

## Metropolis of Kastoria: official opening of a 14th Century Church



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On Monday, 13 November 2023, during the Vespers Service for Saint Gregory Palamas, His Eminence Metropolitan Kallinikos of Kastoria conducted the official opening service for the wonderful Chapel that was erected and painted before the Fall of Constantinople and before the conquest of Kastoria by the Ottomans, during the glorious era of Hesychasm and Saint Gregory of Palamas.

The opening was of the Church of Saint George of the Mountain (Tou Vounou) a recorded 14th century Chapel, one of the fifty-three surviving churches in Kastoria (among its total of 73 historical monuments) of the period of the Christian Empire of Constantinople, but also of the Turkish rule.

The Chapel was erected at the beginning of the 14th century, and in the middle of the 16th century the narthex was added with frescoes from the same period, while in the middle of the 17th century it was the Catholicon of a Holy Monastery of female monastics. The Chapel is observed for the different phases of iconography,

the initial decoration between about 1364-1367, the second in the middle of the 16th century and the third phase in the middle of the 17th century.

The relatively simple iconographical style of the church has many common stylistic features with the neighbouring church of 'Agios Nikolaos Kyritzis, Agios Athanasios Mouzakis', but also with the iconographical decoration of churches in the area of Korçë and Prespa of the same period.



It is very significant that among the frescoes is the icon of Saint Gregory Palamas, which was painted shortly after his falling asleep in the Lord (which happened in 1359) and perhaps before his canonisation or at least at the time of his canonisation (which took place in 1368), and probably constitutes the oldest surviving illustration of Saint Gregory Palamas in ecclesiastical monumental painting.

The Church was maintained with the Operational Program of Macedonia – Thrace 2007-2014 by the Ministry of Culture and was delivered in the year 2015, but it was not functioning until today due to various technical details.

The Church of Saint George of the Mountain belongs to the Parish of Saint George of Kastoria and is looked after by Mrs. Ekaterina (Rena) Nana-Papathoma. Because, as is well known, all the old churches of Kastoria from the time of Constantinople and the later period, are traditionally cared for by families of Kastoria.



His Eminence Metropolitan Kallinikos thanked the patron Mrs. Rena Papathoma for the care, beautification and improvement of the church, as well as the Head of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Kastoria, Ms. Andromachi Skreka, the Head of the Maintenance Department Ms. Malia Gimourtzina and all those who worked for years as maintainers of this important Byzantine holy church, the former Member of Parliament for Kastoria Mr. Zisis Tzikalagia, the Priests of the Holy Church of Saint George in Kastoria, Protopresbyter Father Michael Lianos and Protopresbyter Father Christos Mesimeris, for the preparation of the official opening and the festive Vespers and the general organisation of the whole event.

After the dismissal of Vespers, Mr. Tzikalagias and Mrs. Skreka addressed greetings, who together with Ms. Gimourtzina and Fr. Stefanos Schinas guided the pilgrims to the Holy Church.

During the service of the official opening of the Church and the Vespers Service, holy relics of Saint George the Trophy-bearer, Saint Gregory Palamas of Thessaloniki and Saint Kallinikos of Edessa were placed out for the veneration of the laity.



On the following day, Tuesday, 14 November 2023, a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy



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