



## Head of the Assyrian Church of the East arrives in Russia for official visit



**DECR Communication Service, 30.05.2025**

On May 30, 2025, His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III, Primate of the Assyrian Church of the East, arrived in Russia at the invitation of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'. The primary purpose of the visit is pastoral: to conduct hierarchical services for Assyrian believers in Russia, over whom the Patriarch himself exercises archpastoral care.

The delegation accompanying His Holiness Mar Awa III includes: Metropolitan Mar Afrem Athneil of Syria; Bishop Mar Narsai Benjamin of Iran, Armenia, and Georgia; Chorbishop Samano Odisho, rector of the Assyrian Church of the Holy Virgin Mary in Moscow and representative of the Assyrian Church of the East in Russia; Priest Peter Pavlov, rector of the Assyrian Church of St. George the Victorious in Krasnodar; Priest Ephraim Alkhas, rector of the Assyrian community in Rostov-on-Don; Deacon Roland Bidzhamov, representative of the Assyrian community in Moscow.

At Vnukovo Airport, the distinguished guest and his entourage were welcomed by: Bishop Kliment of Krasnoslobodsk and Temnikov, co-chair of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East; Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), DECR Secretary for Inter-Christian Relations; DECR staff members S.G. Alferov and D.I. Menyalov; Representatives of the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in the Russian Federation; Members of the Moscow parish of the

## Assyrian Church of the East.

The visit's itinerary includes meetings with Assyrian communities, visits to churches and monasteries of the Russian Orthodox Church within the Moscow and St. Petersburg metropolitanates, as well as discussions with representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate and other traditional faiths in Russia.

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## Background on the Assyrian Church of the East

The Assyrian Church of the East (officially: The Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East) traces its origins to the 1st century among the Aramaic-speaking population of Mesopotamia. According to tradition, the Apostles Peter, Bartholomew, Thaddeus, and Thomas preached in the region, with Thomas carrying the Gospel as far as southern India, where a significant Christian community, including adherents of the Assyrian Church, endures to this day. At its peak (by the 11th century), the Church's influence spanned from southern Siberia to Sri Lanka and from the Levant to Japan.

The Assyrian Church of the East adheres doctrinally only to the first two Ecumenical Councils (Nicaea, 325 AD, and Constantinople I, 381 AD), making it the sole Christian Church of the "pre-Ephesian" tradition.

Today, the Church has approximately 400,000 members, most living in diaspora communities. Over the past decade, emigration has surged due to the forced displacement of believers from their historical homelands in Iraq and Syria, where Assyrians—like other Middle Eastern Christians—faced brutal persecution by ISIS (recognized as a terrorist organization and banned in the Russian Federation) and other extremist groups.

The Assyrian community has long played a notable role in Russian public life. Around 20,000 Assyrians reside in the Russian Federation and neighboring countries, primarily descendants of early 20th-century migrants from the former Ottoman Empire.

His Holiness Mar Awa III was born on July 4, 1975, in the U.S. to Assyrian emigrant parents. He descends from an ancient noble lineage, many of whom were subjects of the Russian Empire and officers in the Imperial Army during the 19th and early 20th centuries. His maternal great-great-grandfather and great-grandfather were recipients of the Order of St. George.

Ordained a deacon in 1992 and a priest in 2006, he was consecrated bishop in 2008. From 2015 to 2021, he served as Synodal Secretary and Chairman of the Commission for Inter-Church Relations and

Education of the Assyrian Church of the East, as well as co-chair of the Dialogue Commission with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Elected to the Patriarchal Throne on September 13, 2021, he had previously visited the Moscow Patriarchate multiple times as a bishop. This marks his third visit as Primate, following trips in November 2022 and October–November 2023.

A vocal advocate for strengthening ties with the Russian Federation and the Russian Orthodox Church, he was awarded the Order of Friendship by President Vladimir Putin on November 22, 2023.

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Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/93293/>