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Metropolitan Joseph, Delegation Arrive in Russia for Two-week Pilgrimage



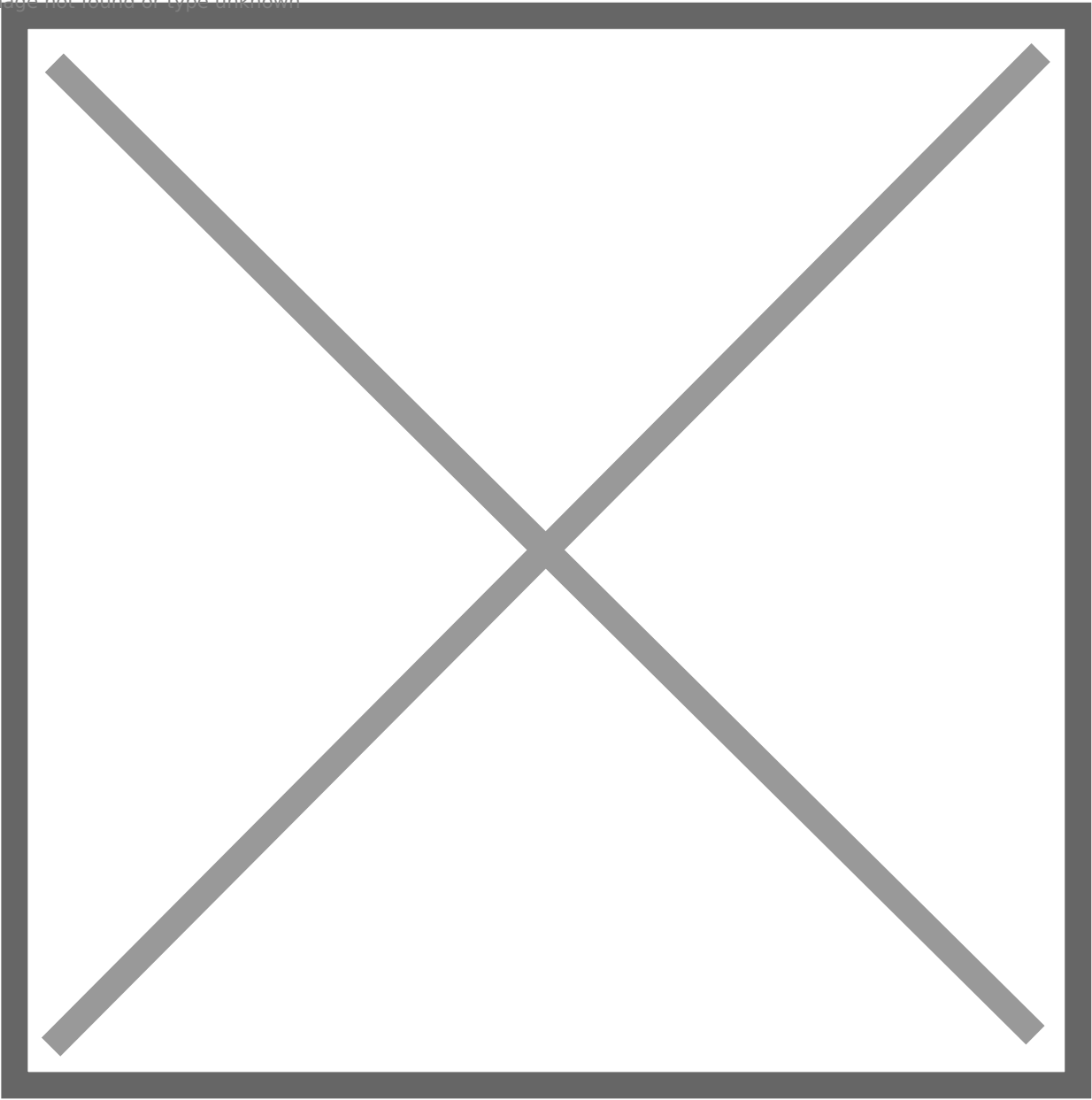
By the grace of God, His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph and more than 20 clergy and lay delegates from the Antiochian Archdiocese arrived safely in St. Petersburg, Russia, as they begin their two-week pilgrimage in the “city of Peter,” Moscow and other cities. They were warmly welcomed by His Grace Bishop Mitrophan of Gatchina and Lugsy and other dignitaries.

The pilgrimage will include visits to the most beautiful cathedrals, monasteries and national heritage sites Russia has to offer. The highlight for Sayidna Joseph and the delegation will be their scheduled participation in the festivities with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia in honor of his patron saint’s day on May 24.

Follow the pilgrims each day on Antiochian.org and the Archdiocese’s Facebook page for photos and stories of their voyage.



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Day One, May 15

His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph and the delegation of the Antiochian Archdiocese began their first full day of their pilgrimage with a visit to the Peterhof palace. The palace was founded by Peter the Great when he moved the imperial capital to his new city, and was greatly enhanced by Catherine the Great. The beauty of the art and architecture as well as the technical expertise of the fountains left a profound impact on all.

The pilgrimage continued to the tomb of St. Xenia of St. Petersburg, where the delegation venerated the tomb, were anointed with holy oil, and chanted hymns of the Resurrection with great Paschal joy. The day ended with a visit to the Holy Dormition Church, a representation church of the famous Optina Monastery. The pilgrims had the blessing of venerating the relics of the Optina Elders, including St. Ambrose – Dostoevsky’s inspiration for the character of Elder Zosimas in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. All were deeply moved by these grace-filled experiences.



Day Two, May 16

His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph and the Antiochian delegation continued their pilgrimage in Russia with a visit to Catherine's Palace, in what became known as the "Tsar's Village." The palace was occupied by the Nazis during the Second World War, and they burned it when they fled. Over many decades, the Russians have painstakingly returned it to its former glory - including the unique Amber Room.

The delegation then visited a church built by Tsar St. Nicholas II near the palace in which he and his family preferred to live. The church was also in need of restoration as it was in disrepair from both the Nazi and Communist regimes. One of the moving things about the pilgrimage has been witnessing the perseverance of the Russian people through the devastation of the Second World War and Communist oppression.

The delegation then visited the New Maiden Convent, the first monastic sisterhood in St. Petersburg. They toured a new church, fittingly named in honor of the Holy Resurrection. The church is stunningly beautiful and houses many holy relics. The day closed with a visit to the Lady of Kazan Cathedral, and the pilgrims were able to venerate the wonderworking icon of Our Lady of Kazan.



Day 3, May 17

His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph and the Antiochian delegation traveled to Novgorod, founded in 859, to experience the culture and history of Old Russia. The delegation visited the oldest monastery in Russia, Yuriev (St. George), and were able to pray in the favorite spot of St. Alexander Nevsky. The pilgrimage continued to the historical heart of the city, the Kremlin. The pilgrims visited the cathedral of the Holy Wisdom, and venerated the miraculous icon of Our Lady of the Sign that was processed around the city and delivered it from a siege in 1170.

The day concluded with a visit to the monastery of Khutyn, founded by St. Varlaam in 1192, which is currently a convent. The pilgrims joined the sisterhood for Vespers and venerated the holy relics of the founder. The pilgrims left with a great appreciation for the role of the city of Novgorod in spreading the culture of Ancient Rus to Kiev and preserving during the dark days of the Tartar invasions as the only city to remain free during those dark times.



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— Source: [Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of America](#)