21/09/2021

THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS AT THE PATRIARCHATE



On Sunday 6/19 September 2021, for pastoral reasons the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos was celebrated earlier at the Holy Church of the Nativity of Theotokos in Beit Jala, near Bethlehem.

On this feast, the Church glorifies God because He granted Mary to the former baren Joachim and Anna, from whom our Lord Jesus Christ was born in the flesh. The Church joyfully chants “Joachim and Anna were freed from the corruption of death O immaculate one by thy Holy Nativity…the barren woman giveth birth to the Theotokos and nourisher of our life” (Kontakion).

For this joyful feast the Divine Liturgy in the beautiful Church of Beit Jala was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the co-celebration of their Eminences; Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis, Elder Kamarasis Archimandrite Nectarios, the Priests of the Community, Paul, Joseph and Elias and Archdeacon Mark. The chanting was delivered by Mr Nidal and his choir, as the service was attended by the whole parish and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“The ends of earth rejoice today upon thy birth, O blameless Maid, O Mary, God’s hallowed Mother and bride who knewest not wedlock. Hereon is loosed the sorrowful reproach and pain of childlessness by which thy parents once were held; loosed is the curse in childbearing that fell on Eve, our first mother” the hymnographer of the Church proclaims. (Minaion, Matins, Exapostilarion).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians,

The Holy Church of Christ rejoices today along with the Holy Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Righteous and Saints on the Holy Nativity of the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, we are gathered in this holy Church to honour in Eucharist the Theotokos, the Mother of our God.

Let nature leap with joy because the sheep of God is being born and from her, the shepherd will be clad in a garment like a sheep and will tear apart the garments of the old deadening. Let virginity dance, because as Isaiah says, “the Virgin is born, she who will conceive and give birth to a Son, whose name will be Emanuel”, meaning, “God is with us”.

And the shepherd who will be clad in the sheep’s form and will tear apart the garment of the old deadening is no one else by God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, who “for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9), Saint Paul preaches.

Interpreting these words of Paul, Saint Chrysostom says: “Here, Paul names ‘wealth’ the knowledge of the mystery of reverence, the purification of sins, righteousness, sanctification, the myriads of good things He has bestowed on us and those He will bestow in the future”. And Zigavinos says: “The wealth of the

deification by grace".

The nativity of the pure Theotokos Mary from Joachim and Anna reversed the curse that came from Adam and Eve to the human race when later on she bore Christ in the flesh. That is why Saint John Damascene says, "in thee Ever-Virgin Theotokos are both nature and time renewed".

This means that both human nature and the time are renewed in Theotokos and Virgin Mary, because from her did the Light of Righteousness dawn in the world, namely, Christ, the salvation of the human race. "Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2) the Lord says. "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you" (1 Peter 1:10), Saint Peter says.

Indeed, the words of the Prophets were fulfilled to the righteous people of God, Joachim and Anna, whose prayer did the Lord hear, and gave them the Virgin Mary as a brilliant and great ransom for Eve, as Saint John Damascene says: "And the Lord heard their prayer, giving them Mary, who has the name of the Lord, such a brilliant and great ransom for Eve. The daughter will become the healing of the mother, the new dough of the divine rebirth, the root of the god-spoken branch, the rejoice of the forefather".

This holy event of the nativity of the Theotokos is especially honoured by our Holy Church. And this is because the Most Holy Mother of God is the beginning of the people in Christ, the Christians. From her pure flesh, the Word became incarnate, He was made flesh (John 1:14).

In other words, my dear brethren, the incarnation of God the Word in the Holy Spirit from her pure flesh became "the new leaven for the divine rebirth" as Saint Athanasios the Great teaches: "In Christ, the human nature is unspeakably united with the Divine nature of the Saviour and thus rejects all natural malformity that was inherited from Adam and is renewed from above into a new divine and eternal being, by the power of the Divine nature of the Word".

Behold, therefore, the contribution of the Most Pure and immaculate Virgin Mary to the great mystery of the salvation of us men. Behold again, why Saint Paul preaches; "For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches" (Romans 11:16). And behold why the hymnographer of the Church cries out loud: "thy Nativity O Theotokos, hath proclaimed joy to the whole world; for from thee hath dawned the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, annulling the curse and bestowing the blessing, abolishing death and granting us

life everlasting” (Apolytikion of the Feast).

And the Nativity of Theotokos proclaimed to the whole world the message of the joy of salvation, while the greeting from Archangel Gabriel, “Rejoice thou who art full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women” sealed the redeeming message of the absolution from the curse of the forefather and the curse of death and corruption, namely of sin, through Christ’s death.

For this reason, the Gospel of joy, blessing and sanctification, as well as the grace of the Holy Spirit, these divine and marvellous gifts that our Holy Church possesses, we are called to keep as treasures in our hearts, through the prayers of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary.

Along with Saint John Damascene, let us exclaim to the Theotokos: “Rejoice lamp, the deep-rooted and golden vessel, whose wick is the grace of the Holy Spirit and olive oil the holy body which Christ took from your pure flesh, the Light that never sets, thou who brought the light of eternal life to those who were sitting in the darkness and the shadow of death”. Amen. Many happy returns, with many blessings and in good health!”

The Divine Liturgy was followed by a meal at lunchtime, which was offered by the Community Council. During the meal His Beatitude addressed those present as follows:

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39), Saint Paul preaches.

Dear Brethren,

Today’s feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos is in essence a feast of the infinite love of God toward His creature, the man, whom He made according to His image and likeness.

This divine love is witnessed and confessed by the Holy Church of Christ during its liturgical sacrament of the Eucharist when both the clergy and the people become communicants of the body and blood of our God and Saviour Christ, united in His Spirit.

This unity has been preserved throughout the centuries by the Holy Church of Jerusalem, namely the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, according to Saint Paul’s advice:

“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

This bond of peace between God and the people was inaugurated by the great event of the Nativity of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, whom we gratefully honour today and in great reverence entreat to protect and comfort all who magnify and praise Her.

The Most Holy Virgin and Theotokos Mary is the hope of the whole world, and especially of the Christians. “Unto Thee do I commit mine every hope. O Mother of God, guard me under thine shelter”, the hymnographer of the Church proclaims (end of Small Compline). And the psalmist says: “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help” (Psalm 146:3).

We, my dear brethren, are called to “Look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2), the Son and God of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. Amen. To the good health of all of us!”



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