

Annual New Year's cake-cutting (vassilopita) at Patriarchate of Jerusalem



The annual cutting of a New Year's Cake, known as vassilopita in Greek, was held on Wednesday evening at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which celebrated New Year's Eve, as based on the Julian calendar.

The Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Most Godly Beatitude Theophilos III, presided over the ceremony and then addressed those in attendance.

Afterwards, the Patriarchal School's pupils sang New year's carols at the Patriarchate Hall and at the residences of the Hagiotaphite elders.

The press release of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem reads:

On Wednesday evening, 31 December 2020 /13 January 2021, which is New Year's Eve according to the Julian calendar, the Cutting of the New Year Cake took place at the Patriarchate.

This ceremony is held by the Church, for the beginning of each New Year on 1st January, as we also commemorate Saint Basil, to whom we owe the custom of the New Year Cake, as he put in it a coin as a token of charity, respecting the dignity of the poor.

This ceremony on New Year's 2021 Eve was led by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, who addressed those present with the following:

"For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2), Saint Paul preaches.

The New Year's dawn has shone unto us today, like the light of those under the shadow of death, due to the coronavirus plague; for this reason, our Holy Church of Christ has gathered us all in this holy place of our Venerable Patriarchate, in order to give glory and thank the Holy Trinitarian God, who has given times and seasons in His own power (Acts 1:7). On the commemoration of the circumcision according to the flesh of the Son of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ on the one hand, and on the other, on the co-celebration of the commemoration of our Holy Father among the Saints, Basil the Great, in whose honour we have this ceremony of the cutting of the New Year Cake which bears his name "Vasilopita".

The change of the year is a fact that marks the course of the worldly history of man, and much more of the sacred history, which finds its peak at the mystery of the Divine Providence, namely the Incarnation of God the Word, our Saviour Jesus Christ, during the reign of Caesar Augustus and Cyrenius, the Governor of Syria (Luke 2:1-2). For this reason, our Holy Church, according to the Biblical words: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, ... To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4:18-19), does not only celebrate this event but also calls upon the blessing of God the Father "for the year of the Lord", saying: "Thou who art One with the Holy Spirit, Word without beginning and Son, the co-creator of all things visible and invisible, bless the crown of this year, preserving the crowds of the Orthodox faithful in peace, by the intercessions of the Theotokos and of all Thy saints". By

the Lord's blessing, the year within the Church is transformed into a time of salvation according to the saying: "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

It is precisely this Biblical, or better say, this redeeming change of the year that we celebrate today. "But though the righteous be prevented with death, yet shall he be in rest. For honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by a number of years" (Wisdom of Solomon 4:7-8).

In other words, the distinguishment of time into the present, past and future, on the one hand, and its counting in years, on the other, is made understood only in Christ our God, according to the witness of Saint John the Theologian: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8). And the mental, or philosophical consideration of time, cannot be determined, that is why Saint Peter says: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

This means that time, which becomes a season in the Church of Christ, was given to us, so that we may become through faith "watchers of His majesty", namely to become seers of God's glory in His heavenly Kingdom. And Saint Basil the Great says: "In order that one may not try to find the beginning of the world and of time by the use of human thoughts, in order that one may not be led astray from the truth, God has put His seal (in the Book of Genesis), to protect the soul of man; God has given His precious Name to protect from such teaching (fallacy), saying that the beginning of the world and of the time was made by God. The blessed nature, the abundant goodness, the beginning of all beings, the source of life, the much-desired beauty, the water, the light, the incomprehensible wisdom, He (God) made heaven and earth from the beginning".

These God-inspired words of the established Church Father, Basil the Great, call all those who love "the much-desired beauty, the source of life, the noetic light, and also the unapproachable wisdom", during this time of the change of the year and with the ongoing deadly plague of coronavirus, to consider, each one of us to himself, to what thing(s) we have gone astray, thus imitating the prodigal son, of the Gospel parable, who having come back to his senses, he thought: "I will arise and go to my father and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son..." (Luke 15:18-21).

Having before us the repentance of the prodigal son and the viewing of time in Christ, who became incarnate through the pure flesh of the Ever-Virgin Mary the Theotokos, let us entreat the great Hierarch of Cappadocia, Saint Basil, who has decorated the customs of the people, to pray to our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who was circumcised in the flesh, for the salvation of our souls, for the peace of the world, and especially for the peace of the tested Middle East, for the cessation of the schisms and the restoration of the unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church, and for the release of the humankind from the various mutations of the coronavirus plague.

And let us say along with the hymnographer: Saviour of all, and master, creator and sovereign of the whole creation, by the prayers of the one who gave birth to Thee, grant peace to Thy world, keeping the Church always united. Moreover, Lord, Thou, Who has under Your power the times and the seasons, bless the crown of this year of Your goodness, preserving in peace and health the Venerable Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, our reverend Christian flock, the Holy City of Jerusalem and the noble nation of the Rum Orthodox. Amen.

Have a happy, blessed and healthy New Year 2021.

Many Happy Returns!"

After His Beatitude's address, the Apolytikia of the Feast were sung and then with the wish of "A blessed and Happy New Year", His Beatitude cut the Cake and distributed the pieces to the Hagiotaphite Fathers and to the few guests present, due to the covid-19 measures.

Afterwards, the Patriarchal School's Students sang the carols at the Patriarchate Hall and at the houses of the Hagiotaphite Fathers.

From Secretariat-General







