



On the Day of the Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel, Patriarch Kirill celebrates the liturgy at the Church of Antioch Moscow Representation



On July 26, 2016, the Day of the Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the church of St. Gabriel, the Moscow Representation of the Orthodox Church of Antioch.

This year marks the 75th birthday of the rector of the Representation, Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis, representative of the Patriarch of Antioch to the Patriarch of Moscow, and the year 2017 will mark the 40th anniversary of his representation mission in Moscow.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church was assisted by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations; Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis; Metropolitan Anthony of Zahle and Baalbek (Patriarchate of Antioch); Bishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate administrative secretariat; Archpriest Vladimir

Divakov, patriarchal secretary for Moscow; Archpriest Myron Jabbour, rector of the St. Nicholas Cathedral in Zahle (Lebanon); and the Moscow clergy.

The festivities at the Antiochian Representation were attended by A. Bessmertnykh, president of the Foreign Policy Association (USSR Minister for Foreign Affairs in 1991), V. Kalyuzhny (Russia's Minister for Fuel and Energy from 1999 to 2000), United States Ambassador to Russia John Francis Tefft; Syria's Ambassador to Russia Riad Haddad, as well as heads and representatives of diplomatic missions of Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Bulgaria, Colombia, Cote-d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Czechia, Great Britain, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Japan, Lebanon, Luxemburg, Malta, Mauritania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Oman, Palestine, Paraguay, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Yemen and other countries.

Among the worshippers were parishioners of the Antiochian Representation as well as a 110-member group of the faithful under the pastoral care of the Church of Antioch, who are on a pilgrimage to Russia from Lebanon, Syria and other countries.

The liturgical singing was performed by the choir of the Antiochian Representation, conducted by Ms. L. Nikulina. The service was celebrated in Church Slavonic and Arabic.

The liturgy was broadcast to the Middle East countries by the Lebanese TV networks MTV and Tele Lumiere. In Russia it was broadcast by the Soyuz TV network.

After the Prayer of Fervent Supplication, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church lifted up a prayer for peace in Ukraine.

During the liturgy, His Holiness Kirill ordained to priesthood Deacon Alexy Zheludkov of the church of the Holy Transfiguration, the Patriarchal Metochion at Peredelkino.

The sermon before communion was delivered by Archpriest George Fomin, a cleric of the Antiochian Representation.

After the liturgy, Metropolitan Niphon greeted Patriarch Kirill and presented him with an icon of St. Gabriel.

Patriarch Kirill addressed the congregation, saying in particular, 'Thank God for giving me an opportunity to celebrate on the day of the patronal feast of this church. Soon His Eminence Niphon will celebrate the 40th anniversary of his appointment as representative in Moscow and his 75th birthday. Today we begin the anniversary celebrations and will complete them in December, when I will be able to

express on behalf of the Russia Orthodox Church my love and gratitude to His Eminence with visible signs of respect.

'Today I would like to remember the remarkable history of relations between Holy Antioch and Rus'. It began with the visit of Patriarch Joachim to Moscow. He was the first Eastern patriarch to enter in the city of Moscow. He saw all the beauty of church life and the magnificence of the Russian Church and it occurred to him that the Russian Church should be headed by a hierarch in the rank of Patriarch. His Beatitude Patriarch Joachim did very much to make it true.

'So it was the Church of St. Peter – the Church of the Holy Antioch that was the architect of the Russian patriarchal office. We will note it with gratitude and respond to the Holy Church of Antioch with reciprocal love', His Holiness stressed.

His Holiness also recalled that Patriarchs of Antioch were frequent visitors to the Russian Orthodox Church. He noted with satisfaction that the Representation of the Church of Antioch had functioned in Moscow since 1947, headed in various years by outstanding figures of this Local Church – the late Metropolitan Basil (Samaha), Archimandrite Macarius (Tayar) and today His Eminence Metropolitan Niphon (Saikali).

'The relationships between Holy Russia and Holy Antioch have always been mutually enriching. As far back as the pre-revolution time, Russia and the Russian Church considered it their duty to protect the Orthodox in the Middle East. Sometimes this protection led to military conflicts, the blood of our soldiers was spilt, but Russia undertook those steps difficult for her to defend the Orthodox presence in the Middle East.

'So today, when the presence of our Orthodox brothers and sisters is threaten by the terrible terrorist force, when the civic peace has been blown up in Syria, when terrorists are eliminating the Syrian people, both Muslim and Orthodox Christians, Russia has again arisen to the defense of her brothers and sisters. It is a continuation of the great historical tradition based on love of the Church of Antioch and the Orthodox people of the Middle East and the desire to secure peace and justice in that region', His Holiness said, 'And we know that today the Russian Armed Forces are playing the decisive role in the struggle with terror in Syria. They do not participate in the internal political struggle in that country, nor do they propose any plans of political changes, which would not be defined by the will of the Syrian people. It is a remarkably noble and honest stand. That is why we treat our brothers today with great respect, love and appreciation as they are defending the Syrian people from terrorism, sometime, as we know it, at the price of their lives'.

Having described the dialogue between the Churches of Antioch and Russia as an important factor of

stability and peace in inter-Orthodox relations, Patriarch Kirill reminded the congregation that the Patriarchate of Antioch was among those Local Churches which refused to participate in the 2016 Council in Crete.

‘The Russian Orthodox Church, aware that the Council can take place only if there was a unanimous decision of all the Orthodox Churches, proposed that the Council be postponed. But when this wise and humble proposal was rejected, she together with brothers from Antioch, Bulgaria and Georgia refused to go to Crete. By this action we did not want to belittle the importance of the Council for those Churches which did participate in it, but we clearly stated that it does not have a pan-Orthodox status’, the Primate pointed out.

‘Such is the reality today, and nobody should be angry with it. We can be angry only with ourselves because God does not give us something according to our sins. And with humbleness, aware of our weakness and imperfection, we all together should seek to overcome differences within the Orthodox family, so that the pan-Orthodox unity may grow. We trust that the Lord will lead us all to the Universal Orthodox Church along this path, not the path of new divisions, as representatives of some political forces would have it, but along the path of growth in fraternal love and unanimity’, Patriarch Kirill concluded.

His Holiness presented the Representation with an icon of the Resurrection of Christ.

After that a thanksgiving was celebrated at the church square and ‘Many Years to You’ was sung to His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

In conclusion of the festivities, a reception was given in honour of the Patriarchal visit at the church of the Protomartyr Theodore Stratelates.

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