



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

The 150th anniversary of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission's representation in Jericho was celebrated on the Holy Land



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On December 15, 2023, the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem solemnly celebrated the 150th anniversary of the founding of its representation in honour of St. Zacchaeus, the holy Apostle of Christ, former tax collector, Bishop of Caesarea in Palaestina, reports the REM press service.

The land plot, acquired for the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission by its head Archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin) in 1873, is associated in the Christian Tradition with the location of the house of Zacchaeus, the tax collector. The ruins of a Byzantine monastery and the mosaic on the tomb of Abbot Kiriak, located on the territory of the representation, are viewed as evidence for that claim.

With the blessing of His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine, the festive Divine service on a significant day for the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission was celebrated by Metropolitan Timothy of Bostra (Patriarchate of Jerusalem).

His Eminence was accompanied by Archimandrite Vassian (Zmeyev), head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, Archimandrite Parthenios, rector of the Church of the Prophet Elijah in Jericho, Archimandrite Roman (Krasovsky), head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem within the Russian Church Abroad, Hegumen Nikon (Golovko), secretary of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, Archimandrite Amfilohiy, clergyman of the Church of Saints Constantine and Helen of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem; Hieromonk Amvrosy (Ignatov), clergyman of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission's representation in honour of the Holy Forefathers in Hebron, Hieromonk Innocent (Bespalov), clergyman of the Gorno Nunnery in Ein Karem, and Hieromonk Abraham (Romanian Patriarchate), resident of the monastery in honour of the Holy Prophet Elijah in Jericho.

The Liturgy was attended by: Abbess Catherine (Chernysheva), Superior of the Gorno Nunnery in Ein Karem with her sisters, Abbess Elizabeth (Schmelz), Superior of the Gethsemane Nunnery with her sisters, Nun Lukina (Ganicheva), Head Sister of the Jericho Mission, and representatives of the local Christian community.

Present at the service was the Director of the Museum and Park Complex in Jericho, a representative of the Federal State Unitary Enterprise "Goszagranzobranstvo" of the Presidential Affairs Directorate of the Russian Federation R. V. Dikansky.

The choir of the sisters of the Gorno Monastery sang during the service, which was performed in Church Slavonic, Greek, Arabic and Romanian languages.

The prayer for peace was recited after the Litany.

After the Dismissal, the clergy celebrated a memorial service for Abbot Kiriak. Afterwards, the clergy, sisters and worshipers made a procession, and Metropolitan Timothy sprinkled the territory of the Representation with holy water. Then the special prayers were recited, asking God to grant everyone many years.

Archimandrite Vassian then addressed Metropolitan Timothy with a welcoming speech, in which, in particular, he noted:

"In the nineteenth century, the hospitality of the Jerusalem Patriarchate enabled the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission to provide care and concern for pilgrims from distant Russia who came to venerate the holy places of Palestine. Today, dear Vladyka Timofei, we receive you with love and joy, imitating the hospitality of St Zacchaeus, on the historic day of a great anniversary - the 150th anniversary of the existence of the Russian Church's representation in Jericho. We believe and hope that it is love in Christ that will allow us, modern Christians, to preserve unity and mutual understanding.

With the help of these important qualities [we shall] overcome all difficulties and trials, and pass on the saving faith to the next generations of Christians".

In his reply, Metropolitan Timothy conveyed to all present the congratulations and good wishes of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem and, in particular, said:

"The erection of the church on the site of the ancient monastery is an important fact in the history of Christianity in the Holy Land, a continuation of the witness of the Orthodox faith and the holiness of this blessed land, which was sanctified by the footsteps of our Saviour. It is also the result of the piety of the holy Russian Orthodox Church, which has always - both under the Imperial government and in the modern Russian Federation - in those times when our Jerusalem Church did not have sufficient funds, showed concern for the preservation and restoration of the holy places.

On the eve of the salvific feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh, we offered our fervent prayers for the cessation of internecine fighting in Russia and Ukraine, as well as for the cessation of hostilities in the Holy Land, which resulted in the tragedy of the locals and the pain and death of innocent children. We are also constantly praying for our inner peace, for peace here and in the world."

Metropolitan Timothy congratulated Archimandrite Vassian on his appointment as head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, wishing him fortitude and patience, so that his service to the Church of Christ and the Russian Orthodox Church in particular, "would be faithful and contribute to good co-operation with the Supreme Authority of the Jerusalem Church, to strengthen the spiritual ties between the two Churches".

After the service, a festive reception was organised for all the guests by the diligence of the workers of the Jericho representation.