

## **Sparta: The celebration of Saint Nikon in the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch - a historical milestone**



The Christian plenitude of the Holy Metropolis of Monemvasia and Sparta, the entire clergy and the pious people, experienced a historic and extremely joyful day, since this year's celebration of the Patron and Protector of Sparta, Saint Nikon "Metanoieite", was graced with the gracious presence of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. For the first time in centuries, the blessed land of Laconia had the honour of welcoming the Primate of the Orthodox Church, in order to receive His blessing, while expressing towards Him genuine feelings of respect, joy and love.

In particular, on the main day of the feast, Tuesday, 26 November 2024, in the beautiful parish church of Saint Nikon, the Matins service was initially celebrated, and officiated by His Eminence Metropolitan Nikephoros of Gortyna and Megalopolis, and then the Festal Patriarchal Divine Liturgy, presided over by His All-

Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

The Divine Liturgy was attended by the local Shepherd, His Eminence Metropolitan Efstathios of Monemvasia and Sparta, as well as by His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph of Proikonnisos, His Eminence Metropolitan Maximos of Selyvria, His Eminence Metropolitan Theoktistos of Phokida, His Eminence Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Mani and His Eminence Metropolitan Epiphaneios of Mantinea and Kynouria, the Protosyncellus of the Holy Metropolis of Messinia, Archimandrite Father Philippos Hamargias, Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Throne Fr. Eleftherios Chrysochoos and four hierodeacons. Also present were Their Eminences, Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Messinia, Metropolitan Nikephoros of Gortyna and Megalopolis, and Their Graces, Bishop Theoklitos of Tegea and Bishop Theophilos of Lacedaemonia, and The Grand Ecclesiarch Archimandrite Aetios.

Before the communion of the Immaculate Mysteries, His Eminence Metropolitan Efstathios of Monemvasia and Sparta, addressed the Primate of the Holy Great Church of Christ, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and the large congregation, referring initially to the honoured Saint Nikon “Metanoieite”, who for more than ten centuries has protected Lacedaemon and benefited its inhabitants. Subsequently, he awarded His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew the highest honorary distinction of the Holy Metropolis of Monemvasia and Sparta, the Grand Cross of the Millennium of Saint Nikon, worthily honouring in His person the authentic ecclesiastical ethos, the steadfast adherence to Greek-Christian traditions, His sacrificial love for the God-built Great Church of Christ and the generally correct testimony of the Orthodox Faith, at the same time wishing him health and longevity, so that he may continue without hindrance His multifaceted, valuable and multi-responsible Patriarchal ministry for the building up of the Body of Christ, the edification of the Ship of the Church and the glory of the All-Holy Name of Its Builder.



Addressing the holy clergy, the official guests, the local leaders and the pious people, who had flooded the Church and the surrounding area, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew initially pointed out that the Lord sets as the Beginning and End of His Gospel the call to repentance, which becomes the priceless gift of God to Humanity. Repentance was also the core of his preaching by the Patron Saint of Sparta, emphasised His All-Holiness, who at the same time taught with his austere and virtuous life, faith, unceasing prayer, sacrificial love and humility. Subsequently, the Primate of Orthodoxy congratulated the Local Shepherd for his sixty-year brilliant priestly journey and for his almost forty-five years of fruitful and fruitful hierarchical ministry. He also expressed his warm thanks for the kind invitation, the highest honorary distinction of the local Church that was bestowed upon him, and for the heartfelt hospitality. In conclusion, addressing the pious people, he urged them to embrace the “life in Christ,” stating characteristically: “Rejoice in the Lord always, be steadfast, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong.”

Immediately afterwards, in a climate of reverence, with the paeans of the Philharmonic Band of the Municipality of Sparta and accompanied by an honorary military procession, the procession of the holy icon of Saint Nikon “Metanoieite” took place in the centre of the Laconian capital. The procession was attended by His All-Holiness, the Hierarchs, the clergy of the local Church, students of the city’s schools accompanied by their teachers, and cultural associations of the city. The

pious people of Lacedaemon with enthusiastic reactions expressed their respect and love for the person of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

After the prayer for health, at the intersection of Konstantinou Paleologou and Lykourgou streets, the procession returned to the entrance of the Holy Church, where His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew blessed the pious people, wishing that they may always be under the protection of the Holy Trinity, through the intercessions of the Patron Saint Nikon.

The grand celebration was attended by the Deputy Minister of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports of Greece, Ms. Zetta Makri, as representative of the President of the Greek Government, the Member of Parliament of Laconia, Mr. Athanasios Davakis, as representative of the President of the Greek Parliament, the Members of Parliament of Laconia, Mr. Neoklis Kritikos and Ms. Nagia Grigorakou, Members of Parliament of neighbouring Prefectures, the Governor of Peloponnese, Mr. Dimitrios Ptochos, Deputy Governors, the Mayors of the Prefecture and neighbouring areas, the Commander of the Centre Administration of the Peloponnese, Major General Apostolos Tsoulouvis, the Police Director of Laconia, Mr. Vasilios Tsigaridis, representatives of the other law enforcement agencies, members of the First and Second Degree Local Government, executives of the judicial branch, representatives of all levels of Education, organisations and associations.

As during the celebration of the Doxology and the Festal Patriarchal Vespers, and on the day of the feast, the presence of the amazing chanters at both sacred chanter's stands was excellent. Specifically, at the right chanter's stand, members of the Laconian Chanters Association "Petros the Peloponnesian" chanted, with the choirmaster, Protopsaltis Mr. Panagiotis Tzanakos, Archon Maistor of the Great Church of Christ. On the left chanter's stand, members of the choir of the Holy Metropolis of Mantinea and Kynouria chanted, under the direction of the choirmaster, Protopsaltis of the Metropolitan Church of Tripoli and professor of church music, Mr. Vasilios Georgaras.

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