, my beloved brethren, in this land and in this sacred place of the shepherds abiding in the fields (cf. Luke 2:8), our Holy Church, like another Angel, proclaims unto us tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: “For unto us is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord, in the city of David” (Luke 2:10–11).

Let us hasten, like the Magi, to worship Him—the Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord. Him, our Lord and God, the Saviour Christ, we also beseech, my beloved, that by the power of His Holy Spirit He may dwell in the cave of our hearts, that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17–19). And together with the hymnographer let us say: “Unto Christ God, the Son begotten of the Father before the ages without change, and in the latter times incarnate seedlessly from the Virgin, let us cry aloud: O Thou Who hast exalted our horn, holy art Thou, O Lord.”

Amen. Blessed, peaceful, and grace-filled Christmas.”

Thereafter, a reception took place in the presence of the Minister of Tourism of the Palestinian Authority, Mr Haik, and the Mayor of the city, Mr Elias Sa‘id, together with Commissioners and other officials of the Palestinian state. His Beatitude was presented with a relief icon of the Church of the Resurrection and the Basilica of Bethlehem by the Scouts’ Association, and with a painting of the Nativity of the Lord by President Abu Mazen.

Finally, a banquet was offered in honour of His Beatitude and many others, at which His Beatitude once again addressed those present as follows:

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:8–11).

Honourable President and esteemed members of the Ecclesiastical Council,
Your Excellency Mr Haik, and Honourable Mr Sa‘id,
Beloved brethren in Christ,

“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: for unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord, in the city of David” (Luke 2:10–11).

This proclamation of great joy—the Birth, that is, of our God and Saviour Christ—was foretold by the Forefathers of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh, whose memory we festively honour today in this very place of the shepherds abiding in the fields.

This proclamation of “great joy” is today announced by the pious Christ-named

flock of the Church of Jerusalem, from this blessed land of Palestine, unto the whole world, and especially unto her afflicted people in Gaza and the occupied territories.

We say this because the Christian Communities in the Holy Land and the wider region look to the Churches, and in particular to our own Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, for encouragement and spiritual nourishment. Despite the challenges we face, we cannot yield to despair and hopelessness; rather, we must always proclaim the Evangelical message of the Angels, of hope, justice, and peace, praising and glorifying the Christ who is born, saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill among men” (Luke 2:14).

This sacred trust, namely, the joy of Christmas, has been preserved and continues to be safeguarded as the apple of the eye throughout the ages by our most venerable Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, together with the venerable Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre and the devout Christ-named people. For we hear in the Sunday Gospel: “And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (the Church) (Matt. 16:18); and again: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Interpreting this saying, Saint Cyril of Alexandria remarks: “He calls the saints (the faithful) a little flock, in comparison with the great multitude of the unbelievers, or because of the voluntary humility of such a flock.”

Rightly, therefore, does our Holy Church of Christ honour the memory of the Holy Forefathers. For from them “there hath sprung forth for us a rod of strength, the only Bride unwedded and God-bearing, the pure Mary, from whom the Flower hath blossomed forth, Christ, Who hath budded forth life and eternal salvation for all.”

We pray that the light of the Sun of Righteousness may illumine the hearts of us all and shine forth upon the Holy Land, and especially upon the land of the shepherds abiding in the fields.

Amen. Many years, blessed, peaceful, and grace-filled Christmas.”

From the Chief Secretariat

























