



## Divine Liturgy celebrated in Sumela Monastery for the first time in decades

A group of several thousand believers from Russia and other countries of the near abroad came to the old Monastery of the Panagia Sumela near Trabzon, Turkey, on August 15, 2010, to attend the liturgy celebrated by Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople in this unique cultural monument and great Christian shrine which was opened for celebrations for the first time since 1922.

It was already the fourth pilgrimage made under the project for reviving the old tradition of Russian pilgrimages to holy places in Asia Minor. The project was negotiated by Patriarchs Kirill and Bartholomew during the Patriarch Kirill's official visit to the Church of Constantinople in July 2009 and approved by Turkey's Prime Minister R. T. Erdogan.

Patriarch Bartholomew, in his address to the worshippers standing both in the monastery yard, which could accommodate only about 500 people, and outside where large plasma screens were installed, said he was glad that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia could participate in the historic liturgy in the Monastery of the Panagia Sumela through his representative, Bishop Tikhon of Podolsk and his fellow-travellers, and expressed hope that divine services would continue to be celebrated in that old monastery with the participation of His Holiness Kirill and other hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Bishop Tikhon of Podolsk, who led the pilgrims, thanked the Turkish authorities for having responded to requests from the Orthodox to open the old monastery for worship. 'Pilgrimage is a component of the spiritual life of every Christian. Guided by the example of the Lord Who with His Most Holy Mother made annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem, we have come here to venerate this holy place. We thank His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill who have opened an opportunity for us to come to this source of God's grace'.

The Monastery of the Panagia Sumela is believed to be founded by St. Barnabas in the late 4<sup>th</sup>-early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. Since the late 4<sup>th</sup> century the miracle-working Icon of Our Lady the Panagia Sumela has been kept in the monastery. According to tradition, it was made by St. Luke. The monastery is renowned for its unique frescoes depicting episodes from the life of the Mother of God and Jesus Christ as well as Old Testament stories, such as the Creation, the creation of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden.

After the flourishing periods in the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the monastery became desolate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pilgrimages to this holy place were resumed in 2007.

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