



## Clergy of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission celebrate Liturgy in Bethlehem Grotto of the Nativity



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On the eve of the feast of the Nativity of Christ, according to a tradition that dates back to the 19th century, the clergymen of the Russian Orthodox Church, who serve in the Holy Land, come to Bethlehem to celebrate the annual “Russian” Divine Liturgy in the Grotto of the Nativity. On January 3, Archimandrite Vassian (Zmeyev), head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, officiated at the Divine service at the site of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ with the blessing of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem.

Concelebrating were hegumen Nikon (Golovko), deputy head of the Mission; sacristans of the Mission’s metochions archpriest Miroslav Vitiv of the church of Prophet Elijah in Haifa, archpriest Nikolai

Zhdanov of the church of St. Tabitha in Jaffa, hieromonk Amvrosy (Ignatov) of the church of the Holy Forefathers in Hebron. Among the concelebrants were also hieromonk Innokenty (Bespalov) and priest Viktor Klinshov of the Gorny Convent in Ein Karem; hieromonk Petr (Borodulin), hieromonk Filofey (Artyushin) and deacon Makary Petukhov of the Mission, priest Sergy Demidov of the Moscow Metropolia, and archpriest Issa Thaljieh of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Jerusalem Patriarchate.

Praying at the service were Metropolitan Benedict of Diocesarea, representative of the Patriarch of Jerusalem in Bethlehem; mother superior Yekaterina (Chernysheva) and sisters of the Gorny Convent in Ein Karem; members of the local Greek and Arab Orthodox communities; and numerous Russian-speaking pilgrims.

The service in the Bethlehem Grotto was celebrated in Church Slavonic, Greek and Arabic, the Mission's website reports. Liturgical hymns were sung by the Gorny Convent choir.

After the service, the clergy of the Mission, sisters of the Gorny Convent, and pilgrims were received by Metropolitan Benedict in the refectory chambers at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Archimandrite Vassian congratulated Metropolitan Benedict on the upcoming feast and gave him a Christmas gift. The sisters sang Christmas carols.

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