

EPIPHANY 2016, MARGATE



On Sunday, 10th January, the annual Feast of the Epiphany/Theophany was held in Margate at the Greek Orthodox church of St Michael the Archangel in Westbrook. Now in its 51st year, the ceremony takes place to commemorate the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. A service at the church is followed by the Blessing of the Waters on Margate's seafront.

The Blessing of the Waters takes place in Greek Orthodox communities throughout the world. Margate was the first Greek Cypriot community to re-enact this traditional ritual here in the UK and it has now been established as the focal point for this special festival.

The spectacular day began with a service conducted by the Greek Archbishop Gregorios of Thyateira and Great Britain assisted by Margate's resident priest, the Very Reverend Archimandrite Vissarion Kokliotis. The clergy from other Christian denominations were also in attendance including the Bishop of Dover, the Very Reverend Trevor Willmott, Father David Vicar of All Saints, Margate, Rvrd Denise Yeldham from St John's church and the Revd Prebendary Tony Kyriakides.

As soon as the church service for the Epiphany had ended, the congregation, some of whom had travelled from all over the South East, gathered outside the church before proceeding to Margate's sea front for the Blessing of the Waters ceremony. They were accompanied by the Mayor of Margate and other civic dignitaries from around Kent attired in their full ceremonial robes and chains of office. Political dignitaries Roger Gale MP, and Craig Mackinlay MP were also in attendance.

The procession was led by the First Margate Boys and Girls Brigade band. During the short procession to the beach, the band entertained the crowd of onlookers with a variety of tunes including 'Alex', 'Shortie' and 'Steadfast'.



Photos by Michael Kourtoulou



His Eminence Gregorios, Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain wore the most magnificent vestments of woven gold embroidery including a mitre that is shaped like a golden crown and surmounted by a jeweled cross. The Very Reverend Archimandrite Vissarion Kokliotis was also splendidly attired in white with blue embroidered roses.



This year, young Adam Marinou was the lucky boy chosen to retrieve the holy cross from the sea. After a brief ceremony at the beach, the Greek Archbishop tossed a wooden cross wreathed in flowers and attached to a blue ribbon (so that it could be easily located) into the sea. Young Adam immediately jumped in after it and, having retrieved it, handed it back to the Archbishop who gave him a special blessing for his efforts.



Although the congregation and spectators watching the ceremony were fortunate that the weather was fairly mild for this time of year with an overcast sky and mild temperatures, the sea was icy cold and Adam was immediately dried off and wrapped in a bathrobe by his loving parents to keep him warm.

Religious leaders then posed at the beach for the press and anyone else who wished to mark this special day with a photo or two. Worshippers and dignitaries rounded off the religious event with an appetizing lunch at Margate's Winter Gardens. After lunch speeches followed by the Mayor of Margate Mr. R. Edwards, Mr. M. Papadopoulos, president of the Greek community, Fr Vissarion, the Very Reverent Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover, the Consul of Greece Mr S. Demestichas, the Cyprus High Commissioner Mr Evripides Evriadiades, Sir Roger Gale and lastly Archbishop Gregorios. Archbishop Gregorios asked to see Adam again and he handed the brave boy the cross that he retrieved from the sea.

The Feast of Epiphany and the Blessing of the Seas is a magnificent way to start off the New Year; to lift one's spirits and inject a feeling of optimism for what may lie ahead.



Report and photos by Michael Kourtoulou