

## Pilgrimage to the Holy Places in the Holy Land and Mount Sinai

*by Bishop Klemes of Gardikion*

**BY THE GRACE** of Our Crucified and Risen Lord, with the help of the *Panagia*, and with the blessing of our Most Reverend Father, Metropolitan Cyprian, who is ailing, a week-long pilgrimage was made to the Holy Places in Israel, Palestine, and Sinai, where God walked.

From Bright Saturday, April 12/25, 2009 through the Saturday of St. Thomas, April 19/May 2, 2009, a group of fifty of our faithful, under His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod in Resistance, had the great honor and blessing of visiting the holiest shrines of our Orthodox Christian Faith.

The pilgrimage was organized by the Holy Metropolis of Oropos and Phyle and sponsored by the St. Philaret the Merciful Orthodox Women's Guild, with the coöperation of the Kitsakes Tours travel bureau.



Taking part in the pilgrimage, along with Bishop Cyprian, were the author of this article, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion; Hieromonk Kallis-

tos, Hierodeacon Niphon, and Rasophore-Monk Nikephoros, brothers of the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina, in Phyle; Mother Taxiarchia, Abbess of the Convent of the Holy Angels, in Aphidnai, together with five of her nuns; four sisters from the Convent of St. Paraskeve, in Acharnai; a nun from the Convent of the *Panagia Myrtidiotissa*, in Aphidnai; a nun from the Convent of the *Panagia Hodegetria*, in Aphidnai; and more than thirty of our lay spiritual children, including members of the St. Philaret Guild, under their President, Mrs. Irene Archontoule.

The manager of the travel bureau, Mr. Georgios Kitsakes, holds a degree in theology, possesses an abundant knowledge of the Hebrew and Arabic languages, the history and topography of the region, and the mentality of its inhabitants, and has been organizing tours of the Holy Land for four decades. His help, together with that of his assistant Ourania, proved truly invaluable and contributed greatly to the success of this unforgettable pilgrimage.



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**The pilgrims** assembled around midnight on Bright Friday at the Eleutherios Venizelos Airport in Athens. Bishop Cyprian distributed to the pilgrims a special article about pilgrimage as a milestone in one's life and the starting point of

a new life and reminded them of the fundamental point that a pilgrimage is not a mere holiday or excursion of a worldly kind, but a sacred journey to the places where God has walked, and a journey which requires a corresponding internal and external preparation and disposition. After landing at Ben-Gurion Airport in Lod (Lydda), near Tel Aviv, Israel, around 4:30 a.m., we boarded a special bus and stopped, around daybreak, at the famous Church of the Holy Great Martyr George the Trophy-Bearer in Lydda, the crypt of which houses the Saint's tomb. According to Tradition, after his martyrdom, his holy Relics were translated to this place, where they were interred. We chanted hymns to the Saint and read the Akathist to the Great Martyr beside his tomb with great love and reverence.\*

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\* It should be noted that, in keeping with the fundamentally devotional and spiritual character of this pilgrimage, at every Church, monastery, or shrine that the pilgrims visited the



We then continued our journey by road to the Holy City of Jerusalem. After checking in at our hotel (the Holy Land Hotel, located outside the city walls), we passed through the Damascus Gate and walked along the narrow alleys of the Muslim Quarter of the Old City towards the Church of the Resurrection (the

Church of the Holy Sepulchre). There, we saw the large fissure in the column at the entrance of the Church, from which the Holy Fire issued for the Greek Orthodox Patriarch in 1580, to the shame of the heretical Armenian Patriarch, who had illegally entered the Holy Sepulchre.

With awe, restraint, and emotion we entered the most venerable Church of our Holy Faith and fell down before the sacred and myrrh-streaming Stone of Anointing (lit. “of the Unnailing” [Ἀποκαθήλωσις]—*Trans.*). It was here that Sts. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus deposited the lifeless Body of the Lord Jesus in order to anoint It with myrrh and spices and to prepare It hurriedly, before placing It inside the Sepulchre.



We had a feeling of great poverty! We did not have any myrrh to offer, but only our sins and a few tears of repentance and contrition. Nevertheless, we sensed that Our Lord is the Great

and First Myrrh-Bearer, for by means of the Anointing Stone He was anointing us both sensibly and noetically. The sacred Stone was, as it were, in the myrrh and had endowed all of us with its fragrance.

We strove with difficulty to chant something suitable, but how is one to render the *Doxastikon* “Thee Who puttest on light as a garment” in that place? The questions contained therein constitute a relentless censure for the sinful and insensitive soul: “How shall I bury Thee, O my God? Or how shall I wrap Thee with winding-sheets? With what hands shall I touch Thine undefiled Body? Or what dirges shall I sing at Thy departure, O Compassionate One?” The unfathomable conde-

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Gospel passage pertaining to the event or events commemorated thereat was read and suitable hymns were chanted [*Trans.*].

scension and love of the Redeemer encompasses you and makes you contrite, without, however, overwhelming you.



After ascending a steep staircase, we found ourselves at the rock of Golgotha, where one's knees give way of their own accord and one falls down in repentance, thanksgiving, confession, and supplication before the only Longsuffering and Forbearing One! We humbly venerated the opening where the Weapon of Peace and invincible Trophy, the Precious and Life-Giving Cross stood and was elevated. Thereon was sin nailed, the handwriting of our debt was torn asunder, the ransom of our captivity was paid, our freedom and remission were signed, the Devil was put to shame, the Savior gave up the spirit; thereat creation quaked and the sun was darkened.

We descended via another steep staircase and entered the Chapel of Adam, where we could see the split rock from which All-Holy Blood of the Life-Giver flowed in order to wash clean the skull of the Forefather of our race.

We then worshipped in other chapels within the complex of the Church of the Resurrection, since on account of the large crowd we could not gain access to the Edicule (Κουβούκλιον) of the Holy Sepulchre.

We entered and worshipped in the Chapels commemorating the Discovery of the Precious Cross by St. Helen, the scourging of Our Lord and various other sufferings inflicted on Him in the course of His Passion, St. Longinos the Centurion, St. Joseph of Arimathæa, *et al.*, and also in the large and impressive *Katholikon* of the Resurrection, which serves as the Patriarchal Church



of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Mother of the Churches.

After chanting the Paschal Canon, we entered the All-Holy and Life-Receiving Sepulchre, where the Life of all was placed and from whence Christ God rose, “the tomb being sealed”! The place was so evocative and



sacred that it stilled every earthly movement and thought. A warm feeling of consolation welled up from the inner recesses of our being: Let the stone of insensitivity be lifted from our hearts, so that we might be among those who have beheld the Arising of Christ and become truly witnesses of His Resurrection.

Following the *Via Dolorosa*, on which the Lord carried His Cross, we walked from Golgotha to the Orthodox Monastery of the Prætorium, located on the site where the Lord, the two thieves, and Barabbas were imprisoned. Here we rested and enjoyed the gracious hospitality of Archimandrite Nectarios.



Next, we visited the Roman Catholic Monastery of St. Anne, where the remains of the Sheep’s Pool (of Bethesda) mentioned in St. John’s Gospel are to be found and where Christ healed the paralytic, and then the nearby Orthodox Monastery of the Holy Ancestors of God Joachim and Anna, built on the site of their

house. Here we saw the birthplace of the *Panagia* and the grave of her parents and chanted hymns to the Theotokos.

Our next stop was the Catholic Monastery of the *Lithostrotos* (“Gabbatha” in Hebrew). Finally, we visited the Monastery of St. Nicodemus, the place where the Lord spoke with Nicodemus about spiritual rebirth. Underground there is the prison from which St. Peter was rescued by an Angel, and beside it stands a beautiful chapel dedicated to St. Peter.



Back at our hotel, we were most pleasantly surprised to meet His Eminence, Metropolitan Vlasie, First Hierarch of our Sister Old Calendar Church of Romania, who was also in the Holy Land on pilgrimage. Late on Saturday evening, we travelled by road from Jerusalem to Jericho, one of the oldest cities in the world, an oasis in the middle of the Judæan wilderness, with rich vegetation but an even richer history. On the way, we took a detour to view the ruins of the Monastery of St. Evthymios the Great. That night, we stayed in a hotel near the city. In spite of our physical weariness, our spiritual exultation was immeasurable.

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**After services** on the Sunday of St. Thomas, April 13/26, we went to the Monastery of the Holy Prophet Elisaïos in Jericho, in the courtyard of which stands the sycamore tree which Zacchæus the publican climbed in order to see Christ.



Next, we were driven in local taxis to the Monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos in Chozeva, which is perched on a steep and rocky slope. Nearby is the cave in which the Holy Prophet Elias was fed by a raven. This area was owned by St. Joachim, and it was there that he prayed to God for a solution to his childlessness. The monastery attained to the height of its flourishing in the sixth century, at the time of Sts. George of Cyprus and John the Bishop. We celebrated a *Trisagion* for the departed Fathers and Abbots





of the monastery in the *Katholikon*, which contains the Relics of Sts. George and John the Chozevites, and in an adjacent chapel we venerated the incorrupt Relics of St. John the New Ascetic of Romania († August 5, 1960 [Old Style]).

We then visited to the Holy Monastery of St. Gerasimos of the Jordan (fifth century), where

we marvelled at the beautiful development of this area, in the Jordan desert, which has been turned into a veritable oasis, both spiritual and material, by the industriousness of its Abbot, Archimandrite Chrysostomos, and his monks, who also offered us generous hospitality.

After that, we made our way to Bethany, where we venerated the tomb of St. Lazarus, whom the Lord raised from the dead, and also visited the Convent of Sts. Martha and Mary, the sisters of St. Lazarus. The convent is situated on the very spot where Martha met the Lord and informed Him that Lazarus had died. The sisterhood of the convent, under Abbess Evpraxia, is distinguished for its hospitality and spiritual sobriety. There, Bishop Cyprian served a *Trisagion* for Archimandrite Theodosios († 1991), whom we knew well.

Our next stop was the Mount of Olives, at the foot of which is the shrine of St. Stephen the Protomartyr. After venerating the place where St. Stephen was stoned to death, we went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where the Lord prayed in agony before His Passion and where



He was betrayed and arrested. In this garden there are still some olive trees from the time of Christ!

We then proceeded with joy to the Shrine of the Mother of God in Gethsemane. We descended a ladder to the cave in which the Holy



Edicule containing the tomb of the Theotokos is housed, behind which hangs the miracle-working Icon of Our Lady of Jerusalem. While chanting the Small Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos, we venerated her tomb, from which Divine sweetness and consolation gush forth.

Next, we ascended the Mount of Olives, to the spot

from which Our Lord ascended in glory to the Heavens. The place belongs to Muslims and one has to pay to go inside. Inside a small circular building is the rock with the Divine imprint of the sole of the God-Man, from whence Our Savior ascended to Heaven. Nearby there is another cave, also belonging to Muslims, in which dwelt St. Pelagia the Penitent, the erstwhile harlot of Antioch who was converted to the Faith by the preaching of the holy Bishop Nonnos.

From there we went east of the Mount of Olives to the region of Bethphage, where the Orthodox Monastery of *Baïphoros* [its Patronal Feast being Palm Sunday—*Trans.*] is undergoing renovation. A heroic nun, Mother Savvina, who welcomed us with kind hospitality, lives in its large and imposing buildings and serves as its guardian. After we had offered prayers in the Church, she showed us in a special small chapel the stone on which Our Lord stepped when mounting the foal of an ass, thereby commencing His triumphant journey towards Jerusalem, where He was to undergo His Divine Passion. This year on Palm Sunday, when a great procession takes place from here to Jerusalem, headed by the Patriarch, this sacred stone began to give off a miraculous fragrance.

It was already getting dark when we started back for Jericho. We needed to get a good night's rest, since a long and tiring journey awaited us the following day. We were going to Mount Sinai.



**On Monday**, April 14/27, we travelled by road to the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. We passed along the west bank of the Dead Sea, crossed the Wadi Al-‘Arabah, and reached the border city of Eilat, in Israel, where we went through border control and entered the Egyptian city of Tamba. In the distance we could see opposite us the city of Al-‘Aqabah, in Jordan, which has given its name to the gulf of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aqabah, that irrigates these parts.



We headed for the interior of the peninsula and arrived late on Monday afternoon at the celebrated Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, where God walked.

Behind the Chapel of the Burning Bush, the bush that burned but was not consumed, which Moses saw as a prefiguration of the incorrupt childbirth of the *Panagia*, we chanted the *Dogmatikon* in the Second Tone, “The shadow of the Law hath passed away with the coming of Grace.” Tranquillity and stillness prevailed in this monastery founded by St. Justinian. We also saw Jethro’s Well, which is preserved to this day. We conversed for a short time with the well-known spiritual Father of the monastery, Father Paul. After this, one of the monks, Father Ephraim, gave us a guided tour of the monastery’s original museum, where we admired the most representative treasures of this historic monastery (Icons, books, vestments, miniatures, etc.).



After a short rest, before midnight we began our ascent on foot—some of us rode on camels—to the Holy Summit, Mount Horeb, where Moses the God-Seer received the Law of

the Old Covenant and where he beheld, as did the Prophet Elias, the Glory of God.

We ascended with great difficulty, reaching the summit, where there is also a famous Church dedicated to the Holy Trinity, around 3:00 a.m. We conducted a short service in the open air beside the cave of the Prophet Elias, at which we chanted Eucharistic hymns and were vouchsafed to commune of the Holy Bread, which we had brought with us. We saw the Church of the Holy Trinity, which was closed, and to the north of it, the cave of the Prophet Moses, and then prepared for our descent, by which time it had already begun to dawn. Finding ourselves at an altitude of 2,500 meters, we gazed upon a panoramic and majestic sight. We were surrounded by a truly wild and other-worldly grandeur.

The descent was easier than the ascent, and thus we returned to the monastery in the very early hours of Tuesday, April 15/28. There, we had the unexpected honor of meeting its Abbot, His Eminence, Archbishop Damianos of Sinai. He received us with warmth and cordiality, and we had an edifying spiritual conversation.

Another of the monks, Father Nectarios, then gave us a brief tour of the monastery's renowned sixth-century *Katholikon*, where we venerated a portion of St. Catherine's Relics, and also of the monastery's charnel house. We then prepared to depart before noon.

We returned by the same road on which we had come, arriving at our hotel outside the walls of the Old City by nightfall.



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**On the** morning of Wednesday, April 16/29, we headed north of Jerusalem by road to Galilee, following the current of the River Jordan upstream. We passed through the Hebrew city of Bet-She'an, known in antiquity as Scythopolis, and reached the southern edge of the Lake

of Tiberias, in that region of the Jordan where symbolic Baptisms of pilgrims are performed.

After entering the river clad in white robes, we celebrated the service of the Great Blessing of the Waters and were sprinkled with the blessed streams of the Jordan.

Next, we visited the city of Tiberias. The weather was beautiful, and there is an abundance of greenery in these fertile regions of Galilee.

As we headed north, before us stretched the lake known as the Sea of Galilee and the Lake of Gennesaret, where so many miracles were worked and so many teachings were heard.



We passed through Magdala, the birthplace of St. Mary Magdalene, saw the mountain where Christ delivered the Beatitudes, and stopped by a Catholic monastery on the site of which the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand occurred.

Nearby are the remains of Capernaum, the site of many of the Lord's miracles and teachings. Capernaum, which did not repent, was overtaken by a catastrophe and was never subsequently rebuilt.

Not far away is the Orthodox Monastery of the Holy Apostles, to which numerous former Jews from Russia who have settled in Israel and converted to Orthodox Christianity have recourse for their spiritual needs.

We then proceeded to Mount Tabor, where the Orthodox Monastery of the Transfiguration is located. Archimandrite Hilarion, the Abbot of the monastery (which is currently undergoing restoration), received us with esteem and kindness in the newly frescoed Church.



We venerated the stone on which Our Lord was transfigured and also a fragrant and miraculous paper Icon of the Theotokos "of the Unfading Rose." Father Hilarion recounted to us the annual miracle of the shining cloud

which descends on the monastery during the Vigil of the Transfiguration.



After that, we went to Cana in Galilee, where Christ worked His first miracle, that of turning water into wine. We visited the Church of St. George, which is being renovated and where two of the jars from the miracle in Cana are preserved. The Abbot, Father Dositheos welcomed us hospitably.

Finally, we headed for Nazareth, where we saw the Church of the Archangel Gabriel. In the crypt of this Church is the spring beside which, according to Tradition, the Annunciation to the Theotokos took place.

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**On Thursday,** April 17/30, we travelled south of Jerusalem towards Hebron, where we succeeded, after some difficulties, in venerating the cenotaphs of the Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and of Isaac's wife, Rebecca. Next, we visited the Oak of Mamre in the courtyard of the Russian Monastery of the Holy Trinity, where the Patriarch Abraham offered hospitality to the symbolic appearance of the Holy Trinity in the form of three Angels.



We then travelled north-east, stopping at the Shepherds' Field (Bet Sahour) near Bethlehem, where the shepherds heard the glad tidings of the Nativity of the God-Man and the celestial hymnody of the Angels,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.” In the crypt Church of St. George we venerated the tombs of the Shepherds, after which we worshipped in the magnificent new Church



of the Synaxis of the Theotokos, a *metochion* (dependency) of the Lavra of St. Savvas the Sanctified. Here, we met up again with Metropolitan Vlasie.

Later on we went by local taxi through the Judæan desert to the celebrated Lavra of St. Savvas the Sanctified (fifth century), a monastery very closely

bound up with the life and worship of the Orthodox Church.

There, we saw the original tomb of St. Savvas and prayed in the *Katholikon* of the monastery, where the incorrupt Relics of St. Savvas have once again lain since 1965 [when they were returned to the St. Savvas Lavra by the Roman Catholic Church—*Trans.*], and in the Chapel of St. John of Damascus, which incorporates the Saint’s tomb and cave cell. We also visited the God-built cave Church of St. Nicholas, where the fragrant Relics of many of the Saints of the Lavra are to be found, the cave of St. Savvas and the palm tree which the Saint himself planted. This tree had withered, but miraculously blossomed again after the return of his Relics, and its leaves and fruit work miracles.



We were treated to the generous hospitality of the Fathers of the monastery. The female pilgrims were not permitted to enter the monastery proper, which is *abatos* [lit. “inaccessible”—i.e., to women, as on Mount Athos (corresponding prohibitions for men apply in many convents throughout the Orthodox world)—*Trans.*], but were able to venerate the Relics which the Fathers brought out to them and heard

a spiritually beneficial talk by a brother of the monastery specially appointed for this purpose.

We next visited the Monastery of St. Theodosios the Cænobiarch (fifth century). After praying in the beautiful, more recent monastery Church, we were affably received by Archimandrite Hierotheos, the aged but energetic warden of the monastery. From the courtyard of the monastery we descended to the cave in which the Magi lodged after worshipping the Christ Child. The cave, which has been turned into a chapel, contains the original tomb of St. Theodosios and also the tombs of St. Sophronios of Jerusalem and John Moschos [author of the *Spiritual Meadow—Trans.*], among others.



After that, we went to birthplace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Bethlehem, the “House of Bread” [the literal meaning of the Hebrew—*Trans.*], from which the Life-Giving Heavenly Bread came forth unto the remission of our sins and eternal life.



We entered the renowned Basilica of the Nativity, constructed by St. Justinian in the sixth century, and made our way towards the Cave of the Nativity. While waiting amidst a large throng of

pilgrims to descend the ladder leading to the cave, we chanted Nativity hymns, including the Sessional Hymn, “Come, O ye faithful, let us behold where Christ is born.” With astonishment and gratitude, we fell down before this spot where the Unoriginate One received a beginning in time, where the Uncreated became created, and where the Fleshless One took flesh. There, the Uncircumscribable One emptied Himself and abased Himself. We also saw the



Manger in which Christ was laid.

We then returned to the Mount of Olives, known as “Little Galilee,” where we visited the Monastery of the Ascension. In the courtyard of this Church is a shrine called the “Lord’s Table,” where the Lord



appeared to the Disciples after the Resurrection and asked them for something to eat, in order to assure them that He was not a spirit. The warden of the shrine, Archimandrite Anthimos, showed us the interior of the Church. We saw a shrine in the form of a Holy Table, on

the very spot on the mountain in Galilee where the Lord appeared to His Disciples. In commemoration of this, we chanted the first Resurrectional *Exaposteilarion* and the corresponding *Heothinon Doxastikon*.



The monastery Church is, unfortunately, in need of repair.

Even the graves of three of the previous Patriarchs of Jerusalem, Timothy, Benedict, and Diodoros, seem somewhat neglected.

In the courtyard of this monastery is a chapel dedicated to the “Second Annunciation” of the Theotokos. It is situated in the place where, after the Resurrection of her Son, the Mother of God used to go with the Myrrh-bearing women to pray. Here, an Angel appeared to her and informed her that her Dormition would occur in three days’ time.

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**On the** morning of Friday, April 18/May 1, we travelled by road, passing through Bethel and Shiloh, to the city of Nablus (Shechem) to visit the Well of Jacob, where Christ conversed with the Samaritan woman, the





future St. Photine. On reaching the shrine, we were hospitably welcomed by Archimandrite Justin. The newly-built Church of St. Photine is breathtaking for its size and splendor. After the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, it is the largest Orthodox Church in the Holy Land.

Father Justin took over this shrine amid very difficult conditions following the heinous murder, in 1979, of his predecessor, Archimandrite Philoumenos of Cyprus, a contemporary New Martyr of our Holy Faith. His incorrupt Relics lie in a side chapel dedicated to him; another side chapel is dedicated to the Holy Martyr Justin the Philosopher, who was from Nablus.

We descended a staircase to the Chapel of Jacob's Well, the site of Father Philoumenos' martyrdom. Dried bloodstains from his murder can be seen on the wall.



Father Justin then treated us to a brief reception, at which he told us, among other things, of his yearning to build a Church in honor of St. John the Forerunner in nearby Sebasteia, where the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded.

After that, we headed in the direction of Jericho, where we ascended Mount Quarantal, or the Mount of Temptation. It was here that Our Lord, after His Baptism, fasted and prayed for forty days and was tempted by the Devil. In the Orthodox Monastery located on this site, we venerated the stone on which Our Lord prayed during those forty days. We also visited a nearby cave where, in the





past, innumerable monks and hermits engaged in ascetic struggles in emulation of Our Lord.

We then went back to the city of Jericho, where we saw the springs



of formerly bitter water that were assuaged with salt by the Holy Prophet Elisaïos.

Back in Jerusalem, we made for the Mount Zion, in order to visit the Cenacle, or Upper Room, in which the Mystical Supper was held. Here, Our Lord made His first post-Resurrectional appearance to the Disciples and again, eight days later, to St. Thomas, and here the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles in the form of fiery tongues.

We also visited the crypt in the adjacent Roman Catholic Abbey of the Dormition of the Theotokos where, according to Tradition, the house of St. John the Theologian, in which the Theotokos reposed, was located. Below the Cenacle is a synagogue which houses what is believed to be the tomb of the Prophet-King David

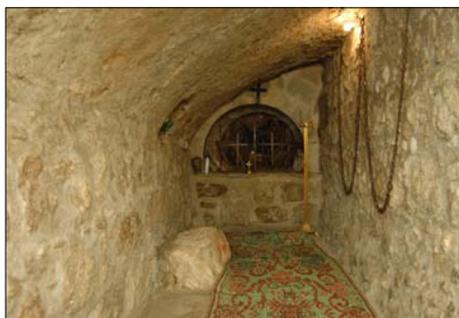
We next went to the Monastery of the Holy Cross and saw an ancient Byzantine Church with beautiful frescoes. In this monastery, which was inhabited long ago by Georgian monks, the Patriarchal Holy Cross School of Theology functioned in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.





We then went back for a farewell visit to the tomb of the Mother of God in Gethsemane. We also visited again the Church of the Resurrection, where we venerated the Stone of Anointing, Golgotha, and the Holy Sepulchre.

After that, we went the Christian quarter of the Old City and visited the Monastery of St. Evthymios, which, up until the fourteenth century, served as a place of residence for high-ranking pilgrims from Trebizond, and the Monastery of the Great *Panagia*, in which the wonder-working Icon of the Theotokos painted by St. Luke is housed, along with the Relics of many important Saints and the hermitage and tomb of St. Melanie of Rome. This was the culmination of the all the blessings that we experienced during these days in the Holy Land.



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**In the** early hours of Saturday, April 19/May 2, we left Jerusalem for our return flight to Greece. We arrived in Athens later that morning, weighed down with God's immeasurable and inestimable blessings. Although we were very weary, the flame of faith burned intensely in our souls. A sweet, nostalgic remembrance beckoned us back to the Holy Places.



The Holy Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, and in general all of Holy Writ, and also the Lives of the Saints connected with the Holy Places, resonate within us in a more familiar and vivid manner and have acquired another dimension and another depth.

The heroic Fathers of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre are more warmly in our prayers, our minds, and our sympathies.

We do not know whether Our Lord will permit us to visit the Holy Places again. We do know that God is worshipped in Spirit and Truth everywhere, even though the Holy Places are endowed with especial Grace and sanctity. Already in the Old Testament the Prophets enunciated the principles that apply spiritually in the era of Grace: "For from the rising of the sun even to the going down thereof My Name hath been glorified among the Gentiles; and in every place incense is offered to My Name, and a pure offering, for My Name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord Almighty" (Malachi 1:11).

Incense and a pure sacrifice can be offered in every place. In the Divine Liturgy, in particular, we have a spiritual synopsis of the entire Mystery of the Divine Economy of Salvation. Every Holy Table is an All-Holy and Life-Receiving Sepulchre and Throne of the Almighty Lord, imparting Grace and sanctification.

A pilgrimage to the Holy Places makes these well-known truths more accessible, comprehensible, and familiar. And it reminds us more emphatically of our obligation to intensify the struggle to render ourselves temples and habitations of the Living God in the Spirit, so that Our Lord might dwell within us, and that we might hear Him distinctly and feel Him palpably.

Those vouchsafed to go to the Holy City of Jerusalem ought to have a great longing to go to the Jerusalem on high, the Mother of us all, the future Homeland of all the children of God.

For all of these reasons, we are of the opinion that every Orthodox Christian should go at least once in his earthly life on a pilgrimage to the Holy Places.

May our Lord Jesus Christ make us all “fellow citizens with the Saints, and members of the household of God”! Amen.

