

Selected Lives of Saints of November and December

Translated from Russian by Irina Guzel

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Saints Cosmas and Damian.

(November 14, November 1 old calendar).

Unmercenaries and wonderworkers, Saints Cosmas and Damian were brothers in the flesh and in the spirit, born somewhere in Asia of a pagan father and a Christian mother. After their father's death, their mother Theodota devoted all her time and energy to the bringing-up of her sons as true Christians. God helped her, and her sons grew as two choice fruits and as two holy lamps. They were skilled in medicine and ministered to the sick without payment, and so fulfilled Christ's command: 'Freely have ye received; freely give' (Matt. 10:8). They were so strict in their unpaid ministry to men that Cosmas became greatly enraged with his brother Damian when he took three eggs from a woman, Palladia, and gave orders that, after his death, he should not be buried with his brother. In fact, holy Damian had not taken those eggs as a reward for healing Palladia's sickness, but because she had sworn by the Most Holy Trinity that he should have them. However, after their death in Fereman, they were buried together in obedience to a revelation from God. These two holy brothers were great wonderworkers both during their life-

time and after their death. A farm laborer, on lying down to sleep at one time, was attacked by a snake, which entwined itself around his mouth and stomach. This poor man would have breathed his last in the greatest torment had he not at the last moment invoked the help of Saints Cosmas and Damian. Thus the Lord glorified forever by miracles those who glorified Him here on earth by their faith, purity and mercy.

Troparion, Tone 8

O holy unmercenaries and wonderworkers, visit our infirmities./ Freely you have received, freely give to us.

Kontakion, Tone 2

You have received the grace of healing:/ give health and strength to the needy./ O glorious and wonderworking physicians./ Through your care for us subdue our enemies/ and heal the world through your wonderworking.

Archangel Michael.

(November 21, November 8 church calendar).

Archangel Michael occupies one of the highest places in the hierarchy of angels, he is very closely associated with the destinies of the Church. The Holy Scripture teaches us that besides the physical world there exists a great spiritual world, inhabited by intelligent and kind creatures called angels. In Greek the word “angel” means “messenger” since it is through them that God often declares His will to people. What the life of angels is like in the spiritual world that they inhabit and what they perform – we know almost nothing and actually we would be unable to grasp it anyway. They exist under conditions that are totally different from those of our material world; time, space and all mode of existence have a completely different content there. The prefix “arch-” added to the names of some angels show that in comparison with other angels they serve God in a more sublime way.

The name Michael in Hebrew means “Who is like God.” The Holy Scripture mentions only some of the angels by personal names when describing instances of their appearing to various people. Obviously those are the angels that carry out a special mission in establishing the Lord’s Kingdom on the earth. Among them are archangels Michael and Gabriel who are mentioned in canonical books of the Scripture, as well as archangels Raphael, Uriel, Sariel, Jerahmeel and Raquel mentioned in some non-canonical books (The “canon,” or the official list of Old Testament sacred books, was set up in the 5th century BC. Old Testament sacred books written after that were not included into the canon and are therefore called non-canonical.). Archangel Gabriel usually appeared to some righteous people as a herald of great and joyous tidings about events to happen to the people of God (Dan. 8:16, 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). In the book of Tobit archangel Raphael says about himself: “I am one of the seven angels who bring prayers of saints to God and ascends to appear in front of the Holy God (Tob. 12:15). This accounts for the concept of there being seven archangels in Heaven and Michael is one of them.

The Scriptures call Archangel Michael “prince” and “leader of the Lord’s army”; he is depicted as the major fighter in the battle against the devil and people’s transgressions. Thus the Church has given him the name of “archstratig,” which means senior warrior, leader. In this ca-

capacity Archangel Michael came to Joshua to help him and the Israelites to conquer the Promised Land. He also appeared to Prophet Daniel during the fall of the Babylon kingdom and the beginning of establishment of the Mesopotamian kingdom. Daniel received a prophecy of assistance that would be rendered by Archangel Michael to the people of God in the times of the coming persecutions from the antichrist. In the book of Revelation Archangel Michael is the forefront leader in the battle against the dragon-devil and other rebellious angels. “And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent call the devil or Satan.” The Apostle Judah briefly mentions Archangel Michael as the enemy of the devil (Joshua 5:13; Dan. ch. 10, 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7-9; Luke 10:18).

In the spirit of the Holy Scripture some fathers of the Church regard Archangel Michael as a participant of other important events in the life of God’s people, though he is not mentioned by his name there. For example, he is believed to appear in the form of the mysterious fire pillar that led the Israelites in their exodus from Egypt and destroyed pharaoh’s army. The victory over enormous Assyrian armed forces besieging Jerusalem in the time of prophet Isaiah (Exod. 33:9 14:26-28; 2 Kings 19:35) was also ascribed to Archangel Michael.

The Church venerates Archangel Michael as a defendant of faith and a fighter against heresy and all evil. He is depicted on icons casting down the devil with a fire sword or a spear. In the beginning of the 4th century, the 8th of November was instituted by the Church as the holiday of “Council” (congregation) of holy angels headed by Archangel Michael. You can learn more about angels from the brochure devoted to them (see Missionary Leaflet # E12 on Angels).

Troparion:

Supreme leaders of the Heavenly Hosts,/ we implore you that by your prayers you will encircle us,/ unworthy as we are,/ with the protection of the wings of your immaterial glory/ and guard us who fall down before you and fervently cry:/ deliver us from dangers,/ for you are the commanders of the powers above.

The Martyrs Victor and Stephanis.

(November 24, November 11 old calendar).

During the reign of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (also Antoninus, 138-161) in Damascus, Syria, there lived a Christian, Victor by the name, who was born in Italy and served as a soldier. He refused to bow down to the pagan idols but instead boldly confessed his faith in Christ. When the emperor ordered to persecute Christians, the army chief Sebastian demanded that Victor would renounce his faith in Christ and bow down to the pagan idols. He said, “You are a soldier of our king and have to obey his orders.” “No,” said Victor, “now I am a soldier of the Heavenly King and shall serve Him alone and I despise your loathsome idols!” So Sebastian put Victor to various tortures. The executioners broke Victor’s fingers and toes and wrung them out of their joints. During all the tortures Victor prayed to God and intrepidly endured the sufferings.

Then the executioners started forcing Victor to swallow a piece of meat poisoned by the black magician. Saying a prayer and making the sign of cross over the meat, martyr Victor consumed it. Everyone there witnessed a real wonder: Victor remained unharmed. What God had once promised to his disciples happened in reality, “When they drink deadly poison, it will not

harm them at all” (Mk 16:18). When the magician saw that his poison did not in the least hurt Victor, he believed in Christ. He understood better than others that no earthly power could neutralize his lethal poison.

Then Victor was put to still worse tortures. During his tortures a young woman, Stephanis, a wife of one of the soldiers who tortured Victor, could no longer stand the sight of horrible tortures inflicted on a completely innocent Christ’s martyr and tried to advocate for him. Inspired by his suffering and confession of Christ, she revealed that she also was a Christian. Stephanis was called before the authorities and asked her name, to which she responded, “Christian.” The executioners, driven insane with the sight of blood, got mad at her and regarded Stephanis as one more victim of theirs. They tied her to bent palm trees and tore her apart. That was how young Stephanis (she was only 15 and had been married one year and four months) met her death. Having killed Stephanis the murderers went back to torturing Victor and finally beheaded him. Saint martyrs Victor and Stephanis suffered for Christ in the year of 175.

Before dying martyr Victor foretold that his executioners would die in 12 days and that the army chief would be captured in 24 days. Everything happened the way it had been predicted by him.

Troparion:

Thou, O Lord, crowned Thy Martyrs in their sufferings with immortality, O Christ our God: / through Thy strength they didst cast down their torturers and destroyed the demons’ futile impudence./ By their supplications, save our souls.

Troparion, Tone 4

Together let us honor the Athletes of Christ,/ memorable Victor and noble Vincent/ and with them we praise divine Stephanie:/ by their contests they destroyed the enemy./ By their supplications, O Christ our God, have mercy on our souls.

Kontakion, Tone 4

Today the Church honors the Great Martyrs and Athletes,/ the struggles of Victor, Vincent and Stephanie./ She cries out and glorifies the Lover of mankind.

St. Martin of Tours.

(November 24, November 11 old calendar).

St. Martin was born in that part of the Roman Empire which is now called Hungary. Though he was the son of pagan parents, he was drawn from his youth to the Christian faith and at the age of ten he asked to be made a catechumen. His father was an officer in the Roman army and Martin was still in his teens when he was forced to become an Imperial Horse Guardsman; this ended his schooldays.

Even before baptism, his actions followed so closely the Gospel teaching that at times he was regarded as a monk rather than a soldier. One freezing night in Amiens, France while on guard duty at the fort, the young officer saw a poor man with no cloak. He removed his cape, drew his sword, and slashed the cape down the middle; half he gave to the poor man and half he put on his own back. That night in sleep, young Martin had a vision: he saw the Lord Jesus

Christ wearing the half of his cloak that he had given away. Thus encouraged, he took the first opportunity to be baptized.

Two years passed, and France (then called Gaul) was invaded by barbarians. Not wishing to transgress the commandments of God, Martin asked his commander for permission to give up his position as an officer, saying, "I am a soldier of Christ; I am not allowed to fight." [This indicates that he already considered himself to be a monk.] The commander was furious and called him a coward, but Martin offered to stand in the front line of battle, armed only with the sign of the Cross. The next day the barbarians surrendered without a fight and Martin was allowed to leave the army, seeing in this the Providence of Almighty God.

In the town of Poitiers was the holy Bishop Hilary; Martin now placed himself in this Saint's hands. It was not long before he was warned in a dream that his parents would soon die and he received the bishop's blessing to travel to his far-off homeland. There he had the happiness of seeing his mother's conversion before her death. Passing through a certain city on his way back to Gaul, he came across many Arians whose false doctrine he so actively opposed that he was whipped in front of a crowd. Soon afterward, he heard that his beloved Bishop had been forced to leave Gaul. Instead of returning there alone, St. Martin went to an island off the coast of Italy to live a solitary life until he heard news of St. Hilary's return. The two monk-saints then established at Poitiers the first monastery in the West, Liguge, which grew into a community of hermits in about ten years and followed the rule of St. Basil for communal monastic life.

In 371 St. Martin was again forced to become a Guardsman, this time of the Church, With great reluctance he accepted his election as Bishop of the city of Tours. At this consecration, however, were some influential and jealous men — nobles, landowners, and even bishops — who preferred "gentlemen" to saints, saying, "A man of such insignificant appearance, with unkempt hair and dirty clothes..." should not be bishop. But already, his reputation as a wonder-worker and a man of God was so well established in the hearts of the people, that they came in great multitudes and made his election sure.

Burdened by the constant stream of visitors to his cell next to the cathedral, St. Martin moved to an isolated place about two miles outside the city. There he established a monastery, directing 80 brothers in the hermitic life while carrying out his duties as Bishop with flaming zeal. He converted the people of many regions in and surrounding Gaul, traveling with few provisions and a small band of monks, usually on foot. His preaching was accompanied by miracles of prophecy and healing of the sick, some of whom were healed simply through touching a piece of his garment; once he cleansed a leper with a kiss of mercy; three times the dead were raised; once five people saw a "ball of fire" surrounding his head when he blessed the congregation.

His prayers were eager, expectant, and pleasing to God. This roused the anger of the evil one. Many times and in the most varied disguises the devil appeared to St. Martin, but that holy man always protected himself with prayer and the sign of the Cross. Once Satan appeared to him in the form of Christ. At another time he taunted the Saint for allowing wicked sinners to become monks. To this St. Martin replied, "If you yourself would even now repent of your misdeeds, I have such trust in the Lord Jesus Christ that I would promise you mercy." Once a troop of soldiers beat him up because the sight of his ragged figure made the mules shy and balk. The monks carried him to safety unconscious, but the mules would not budge until the soldiers recognized the Bishop and begged his pardon.

Everywhere he went, earthly powers humbled themselves before his heavenly spirit: an empress served him at table; when St. Martin ordered a tree sacred to the pagans to be cut down, he stood boldly right in the path of its fall — to everyone's great astonishment, as it toppled it

swerved to avoid him! — and the multitude of pagans with one accord acclaimed the name of Christ. In fact, much of this Saint's life was devoted to the destruction of idols and their shrines, and his daily life was full of miracles proclaiming the power of the one true God, the Creator, and the folly of worshipping anything created. And wherever he went, he left monks and priests to carry on the work of instructing the new believers.

At last, adorned with the venerable gray hairs of old age, St. Martin longed to reach the end of his earthly sojourn. For many years he had withstood the attacks of demons like a true soldier of Christ, armed with patience and prayers which never left his mind and heart. He had attained such purity of life that not only were the demons powerless before him, but he was also granted to converse with angels. At last, while visiting some brethren in need of his 'peacemaking talents, the Saint collapsed from exhaustion. Foreseeing his departure from this world, he called together the brethren of his monastery who begged him not to leave them “at the mercy of wolves.” The old Saint wept and said, “Lord, if I am still necessary to Thy people, I do not refuse to toil; Thy will be done.” But God answered the Saint's desire and took the soul of His faithful servant who died peacefully, his face turned to the window so he could see the sky. St. Martin was the first to be called Saint without having been martyred, and immediately his grave at Tours became the most venerated shrine in Gaul; his memory the most honored in all the West, and many churches and villages were dedicated to this holy Saint of France.

Our knowledge of St. Martin comes from his friend and biographer Sulpicius Severus whose testimony we can trust. Since so many — and such unusual — miracles are recorded in this Saint's life, some people have had a hard time believing them, both then and now, but that should only be those who are unbelievers. We should remember that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself said that His true disciples would work miracles even greater than He did while on earth. Through the prayers of the fervent and faithful St. Martin, may we come to full and unashamed belief in the one true God and all His works. Amen.

Hierarch Mithrophanus of Voronezh.

(Dec. 6, Nov. 23 old calendar).

Hierarch Mithrophanus (Michael in the world) was born in 1623 near the city of Vladimir into a clerical family. His righteous parents brought him up properly in the spirit of Christian faith. Widowed at the age of 40, Michael became a monk at the Zolotnikovsk monastery of Dormition of the Mother of God, not far from the town of Suzdal. A devoted ascetic, he was ordained by laying on of hands to become a hieromonk in 1663 and in 3 years he was appointed Father Superior of the Kosmino-Yakhromski monastery.

In this capacity, Saint Mithrophanus was respected both by the clerical and the society people. Patriarch Joachim trusted Saint Mithrophanus completely and relied on him to give out salaries to army people from the monastery treasury. After a new eparchial cathedra was opened in Voronezh, Father Superior Mithrophanus was ordained a bishop in 1682. When Emperor Peter was succeeding the throne, Saint Mithrophanus was a witness to large-scale schism riots, which left a deep and most traumatic impression on him. He saw how much evil could be brought about by schisms, so for the rest of his life he was an active fighter against schisms.

Despite occupying a high priestly rank of an archbishop in the Church, Prelate Mithrophanus was approachable to everyone. His ministerial house harbored the sorrowful, hosted the

travelers and was the place to cure the ailing. The prelate often toured the city visiting the sick and consoling the sufferers with hope for God's mercy. He frequently visited prisons too. Emperor Peter singled him out from among other bishops and loved him very much. During his frequent visits to Voronezh where a shipyard and the fleet were under construction, Peter the Great supplied Prelate Mithrophanus with money and land lots for the needy. The prelate was the first person the emperor would visit on arrival to Voronezh. After a conversation with him the emperor would always leave in a bright and invigorated disposition.

In the 20 years of his episcopate services Prelate Mithrophanus contributed greatly to the benefit of the Church. In 1705 he fell seriously ill. Emperor Peter, who arrived to Voronezh at the time, came to see the dying prelate, clung to his deathbed and stayed with him all the time until the prelate died. During the funeral the emperor was among those carrying the coffin. Prelate Mithrophanus was buried in the Voronezh cathedral.

The citizens of Voronezh cherished good memories of the righteousness and virtues of Prelate Mithrophanus. When his imperishable relics were opened in 1718 and people received healing from them, no one doubted his sacredness anymore. Later, in 1833 Saint Mithrophanus' relics were brought with due ceremonies to the Voronezh cathedral of the Annunciation of Holy Virgin Mary.

Troparion:

A paragon of faith and a model of modesty, thou hast been a wise and humble father in word and deed to thy parish: like the sun thou didst shine in the bright holiness with the crown of immortality and glory. Intercede before Christ our God for the Orthodox Christians to be saved in this world.

The Holy and Great Martyr Katharine.

(December 7, November 24 old calendar).

Saint Katherine, the daughter of king Konstus, was born in the second half of the 3rd century. After her father's death Saint Katharine lived with her mother in Alexandria. Her mother was secretly a Christian and through her spiritual father, brought Katharine to the Christian faith. Katharine was greatly gifted by God, exceptionally well-educated in Greek philosophy, medicine, rhetoric and logic, she was also exceptionally beautiful. Many rich aristocratic young men were seeking her hand and her mother and relatives tried to persuade her to accept a marriage proposal. But Katharine procrastinated, saying to her family: "If you want me to marry, find a young man, whose beauty and enlightenment would surpass mine."

Through God's will Katharine met an old hermit known for his great wisdom and righteous life. Discussing the merits of Katharine's admirers the old man said: "I know a bridegroom who exceeds you in everything. He is unequalled." Then he gave her an icon of the Holy Virgin and promised that it will help her to see the wonderful Bridegroom.

That night in a light sleep Katharine saw the Holy Queen surrounded by angels standing in front of her with a child in her arms, who was radiant like the Sun. In vain did Katharine try to look into His face: He turned away from her. The Mother of God was asking her Son: "Do not despise Thine own creation, tell her what she should do to see Thy bright countenance." The child replied: "Let her go back to the old man and ask him."

The marvelous dream impressed Katharine deeply. Early in the morning she hurried to see the old man and clung to his feet asking for advice. The old man explained to her in detail what true faith was, he told her how the righteous are blissful in heavens and the sinful die in hell. The wise maiden understood the superiority of the Christian faith over paganism, believed in Jesus Christ as in the Son of God and was baptized. After baptism, heavenly light pervaded her, filling her with great joy.

With reformed soul Katharine came back home and she was praying for a long time thanking God for the mercy bestowed on her. Having fallen asleep while praying, she again saw the Mother of God. This time the Divine Child was looking benevolently at her. The Holy Virgin took Katharine's right hand and the Child put a wonderful ring on her finger saying: "Know not an earthly groom." Katharine understood that from that moment on she was betrothed to Him and she woke up with even greater joy. This ring remains on her finger to this day. After that she changed completely, she became modest, humble and merciful. She began to pray to God very often and to ask for His guidance and assistance. She was inspired by one purpose only: to live for Christ.

Soon after that Maxentius (286-305), who was a co-Emperor of Diocletian, came to Alexandria. He sent messengers to towns of Egypt calling people to gather and worship the pagan gods. Katharine was grievous about the ruler's imposing more pagan superstitions on the people instead of educating them. The celebration started. She came to the temple where the priests, noblemen and commoners gathered and when the wicked Emperor Maxentius offered a sacrifice to idols and ordered everyone to do the same, St. Katharine came with daring before him and denounced his idolatrous errors: "Shame upon you, King, you should know better than worship the loathsome idols! Get to know the true God, eternal and everlasting, it is through Him that kings are ruling and the world exists. He came down to earth and became man to save us."

The Emperor got infuriated by Katharine's disrespect and ordered to imprison her. Then he summoned fifty of the wisest men to dispute with her about faith and to persuade her that the pagan religion is the true one. For several days they were using various arguments to convince her of the superiority of paganism, but Katharine put them to shame with her logic and wise reasoning. Finally, seeing that Katharine surpassed them in logic and learning, they confessed their defeat. The furious Emperor commanded that all fifty wise men be burned. These wise men, at St. Katharine's prayers, all confessed the name of Christ at the moment of death, and proclaimed themselves Christians. Even after having lost the intellectual contest, Maxentius did not give up attempts to subvert Katharine. Having summoned her he tried to entice her with presents and promises of honors and glory. But Katharine remained steadfast.

When the martyr was in prison, she brought Porphyrius the general, with two hundred of his soldiers, to the Faith. Maxentius had to leave the city for a short time. His wife, the Empress Augusta, who had heard much about Katharine's wisdom, wished to see her. After the meeting and conversation with Katharine Augusta believed in Christ and became a Christian.

When Maxentius returned to Alexandria, he sent for Katharine again. This time he removed the mask of kindness and started threatening to torture and kill Katharine. Then he ordered to torture her on a wheel with sharp spikes. But hardly had the torture began when some invisible force stopped and broke the wheel and St. Katharine was unharmed. At St. Katharine's martyrdom the Lord Christ Himself appeared to her, strengthening her. Having heard of what had happened, the Empress Augusta confronted her husband and reproached him for daring to revolt against God Himself. The Emperor was infuriated by his wife's interference and ordered to kill her there and then.

The next day Maxentius summoned Katharine for the last time and proposed marriage to her promising her everything. But St. Katharine would not even listen to him. When Maxentius saw that all of his efforts were in vain, he ordered her killed, and a soldier beheaded her. Milk flowed from her body in place of blood. It was in the year of 310 on the 24th of November.

Subsequently the relics of St. Katharine were brought to the Sinai Mountain and from that time on were preserved there in the monastery named after her. The Emperor Peter the Great presented a valuable shrine for the relics of St. Katharine.

Kontakion:

You lovers of martyrs raise a chorus now/ in honor of wise Katherine./ She preached Christ in the stadium/ and trampled on the snake, spitting on the knowledge of philosophers.

Saint Innocent of Irkutsk.

(December 9, November 26 old calendar).

Saint Innocent (John in the world) was born in a nobleman's family that lived in Volyn, but because of Polish oppression, they had to move to Chernigov province in the 17th century. Innocent was born there in 1680. He studied at the Kiev Theological Seminary and on graduation he became a monk at the Kiev-Pechora Caves monastery. In 1710 hieromonk Innocent became a professor of the Moscow Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy and in 9 years, being the most educated monk, he was appointed a cathedral hieromonk of the ship "Samson" in the port of Revel. Then Innocent was promoted to the position of chief hieromonk of the fleet in the town of Abo, where he directed the work of the clergy on the ships. In 1721 he became governor of the Alexander Nevski Caves Monastery.

From the time of Yermak's conquest of Siberia at the end of the 16th century, there was a continuous migration of Russian people to those parts. By the beginning of the 17th century Orthodox believers needed a special Siberian eparchy with the cathedra in Tobolsk. In 1650 a Cossack chief Habarov occupied the Chinese town of Albazin on the left bank of the Amour river, and from that point the Cossacks kept control over the whole river. In 1685 a large army of Chinese with artillery besieged Albazin. One hundred soldiers were killed in the unequal battle and about 300 Cossacks were captured. Some prisoners of war together with their wives and children adopted Chinese citizenship, after which the emperor Kancy (1665-1722) kindly welcomed them and allocated a place for them live in the very heart of China – Beijing. It was they who started the first Russian mission in China.

In 1718 the confessor of the Orthodox community in China died, and the Holy Synod appointed hieromonk Innocent to succeed him. At the time a catholic mission supported by the emperor was active in China. It was the "Society of Jesust" founded in 1539 by a Spanish nobleman Ignatius Loiyola for propagation of Catholicism among heretics and pagans. When the Holy Synod informed the emperor Peter the 1st that hieromonk Innocent was appointed bishop to the state of China, his resolution was: "Let him be ordained archbishop, but it would be better not to mention town titles...lest the Jesuits cause him trouble."

In 1721 hieromonk Innocent was tonsured a bishop, with the emperor Peter I attending the ceremony, and in several days bishop Innocent accompanied by few clergymen and church singers headed towards Irkutsk as a missionary. A year passed before he reached the town. In the meanwhile, the Chinese government incited by Jesuits refused to grant a visa to "church official

and very important person” Innocent. So he had to settle at the Trinity monastery in Selenga near the Chinese border. Bishop Innocent found himself in a very hard situation and had to ask for the Synod’s help.

At the end of August 1727 the Synod appointed Prelate Innocent to be a bishop of Irkutsk and Nerchinsk. He confronted many difficulties in his ministerial work, such as closeness to Chinese border, vast underpopulated areas of his eparchy, inhabited by many various nations like Buriats, Mongolians and other ethnic groups who were not enlightened by Christianity, bad roads and poverty. Through neglect of the Senate and the Empress Katherine he received no salary until death and he was very hard up. Even under such conditions some of the meager means of the Irkutsk Holy Ascension Monastery were allocated to provide for the two schools that were founded by him: a Russian school and a Mongolian one.

Prelate Innocent took every care for those schools to keep going, finding good teachers, and supplying the students with books, cloths and food. He incessantly was working on improving material and spiritual life of his parish. Many recorded sermons, pastoral messages and resolutions testify to it. In hardships and deprivations he always retained spiritual steadfastness. He was famous for his humbleness and sagacity. There happened a bad harvest in his eparchy in 1727, then the drought started, and people feared hunger. Sermons began to be served in the churches of Irkutsk asking for rain and the akathist to Holy Virgin Mary was read. Prelate foretold: “We should stop praying on St. Elijah’s day.” Indeed, on the 20th of July, the day of prophet Elijah, Irkutsk had a stormy rain of such strength that its streets were covered with knee high water. The drought was over.

It was under Prelate Innocent that the reconstruction of the old wooden church into a stone one, in the monastery of Holy Ascension began. But Prelate’s health was failing him. Because of severe climate and hardships St. Innocent died on November 27, 1731 at the age of 50. He was buried in the monastery of Holy Ascension five miles away from Irkutsk on the bank of the Angara river.

In 1764 during repair works at the Tikhvin church of the monastery his sweet-smelling relics were uncovered and since that time healings started to ensue from them continuously. Prelate Innocent helped people not only in Irkutsk, but also in remote places of Siberia. In 1801 under the emperor Paul I, the Russian Church canonized Prelate Innocent.

Troparion: Bright light of the Church, illuminating the country with the radiance of thy kindness,/ thou art glorified for the many healings received by those who come to thee with faith in God,/ we pray to thee, O Holy Father Innocent, that through thy intercessions this town be protected from all calamities and trouble.

The Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called.

(December 12, November 30 old calendar).

Apostle Andrew was the son of Jonah and brother of Peter, born in Bethsaida, Galilee and a fisherman by profession. This northern part of the Holy Land was famous for its fertility and beautiful landscapes. People living there were good-humored and hospitable; there were many

Greeks in Galilee and Galileans got on very well with them, some spoke Greek and even had Greek names. Andrew is a Greek name, it means “manly.”

When St. John the Baptist started preaching on the banks of Jordan River, Andrew together with John, son of Zebedee (who also came from Bethesda) followed him hoping to find answers to his spiritual quest in the teachings of the prophet. Many people started to believe that it was maybe St. John the Baptist who was the expected Messiah, but he explained to people that he was not the Messiah; he was sent to only prepare the way for Him. At that time our Lord, Jesus Christ came to River Jordan for St. John to baptize Him. Pointing at Him St. John the Baptist said: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes the away the sins of the world” (Jn. 1:29). On hearing those words Andrew and John followed Jesus. When Jesus saw them he asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi (Teacher), where are you staying?” “Come,” he replied, “and you will see” and from that time on they became His disciples. On the same day Apostle Andrew went to see his brother Simon Peter and told him, “We have found the Messiah.” Thus Peter joined Christ’s disciples.

Andrew who was the first Apostle to follow Christ was called “the first-called.” He was at Christ’s side during all the time of His serving humanity. After The Savior’s Resurrection he was honored, together with other apostles, to meet Him. On the Mount of Olives he was a witness of the Lord’s ascension to heaven upon giving them His blessing.

After The Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles, they cast lots to see what countries they would go to preach the Gospel. It fell to the lot of the first of Christ’s apostles, St. Andrew, to preach the Gospel in Byzantium and Thrace, then in the lands along the Danube, in Russia (the land of Scythia at the time) and around the Black Sea, and finally in Epirus, Greece and the Peloponnese, where he suffered. In Byzantium, he installed St. Stachys as its first bishop; in Kiev he raised the Cross on high and prophesied a Christian future for the Russian people: he said, “These hills will be blessed by the Lord and a great city would be erected here. The Lord will enlighten this land with holy baptism and many churches will appear here.” In Thrace, Epirus, Greece and the Peloponnese, he brought many people to the Faith and gave them bishops and priests.

After Apostle Andrew returned to Greece he stopped in the city of Patras, situated near the Corinthian bay. There he performed many wonders in the name of Christ, he healed people with laying on hands and brought many to the Lord, among whom was the lady Maximilla who believed in Christ with all the zeal she had and became the apostle’s disciple. Many citizens of Patras came to the faith, and among them were the brother and the wife of the imperial governor, Aegeatus, who was seized with hatred for Apostle Andrew and sentenced him to crucifixion. Apostle Andrew was not in the least intimidated by the sentence. The governor Aegeatus did not believe the Apostle’s preaching and declared his teaching insane. Then he ordered to crucify him so that the Apostle would be tortured longer. St. Andrew was tied to the X shaped cross without being nailed through hands and feet in order not to let him die sooner. The unjust sentence evoked indignation among people but it remained in force all the same. While Andrew was still alive on the cross, the Apostle of Christ taught the Christians who were gathered round him about the spiritual value and power of the Savior’s sufferings on the Cross.

The people wanted to take him down from the cross, but he would not let them. Finally, the Apostle prayed to God and a strange radiance surrounded him. This light lasted for half an hour and, when it disappeared, the Apostle gave his holy soul into God’s hands. Thus the Apostle, who first of the twelve Great Apostles came to know the Lord and followed Him, finished his earthly course. St. Andrew suffered for his Lord as a martyr in the year 62. His relics were translated to Constantinople, but his head was later taken to Rome and one hand to Moscow.

Since Christianity came to Russia from Byzantium whose bishops consider themselves successors of Apostle Andrew, the church of Russia also believes that it is Apostle Andrew's scion. That was why Andrew the-first-called was commemorated in pre-Revolutionary Russia so reverently. In honor of Apostle Andrew the emperor Peter the first instituted the state's first and highest award which was granted to dignitaries. From the time of the emperor Peter, the Russian fleet has won many a victory under the Andrew's flag – a blue X shaped cross on a white background.

Troparion, Tone 4

As the first-called Apostle and brother of their leader/ entreat the Master of all to grant peace to the world, O Andrew,/ and great mercy to our souls.

Saint Philaret the Merciful.

(December 14, Dec.1 according to old calendar).

Saint Philaret was born in the beginning of the 8th century in the Paphlagonian region of Asia Minor (now territory of Turkey). He was a rich nobleman, whose righteous parents brought him up in the spirit of love for God and compassion for people. He retained those merits for all of his life. He lived happily with his wife and 3 children (a son and two daughters). Being rich did not harden his heart like it happened to many other people in similar circumstances. On the contrary, he felt compassion towards the poor and cared for them always bearing in mind that faith alone without good deeds is barren. Many paupers, widows and orphans knew him as kind person and generous benefactor.

Many years passed by, and then through God's will, St. Philaret was tried by affliction, like in the old days when Righteous Job, the-Much-Suffering, was tested. Quite unexpectedly, Izmail Arabs attacked the area where St.Philaret lived and devastated the land. They captured his slaves, livestock and fields, leaving him with just a house, a small field and a couple of oxen. Without bemoaning, Philaret accept his misfortunes saying, like Job: "God giveth, God taketh away. Blessed be His name for ages."

So Saint Philaret had to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow; poverty and misfortunes struck them. But St. Philaret did not become embittered; he continued to be compassionate and to support the poor. When one of his needy neighbors lost his only ox and asked St. Philaret for help, the latter gave him one of the two he had. Not long after that, St. Philaret gave away his second ox under similar circumstances. Philaret's wife was chiding him that he cared more for others than for his own family. It hurt to hear such reproaches, but he could not refuse when asked for help and he hoped that God would not leave him without His help. Sometimes he would give his clothes away to the needy. Almost every time after a good deed, he got in trouble with his family, he had to listen to his wife reproaching him, and his children weeping.

Thus Philaret's family got completely impoverished. Sometimes out of compassion to Philaret's family, neighbors sent them some bread or flour. But merciful God does not subject a righteous one to trials exceeding one's limits. God chose to put an end to Philaret's sufferings and reward him for his patience and kind heart. This is what happened.

The empress Irina who was ruling Constantinople with her son Constantine the VI (780-797) decided to get her son married. With this aim in view, she sent out her grandees to towns and villages of her empire to find the most beautiful and intelligent girls from among whom the king could pick out a bride.

Among other places, the envoys visited the village where St. Philaret lived. As usual Philaret hastened to welcome the travelers and offered them to stay in his big and once rich but now empty house. Kind-hearted neighbors took care of providing food for the noble guests. When the King's envoys were telling of the reason they were traveling they asked Philaret about his family. They found out that besides a son and daughters there also lived 3 young beautiful grand daughters in Philaret's house. When the guests saw them, they were impressed by the beauty and modesty of one of them, Maria, so much that they made St. Philaret agree to take his family to the capital for the emperor to see her among other chosen brides.

Beautiful Maria, brought up in the spirit of unpretentious sagacity, was also gentle and quiet by nature. The emperor Constantine was charmed by her so much that soon he married her, and Philaret the Merciful became the empress' grandfather. As a close relative of the emperor he was granted houses and rich estates, he was respected and honored. Philaret gratefully perceived all those happy changes as a gift from God. Not long after that, two other granddaughters of St. Philaret also married noblemen of the emperor's court. His wife and children, regretting their being reproachful in the past days, surrounded him with kindness and respect. But even after St. Philaret found himself living in the capital with all the respect and wealth of that new position, he never forgot to help the poor and used his wealth to support them.

By the end of his long life, the day of his death was revealed to him. He called his wife, children and grandchildren and announced it to them. Giving them his last blessing he said, "You know and you have seen the way I lived, my dear children. God granted me rich possessions in the beginning; then He tested me with poverty; seeing that I endure patiently and ungrudgingly everything that God sent me, he rose me again to become famous and equal to the noble and the powerful of this world. But I did not lock my wealth in the trunks, it was through the poor and needy that I sent it to God. Please, be always merciful, protect widows and orphans, visit those in sickness and imprisonment, do not miss sermons, never take anything that belongs to others, never talk spitefully, never rejoice in misfortunes of either friends or enemies, pay homage to the dead and remember me, a sinner, in your prayers."

Then saying, "Thy will be done," St. Philaret gave his Holy soul into God's hands (in the year of 792). The emperor, the empress, grandees, many noblemen and poor people were crying in the funeral procession that took his body to be buried at the Constantinople monastery of the Lord's Judgment. Many generations of Constantinople citizens were remembering St. Philaret's mercifulness.

The Holy Great Martyr Barbara.

(December 17, December 4 old calendar).

Saint Barbara was the only daughter of Dioscorus, a highborn and early widowed pagan who was despotic and held sway over his subjects demanding unquestioning obedience. He loved his daughter, Barbara, more than anything in the world, but being narrow-minded as a pagan he cared for her earthly well-being. St. Barbara lived in the town of Heliopolis of Phoenicia (Northern part of the Holy Land) at the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 4th century. Dioscorus was afraid that if Barbara who was both intelligent and beautiful mixed with people around her, she would make friends with somebody of a lower standing than hers, so he built a splendid house with a tower and shut her up there. He surrounded her with all possible comforts, gave her a host of attendants, set up idols for worship and built her a bathroom with two windows.

Alone in her tower, young Barbara found consolation sitting by the windows and enjoying the beauty of the earth below and the starry sky above. She saw the range of hills stretching out to the horizon, emerald green valleys, and white clouds floating across the blue dome of the sky, she sensed the aroma of field flowers and herbs. After sunset Barbara watched billions of lights appearing one after another on the dark sky, and her innocent soul was exulted with rapture and desire to learn about the One who created that heavenly beauty. Her pagan tutors failed to provide answers satisfying her long quest and contemplation. Barbara's mind was opened by the grace of God and although she had no human teacher to bring her to the knowledge of Him, she came to the conclusion that there is one true God and Creator, merciful, wise and omnipotent, who is the Creator and the Giver of life. It was that God, whom young Barbara aspired to know.

When Barbara came of age, her father decided that she should get married. There were crowds of bridegrooms seeking her hand, but she invented reasons to refuse them all. Thinking that it was the long seclusion that made Barbara so unsociable, her father let her out of her tower and allowed her to meet people. By God's providence, she met some Christian maidens who told her about the God-Creator of all and about Christ the Savior. Barbara's subtle soul helped her to understand that she found the true faith she was dreaming of for so long. Barbara's heart was set on fire with love for Christ. When her father was away, she had a third window cut in the sauna room of her castle as a symbol of the Holy Trinity, and traced a Cross with her finger on one wall of it, which etched itself deep in the marble as if cut by a chisel. A spring of water gushed forth from the sauna floor from her footprint, and it later gave healing from sickness to many. Having come to the true faith she got baptized secretly from her father.

When Dioscorus came back home, he was surprised to see that the tower had three windows instead of the two that he had ordered and there was the sign of cross on a marble wall. He interrogated Barbara and she could no longer conceal her Christianity from him. She explained that the three windows symbolize the Holy Trinity, and that she drew the cross in remembrance of the Savior's crucifixion. Outraged to insanity he beat her harshly and drove her from the tower, chasing after her to kill her with his sword, but a cliff opened and hid Barbara from her irate father.

When she appeared the next day, Dioscorus locked her up for several days with no food. Then he handed her over to Marcian, the governor of the city, reporting she is a Christian and saying, "Do whatever you choose to her. I renounce her."

Enchanted by Barbara's beauty, Marcian spoke kindly to her trying to persuade her to disavow her faith and make a sacrifice to pagan gods. Barbara denounced his proposal resolutely and declared bravely in front of all present that she believes in Christ as God and Savior of people. The courageous confession of the young maiden infuriated the ruler and he handed her over for many bodily and moral tortures. Neither stripping of her body, nor beating her with bull skin-flints in public until her entire body was covered in bloody wounds broke Barbara's strong spirit. She was constantly praying God and setting all her hope and trust in Him during her sufferings. After many fearful tortures St. Barbara was cast into prison where the Lord Himself appeared to her with many angels, and healed her wounds and promised her a great reward in heaven.

In the morning the torturers were amazed to see the martyr healed and in good health. But they were not turned to reason even by that obvious wonder ascribing it to the works of their gods. The governor again tried to make her worship pagan idols, but she remained staunch. Then she was subjected to new tortures, but Saint Barbara regained her spiritual strength in her fervent prayers to God. Seeing that no means would make the Christians disavow their faith, the governor ordered them to be beheaded. For more humiliation Saint Barbara was brought to the place

of execution stripped naked. But the Lord worked wonder to comfort His martyr: heavenly light wrapped her body as if by a garment and she was not exposed to the pagan scum. Before death St. Barbara prayed to God that all those remembering her martyrdom and asking for her help would be delivered from a sudden death. The Lord heard her prayer and she heard a voice promising her that.

A certain woman, Juliana, beheld this and condemned the rulers for their cruelty, she was slain by soldiers while Barbara's beheading was executed by her own father who got demonically vicious.

The Lord's Judgement came very soon. On the same day, lightning struck Dioscorus's house, killing both him and Marcian, their bodies were completely incinerated.

St. Barbara suffered in 306, and her wonderworking relics were reverently preserved by the Greek church for several centuries. In 1108 Greek empress Barbara married the Kiev prince Sviatopolk, son of Iziaslavl. She brought the relics of her holy benefactress and they were placed in the Gold-dome monastery of St. Michael in Kiev.

Greatly glorified in the Kingdom of Christ, she has appeared many times down to our own days, sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of the most holy Mother of God.

Troparion, Tone 4

Let us praise holy Barbara who has broken the snares of the enemy./ By the help of the weapon of the Cross/ she has escaped as a bird and flown towards God.

Saint John of Damascus.

(December 17, December 4 old calendar).

Famous writer and clerical poet St. John was a minister of caliph Abdul-Malek and a governor of Damascus in his younger years. He came from Syria and lived in the 8th century when the iconoclastic heresy was raging in the Byzantine Empire: icons were destroyed, and the advocates of icon worshiping were persecuted severely. A highly educated person and a talented writer, John of Damascus ardently and convincingly advocated the veneration of icons by the Orthodox believers.

The vehement iconoclast emperor Leo the Isaurian was infuriated by John's writings. He ordered his scribe to study St. John's handwriting and to imitate it in a letter addressed to the Byzantine emperor and allegedly written by John offering the emperor his assistance in overthrowing caliph. Emperor Leo sent this spurious letter to caliph as a proof of his loyalty to caliph and St. John's treason.

Without looking properly into the matter or listening to St. John's clarification the Asian despot ordered to imprison St. John and cut off his right hand, which had ostensibly, written the perfidious letter. St. John placed his cut hand in front the icon of the most holy Mother of God that he had with him in prison and fell down in a long prayer and lamentation before the icon. In a dream Most Holy Virgin appeared to the martyr and looking at him kindly she said, "Behold, your hand is healed now, do not grieve any more." When St. John woke up he was amazed to see that his hand was re-joined to his arm miraculously and became as lively as before. Only a narrow scar reminded of the execution. St. John was so ecstatic with joy and gratitude to the Merciful Protectress that a hymn flowed out of his soul, which is still sung in churches: "Every creature rejoices in Thee, Oh, Blessed One!"

When caliph heard of the wonder, he investigated the case carefully and understood that St. John was innocent. The caliph felt guilty, so, trying to amend the injustice done, he offered St. John lavish awards and high tribute. But St. John refused to accept any of those, as he saw how transient fortune and glory are in this world. As a sign of gratitude to the Holy Mother of God he ordered an image of her hand made of silver and attached it to the icon, which he had with him in prison when the miracle occurred. This icon was called “Three hands.”

Having given away all of his possessions and dressed as a commoner, St. John withdrew to the monastery of St. Sabba the Sanctified located 25 miles to the southeast of Jerusalem. Since St. John was very famous, none of the monastery brothers wanted to become his supervisor in his work of penance. Finally one elder agreed to guide him only on the condition that for the sake of humbleness St. John would no longer write any literary compositions. St. John agreed and began to live and work at the monastery as an ordinary monk. There he was from the very beginning a model of humility and obedience, and performed all the works of asceticism prescribed for monks.

Several years passed by. Once St. John’s friend asked him to write a prayer for the repose of his father’s soul. In a moment of inspiration St. John wrote a requiem hymn that is still sung in churches during burial services. An interpretation of one of them by Alexei Tolstoi, a Russian writer and poet goes:

“What earthly sweetness of our lives
Is never marred with woe or worry?
What expectations do not fail?
Whose life is just a happy story?

We waste our strength on trifles, which
Like sand through fingers will be seeping.
What worldly fame will ever last?
Or anyway is worth of keeping?

All these are shadows, ash and dust,
They will be gone like streams of smoke,
And when we face our coming death
We are defenseless, helpless, broke.

Can despotic rule stay ever strong?
Will anything preserve its zest?
Accept your humble servant, Lord
And let him in Thy heavens rest.”

Having learned that John broke the promise and wrote a prayer, the elder got angry and wanted to banish him from the monastery. Then all the monks of the monastery asked the elder to forgive John. The elder agreed to pardon John’s disobedience on the condition that John would clean out all the dirty places in the monastery with his own hand. St. John executed this severe demand humbly. After that Holy Theotokos appeared to the elder in a night dream and said: “Do not obstruct my wellspring any more. Let it flow in the name of the Lord’s glory.” Having risen

from sleep the elder understood that it was God's will for St. John of Damascus to devote himself to literary work.

From that time on nobody hindered St. John's writing clerical compositions and church prayers. Several years of his ceaseless work made a great contribution of compositions, prayers and service canons to the Church services; they are sung in churches to this day and render more beauty to Orthodox services. Many hymns sung at Christmas, Easter and other celebrations were composed by him. He composed the Octoechos (eight tones) sung during Sunday sermons, the Irmologion, the Menologion and the Easter Canon. A great monk, hymnographer, a subtle theologian, and a great warrior for the truth of Christ, St. John of Damascus wrote a famous book "The Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith," in which he summarized the main postulates of Christianity. He entered peacefully into rest in the year of 777, at the age of seventy-five

Troparion, Tone 3

Thou wast a holy instrument/ and a tuneful harp of godliness./ Thy teachings shone forth to the ends of the world./ O righteous John,/ entreat Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.

Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker.

(December 19, December 6 old calendar).

Saint Nicholas the wonderworker of Myra, Lycia, is a saint especially loved by the Orthodox Christians, particularly by Russian Orthodox believers. He is perceived as a prompt helper in various tribulations of life and hardships of traveling. The only son of his eminent and wealthy parents, Theophanes and Nona, he was born in Asia Minor at the end of the 3rd century. His parents dedicated to God the only son He gave them. St. Nicholas was deeply religious since his early childhood and his uncle Nicholas, Bishop of Patara, instructed him in his spiritual life. He became a monk at 'New Zion', a monastery founded by his uncle.

After the death of his parents, Nicholas distributed all the property he inherited to the poor and kept nothing back for himself. He tried to help people secretly, so that they would not be thankful to him. As a priest in Patara, he was known for his charitable works, fulfilling the Lord's words: 'When you give to the needy, do not let thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, so that your giving may be in secret' (Matt. 6:3). The following example shows how he helped those in misery.

In the city of Patara there lived a rich man who had 3 daughters. When the girls were becoming of age, their father's business went from bad to worse and finally he became a bankrupt. He contrived a felonious scheme to use the beauty of his daughters in order to earn money for living. Saint Nicholas learned about his plans and decided to save that man and his daughters from the infamy. At night Saint Nicholas quietly crept to the house of the bankrupt merchant and threw a purse with gold coins into the window. The merchant was happy to find the money and use it as a dowry for his elder daughter to marry. In a short while Saint Nicholas threw in another purse with gold, which was enough for a dowry for the second daughter to get married. When Saint Nicholas was throwing the third purse with gold for the youngest daughter's dowry, the merchant was on the watch for him. He fell on his knees before Saint Nicholas and thanked him tearfully for saving him and his family from a horrible sin and disgrace. After giving his daughters to marriage, the merchant put gradually his own affairs to order and began to help people following the example of his benefactor.

Saint Nicholas wanted to visit holy places. So he boarded a ship going to Palestine. The voyage was calm, but Saint Nicholas had a revelation about a coming storm and told his co-travelers about it. And indeed, a strongest tempest came down upon the ship making it a helpless toy of the raging waves. Knowing that Saint Nicholas was a priest, everybody asked him to pray for deliverance. Upon his prayer the wind subsided and the sea got perfectly quiet. One of the sailors, who had been blown off a mast by the wind and died, was resurrected by Saint Nicholas praying.

After venerating the holy places Saint Nicholas wanted to retreat from the world of people to a desert for the rest of his life. But this was not God's will, He foreordained him to be a good pastor. A voice from on high came to him: 'Nicholas, return home and set about your work among the people if you desire to receive a crown from Me.'

Saint Nicholas did not want to live in the town where all the people knew and praised him. So he settled as a poor man in Myra, the capital of Lycia. There was a bishop's cathedra in that city. He loved the church and came to services every day as soon as the doors would open.

At that time the Myra bishop died and the bishops of the neighboring eparchies gathered to elect his successor. They failed to reach a unanimous decision until one of them said, "The Lord God Himself will show us His choice. Let us pray, brethren, let us fast and wait for the sign from above." And indeed, the eldest of the bishops had a revelation that the first man entering the church is to become the bishop. He told other bishops about it and before the morning service started, he went to the door and was waiting for the God's chosen one to appear. As usual Saint Nicholas was the first to come for morning prayers. When he was entering the church the bishop stopped him and asked for his name. Saint Nicholas told his name humbly.

"Follow me, my son," said the bishop, who took him by his hand, led him into the church and announced that Nicholas was to be ordained bishop of Myra. Saint Nicholas was afraid to accept such a high hierarchical position, but he had to concede to the will of bishops and the people.

When Nicholas became a bishop, he said to himself, "Up to now I could live for myself and the salvation of my soul, but now every moment of my life should be devoted to others." And indeed, with abandonment the holy father opened the doors to everyone, becoming father and benefactor of orphans and the poor, and he protected everybody who was hurt or needed help.

The contemporaries described him as a very kind and humble person, he was wearing most simple cloths and ate only once a day, some fasting food in the evening. Merciful, wise and fearless, Nicholas was a true shepherd to his flock.

He was cast into prison during the persecutions of Diocletian (284-305). But even there, he continued to instruct the people in the Law of God. He supported the Christians suffering persecution together with him, through his example and preaching. But it was not in the will of God for him to die a martyr's death. A new emperor Constantine was benevolent to Christians and granted them the right to openly express their religious beliefs.

At that time St. Nicholas could return to his parishioners. It would be hard to enumerate all the instances of help and wonderworking that he performed. Once during famine in Lycia, St. Nicholas appeared in a dream to a merchant who was loading his ship with bread in Italy. St. Nicholas gave him gold coins and told him to take his cargo to the city of Myra in Lycia. When the merchant woke up and saw the coins in his hand, he was awed and could not but obey the saint's order. He brought his bread to the country struck by famine and told the people about the wonderful vision, which brought him there.

At that time many churches were in schismatic revolts due to the Arius's heretical teaching, which rejected the divinity of Jesus Christ. To reconcile the church, the emperor Constantine the Great convened the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 325. St. Nicholas was present there among other bishops. The Ecumenical Council criticized the heresy of Arius and composed "The Symbol of Creed," which formulates in precise wording the faith of Orthodox believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God, of one essence with the God the Father. During discussions, St. Nicholas got so angry at the heresy that he struck Arius in the face in front of everybody. For breaking order, St. Nicholas was removed from the Council and from his episcopate duties, until some of the chief hierarchs had a vision of our Lord Christ handing a gospel to St. Nicholas and His most holy Mother endowing him with an omophorion. The bishops understood how incompatible with God's truth were the Arius's heretical ideas, and they returned the bishop's title to St. Nicholas.

This wonderful saint was a defender of the truth of God, and was ever a spirited champion of justice among the people. The description of his life also gives us the following example of his being a spirited champion of justice among the people. Once the emperor sentenced three army chiefs to death after they were slanderously accused. Remembering St. Nicholas's wonder making, they appealed to him asking for protection. After a prayer St. Nicholas appeared in a dream to the emperor and told him to release his loyal servants, warning him of a punishment if he disobeyed. "Who are you — the emperor asked, — that you dare to demand something from me?" "I am the archbishop Nicholas of the city of Myra," said the holy father. Obeying the order the emperor looked thoroughly into the matter and set those men free with all the appropriate acclaim.

Once a ship was sailing from Egypt to Libya. A horrible storm arose and the ship started sinking. Some of the people on board remembered about St. Nicholas and began praying him for help. Then they saw him rushing to their ship across the stormy sea, board it and taking the helm in his hands. The storm subsided and the ship arrived safely to harbor. Merciful, and trustworthy, he walked among the people like an angel of God. People considered him a saint even during his lifetime, and invoked his aid when in torment or distress. He would appear both in dreams and in reality to those who called upon him for help, responding speedily to them, whether close at hand or far away. His face would shine with light as Moses' did aforetime, and his mere presence among people would bring solace, peace and goodwill.

He lived a very long life full of labor and fruitful toil. In his old age he sickened of a slight illness, and went to his rest in the Lord on December 6th in the middle of the fourth century. Not only his help did not abate upon death, but also it became even stronger. For already a thousand and a half years he remains a prompt helper of those who pray for his support. The recount of his assistance constitutes a voluminous book and people's devotion to him grows with time.

When in 1087 the Saracens devastated Lycia, St. Nicholas appeared in a dream to a righteous priest in the town of Bari (in Italy) and told to take his relics to that town. This order of the saint was soon carried out and from that time to the present day his relics are preserved in the town of Bari. Healing myrrh is ensuing from them. That event is commemorated on May 22 of the modern calendar.

Troparion, Tone 4

The truth of things revealed thee to thy flock as a rule of faith,/ a model of meekness, and a teacher of temperance./ Therefore thou hast won the heights by humility,/ riches by poverty./ Holy Father Nicholas, intercede with Christ our God that our souls may be saved.

Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Mediolanum (Milan).

(December 20, December 7 old calendar).

Saint Ambrose was born in 340 in the northern part of Italy. He was of eminent parentage. His father was the imperial governor of Gaul and Spain, and a pagan, while his mother was a Christian. While he was still in his cradle, a swarm of bees once settled on him, left some honey on his lips and flew off; and, while still a child, he thrust out his hand and said prophetically: "Kiss it, for I shall be a bishop!" He was well educated in legal sciences and on the death of his father in 370, the Emperor made him governor of Emilia and Liguria, of which province Milan was the chief city. When the bishop of Milan died, there was great dissension between the Orthodox Christians and the heretical Arians about the choice of a new bishop. Ambrose went into the church to keep order, this being his responsibility. Thereupon, a child at its mother's breast cried out: "Ambrose for bishop!" All the people and the emperor Valentine himself took this to be the choice of God, and unanimously elected Ambrose, still a catechumen at the time, as their bishop. (A catechumen was a person only preparing to be baptized. Some people postponed baptism till they become of a mature age in those times). It was against his will, but in vain did he try to dissuade his compatriots and he even fled from Milan. Ambrose was baptized, and passed through all the necessary ranks in one week, and was consecrated bishop in 374.

The first thing he did after consecration was giving out all of his possessions to the poor. Then he started to study the Gospel thoroughly and the works of the fathers of Eastern Church. Only after that he started his work as a bishop.

Saint Ambrose fought defiantly against the Arian heresy, which at that time was supported by the empress Justina. In commemoration of the victory over the Arian heresy he composed the hymn "We praise Thee, O God," which is still sung during the thanksgiving sermons. It was he, who insisted on crossing out the pagan title of the Supreme Priest (Pontifex maximus) from the titles following the emperor's name, pagan priests and heathen temples were left without the governmental financial support, the so-called fire of vestals was put out and the Victory statue was taken out of the Senate building.

Saint Ambrose became a model of bishop's firmness when he did not let emperor Theodosius enter the cathedral after the latter suppressed the mutiny of Thessalonians against him with brutal violence. Saint Ambrose told him, "A person who has shed so much blood cannot enter the temple of God." "David sinned too," the emperor objected, "but was not deprived of the grace of God." To this Saint Ambrose said, "You followed David in crime, follow him also in repentance," and subjected the emperor to penance for reconciliation with God and Church.

In the year of 387 under the influence of Saint Ambrose's preaching, St. Augustine the fool-for-Christ who later became a bishop and a great theologian of the Western Church, was baptized.

This renowned hierarch, who was visited by people from distant lands for his wisdom and gracious words, was very austere in his personal life, being no stranger to toil and full of good works. He slept little, worked and prayed constantly and fasted every day except Saturday and Sunday. God therefore permitted him to witness many of His wonders, and to perform many himself. He discovered the relics of Ss Protasius, Gervasius, Nazarius and Celsus. God granted

this man, who was so pleasing to Him, such grace that he could raise the dead, drive demons from men, heal the sick of every ailment and see into the future.

The last years of his life Saint Ambrose spent in constant prayer, expecting his last day with peaceful joy.

He died peacefully at daybreak on Easter Day in the year 397. Saint Ambrose is deeply revered by the Church among other great theologians and spiritual fathers. He is also renowned as an editor of church choral services: he introduced rhythmical time and various melodies in singing. He borrowed many texts of songs from St. Ephrem of Syria and from St. Illarius, but he wrote about 30 hymns himself.

Kontakion, Tone 3

Thou didst shine with divine doctrine/ and blacken the error of Arius;/ working miracles in the power of the Spirit/ thou didst heal various passions./ O Ambrose, shepherd and teacher, pray to Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.

Saint Angelina of Serbia.

(December 23, December 10 old calendar).

Saint Angelina was the daughter of the famous Albanian hero George Skenderbeg (1414-1467). She married St. Steven, the Serbian ruler who inherited the title of Despot from his father Prince George Brankovich. At that time Serbia had already been conquered by the Turks, so St. Angelina and St. Stephen had to bear many adversities and even humiliating exile to Italy. Among all tribulations the holy couple brought up their two sons, Maxim and John, in a truly Christian and ascetic spirit: St. Maxim became a bishop and St. John was the last ruler of Serbia (from 1493) prior to a long period of enslavement of the country.

Becoming a nun on her husband's death, she devoted herself to prayer and works of charity. She was especially well known for her taking care of Serbian and Russian churches and monasteries. When she saw she could no longer support all the monasteries, she sent a message to the Great Prince Basil III of Moscow with a touching request: "Our country is declining these days, and yours is rising. Do take upon your shoulders the responsibility and care for our holy churches and monasteries built by your and our faithful ancestors." Prince Basil's donation was used to build the Krusedol monastery. She reposed at the beginning of the 16th century and it was in that monastery that her imperishable relics were buried together with those of her spouse, St. Stephen, and of her two sons, the archbishop St. Maxim and Prince St. John. Their names are associated with protection of Serbia from heathen invaders. In the years of Serbia's subjugation to Turkey, Serbian people prayed to them for liberation of the country from the conquerors. Even non-Christians received healing from their relics and marveled at the greatness of the Christian faith.

Saint Angelina along with St. Militza is the most loved and revered saint in Serbia. People call her "maika" (mother) Angelina.

Saint Herman of Alaska.

(December 25, December 12 old calendar).

Russian industrial entrepreneurs discovered the Aleutian Islands in the second half of the 18th century. The islands form something like a chain along the eastern coast of Kamchatka to the western coast of Northern America. After the islands were discovered, the pagan inhabitants, who became Russian subjects, were to be enlightened with the Gospel. The Holy Synod assigned the Valaam monastery elder, Nazarius, with the task to choose the most gifted monks from that monastery so that they would accomplish this apostolic mission. Thus, in 1793 ten monks of the monastery were chosen to go and preach the word of God to the uncivilized peoples of north-west America. A 33 year old monk Herman was among the members of that mission.

Saint Herman was born into a family of merchants and from his youth he had a great zeal for Christ. He entered the monastery at the age of 16. As a young monk, he once became deathly ill with an abscess on his throat. Alone in his cell and near death he fell down before an icon of the Mother of God and prayed with fervent tears for healing. He then took a wet towel and wiped the face of the icon of the Holy Theotokos, and with this towel he covered the swelling. In a dream he saw the Blessed Virgin Mary touching him on his throat, healing him. When he awoke in the morning, he was fully healed.

The mission started its journey in the year of 1793. It was the longest missionary travel in Christian history, taking a year to traverse over 7,900 miles, by land and sea, to arrive at Kodiak Island. As the result of their holy zeal, the light of Christ poured forth, and several thousand new Russian subjects, formerly pagans, were baptized into the Christian Faith. A school was set up to educate the newly baptized children, and the first church was built.

Eventually, Father Herman found himself the only surviving member of the original missionary team. Six years after the beginning of the missionary work among the Aleutians he retreated from Kodiak Island to the nearby Yelovoi (Spruce) Island for the life of prayer and seclusion. It was a small, forested piece of land with a brook running across the island, and he called it New Valaam. Yelovoi was separated from the main island Kodiak by a strait, two kilometers wide.

There he first lived in a cave and then he built a cell in which he lived and worked for the glory of the Lord for over 40 years. A wooden Chapel and a wooden schoolhouse/guest house were built near his cell. He wore the same simple monastic clothing both in winter and summer. His bed was a bench covered with a deer skin, he used two bricks for a pillow and a wooden board for a blanket, which was to cover his earthly remains according to his will. He ate very little, and for further asceticism he wore 16 pounds of chains under his deer-skin smock, so that no one, until his death, knew about them. These chains are kept with his relics to this day on the island of Kodiak. Ferocious bears living on the island were tame and benign around Fr. Herman. He worked many miracles and led thousands to Christ, remaining a simple monk.

St. Herman was so kind and easily approachable that for years Aleutians started regarding him as if he had been their father. Following the example of many desert Fathers who showed the greatest concern for the welfare and needs of others, yet regarded themselves of little significance, St. Herman responded to every hardship they had. He defended those who erred in front of superiors, defended the ill-treated and helped the needy with whatever he could. Aleutians would constantly visit him bringing their children along. Some would be asking for advice, some would complain about offence, some would seek protection or help – the old man tried to help each and everybody.

His love for the Aleutians brought him sometimes to utter self-sacrifice. During the epidemics of a deadly illness that took the lives of very many Aleutians in a month, Father Herman was

selfless and tireless when visiting the sick, preaching patience and repentance, and preparing the dying to depart.

The elder took special care about instilling moral virtues in the Aleutians. To this end he organized a school for Aleut orphans where he taught them the Scriptures and church singing.

With the same aim in view, on weekends and holidays he gathered people in a chapel near his cell for a communal prayer. His disciples said prayers in turn, and the old man read Books of the Apostles, the Gospel and instructed them. The orphans taught by him were singing harmoniously during his sermons. The Aleutians liked his preaching very much, crowds of people always attended his sermons. His preaching produced an unforgettable impression on listeners.

Russian sailors coming to Alaska were visiting Father Herman too. Once he was invited on board a frigate, which sailed from Saint Petersburg. The captain of the ship, a man of excellent education, was sent to America by the Russian tsar to inspect the colonies. The 25 captain's subordinates were also well-educated navy officers. And this company was perplexed by a conversation with a modest rather short monk in shabby cloths. The captain himself said later, "We were at a loss what to say, we were fools in front of him!" Father Herman asked them, "What do you like most of all? What would you like to have so that you could think yourselves happy?" The answers were about wealth, titles, beautiful wives, position of a captain on a wonderful ship and so on. "Do you agree, sirs, " Father Herman continued, that all of your aspirations can be reduced to one wish: each of you wants to have something that he thinks to be the best and most worthy of love?" Everybody agreed and he continued, "Then tell me what can be better and far more worthy of love than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself? The One Who created us and adorned all with perfection, Who gave life, Who provides for all and nourishes all, Who loves all and Who is the best of all people and Who Himself is Love? Shouldn't we love Him more than anything else and aspire for Him?" Everybody started saying, "Well, of course, this is true! It goes without saying!" And then the old man asked, "Do you really love God?" Everybody said, "Of course, we do. How can we not love God?" "Here I am, a sinner, aspiring for 40 years to love God and yet I cannot say that I love Him perfectly," noted Father Herman and started to explain how one should love God. "If we love someone, we always remember that person, we try to please him or her, and day and night our heart is preoccupied with that person. Do you love God that much? Is it often that you turn to Him, do you always keep Him in mind, are you always praying and following His commandments?" We had to confess that we do not. "For our own benefit, for our happiness, let us at least promise ourselves that from this day, this hour, this minute we will try to love God above all and do His Sacred Will!" This wonderful conversation with St. Herman must have impressed the hearts of those people for the rest of their lives.

In general Father Herman was outspoken and eloquent, his statements were intelligent, to the point and enlightening. He spoke of eternity, salvation, future life and God's providence; he often told about lives of saints and quoted holy books, but he never deviated from the essence. It was so much pleasure to listen to him that his interlocutors, even the Aleutians and their women, were so enthralled that they reluctantly left him only at sunrise.

Father Herman was a man of short stature with a pale face covered with wrinkles; his grayish blue eyes shone with special light and his countenance revealed that the old man had the grace of God within him. His voice was not loud, but very pleasant. People were magnetically drawn to him by his mild and quiet disposition, his humble and appealing look, his pleasant smile and kind words.

God endowed St. Herman with the gift of discernment and wonderworking for his devoutness to the Lord and the decades of ascetic life full of hardships. When the time of his death was

coming close St. Herman asked his disciple Gerasim to light candles in front of icons and to read the book of Acts of the Apostles. After a while his face lit up and he said loudly, “Glory to Thee, O Lord!” Then the old man lowered his head onto Gerasim’s chest and the cell was filled with aromatic incense. At that moment Saint Herman’s face shone and he peacefully departed to rest in the Lord. It was in 1837, St. Herman died on the 81st year of his righteous life. At the moment of his death the people who lived in a nearby settlement watched a pillar of light going up from the Yelivoi Island to the sky. This was a sign for them that St. Herman passed to a better world, which he was yearning for from his very youth.

To this day the Orthodox Aleutians venerate reverently the memory of St. Herman, and when baptizing their children they often christen them Herman in his honor.

Excerpts from Saint Herman's preaching.

Make a resolute step

“What do you love most of all and what would you like to have to be happy? Don’t all of the various desires boil down to one wish? Each of us wants to have something that he or she thinks to be the best and most worthy of love? But what can be better and far more worthy of love than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who created us and adorned all with perfection, Who gave life, Who provides for all and nourishes all, Who loves all. He is the One Who Himself is Love – the One Who is the best of all people!

Shouldn’t we love Him more than anything else and aspire for Him and seek Him? A sinner, I am aspiring for 40 years to learn how to love God and yet I cannot say that I love Him perfectly! If we love someone, we always keep that person in mind, we try to please the person day and night. Our heart and mind are preoccupied with the beloved. Do you love God that much? Is it often that you turn to Him, do you always remember Him, are you always praying and following His commandments?

For our own benefit, for our happiness, let us at least promise ourselves that from this day, this hour, this minute we will try to love God above all and to follow His commandments!”

Make your faith conscientious

A true Christian is faithful and loves Christ. According to the Savior Himself our sins do not prevent us from being a good Christian. He said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners,” “There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” He also said to a Pharisee Simon and to a sinful woman washing his feet, “Her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who loves little has been forgiven little.” A Christian should come to hope and joy through such thinking, and to disregard everything that makes him despondent. We need a shield of faith” (which in our time is insight and love of Orthodox sermons, tradition and history and clear awareness of the numinous aspects of heretical teachings, sects, ecumenism and communism that take place in Russia and the whole world now. That is what the “shield of faith” is – ed. note).

Wage a constant battle

“According to the Apostles we are not swimming among waves of a stormy sea, but we travel and strive through an enticing world of passions. And though we are not blessed as the Holy Apostles were, we have to fight, like they did, against the same fleshless sources of evil, the

rulers of dark powers of our time, the spirits of malevolence on the Earth that try to intercept, trap and stop all those on their way to our heavenly fatherland. The Apostle Peter said, 'Our foe, the devil, is roaming like a snarling lion looking for someone to fall prey for him to devour.' A sin for a God loving person is just like an arrow shot by the enemy on the battlefield.

Find your aim in life

A true Christian is a soldier making his way through the battalions of invisible foes toward his Holy Fatherland.

Vain aspirations of our time distance us from our Heavenly Fatherland. Our attachment to those desires wraps our soul as if dressing it in repugnant apparel. The apostles called it "an external man." In our earthly travel, calling for God's help, we must remove the repulsive garb from us and attire ourselves in new aspirations and new love of the future (consummation of the Holy Spirit) and through that we shall see if we are coming closer to our Heavenly Fatherland or going further from it. (St. John of Kronshtadt advised to keep a diary of spiritual life, which was helpful, he said, in acquiring the ability to wage a spiritual life). But it cannot be achieved quickly, we must follow the example of those in sickness, who are looking unceasingly for a way to cure themselves.

Spread the good tidings of the Orthodoxy

"O how delighted was my spirit! Finding myself between bad and good weather, between joy and boredom, between abundance and lack, between fullness and hunger, between warmth and coldness and amidst all my sorrows, I receive something that livens me up when I hear conversations about preaching and removing of various obstacles!

Glory to Providence of our Merciful God! Through His unfathomable divine guidance He has now shown a new event that I had never witnessed before on Kodiak Island in those many years that I have been living here. Today after Easter one young woman who had never seen or known me came here and having heard about the incarnation of the Son of God and life eternal, conceived such love for Jesus Christ that she would not leave me. Looking at that in great amazement I recall the Savior's words, 'I praise Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to a little children.' There are other zealous women and men who would like to follow her example...

But those who diverged from the true Orthodox Church have chosen a wrong path."

Troparion, Tone 4

Blessed ascetic of the northern wilds/ and intercessor for the whole world;/ teacher of Orthodoxy, instructor of piety,/ adornment of Alaska and gladness of America,/ holy Father Herman, pray to Christ our God that He may save our souls.

Martyrs Eugenie and others.

(Dec. 26, Dec. 13 old calendar).

The beginning of the 4th century during the rule of emperor Diocletian (284-305) was markedly horrible in its brutal persecution of Christians.

Emperor Diocletian wanted to revive the fading pagan religion, so in the year of 302 he issued a decree ordering to destroy Christian temples, to deprive Christians of all civil rights and

remove them from all job positions. Soon after this he issued a second decree ordering all measures for persuading Christians to disavow Christianity and to execute the disobedient.

So great was the pagans' hatred to Christians, that those decrees were soon put into action. The enemies of Christianity reported everyone they could and soon prisons were filled with Christian bishops, presbyters and commoners. In Armenia, Auxentius, Presbyter of Aravrak church, was arrested and together with other Christians was brought to the city of Satalione to be judged by the regional ruler Lisius, an atrocious persecutor of Christians.

In Satalione the troops were headed by Eustratius, who was a righteous Christian and a devoted advocate of the Christian way of life. Having learned that Presbyter Auxentius is in the city prison, Eustratius came to him and asked him to pray for the Lord to strengthen Eustratius and prepare him for a martyr's death. And, when Presbyter Auxentius along with other Christians was brought to court, Eustratius declared himself to be a Christian. Infuriated, Lisius ordered to strip Eustratius of all military titles and to put him to torture. A friend of Eustratius — Eugenie, who was also a military officer, wished to share the destiny of his friend Eustratius and in everybody's presence declared himself a Christian. He was immediately put to chains and together with others was thrown to jail.

Next morning they all were made to go to the city of Nikopol. The soldiers were beating the enchained martyrs on the road, and Eustratius was made to put on high boots with nails going through the soles and piercing his feet. On their way to Nikopol the martyrs had to pass through the city of Aravrakin. Citizens came out to see and meet Auxentius who was loved and respected by everybody, but they did not dare to approach him as they feared to call down upon themselves the authorities' fury and persecution.

However, a man called Mardarius ignored the danger. Having left his family to the care of devout neighbors and rather to God's mercy, he followed his friends ready to accept the martyr's wreath. To all the threats of Lisius, Mardarius meekly replied, "I am a Christian." After many tortures Presbyter Auxentius, Eugenie and Mardarius were executed. Before the execution holy Mardarius prayed to the Lord, "O God the Master, Father Almighty, the Lord begotten Son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, one God-head, one Power, bowing to Thy divine judgment I pray save me, Thy unworthy servant, for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen" (This prayer of Saint Mardarius is read at church by the end of the 3rd hour).

Other Christians ready to sacrifice their lives and shed blood to incarnate their loyalty to Christ and love for Him took the place of the martyrs who had just been executed. Lisius, the governor saw that one of his soldiers Orest was wearing a cross and asked him, "Are you a Christian?" Orest did not deny, "I am a servant of Supreme God," he answered. Immediately he was arrested and made to join other martyrs.

When they came to Nikopol, many soldiers declared themselves Christians too. Lisius was abashed, he was afraid that an execution of so many Christians would cause mutiny against the powers that be and sympathy to the martyrs. He decided to send Eustratius and Orest to the city of Sebastia, which was ruled by a certain Agricola, notorious for his cruelty.

Holy Eustratius was brought before his new torturer, but he spoke so wisely and convincingly to him about God, about His love, about His divine goodness which impelled the Son of God to become incarnate as a human and to suffer for people, and about insane futility of idol worshiping, that the atrocious judge was inclined to mercy. Wishing to save Eustratius, he tried to convince him to pretend disavowing from Christ and to bring a sacrifice to pagan gods. He promised him life in gratuity and accolade. But Eustratius remained faithful. Then he was made

to watch a young soldier Orest tormented to death on a hot iron bed. Now Eustratius remained alone.

The Holy martyr spent his last night in jail praying ceaselessly and God was giving him strength to endure the coming agony. Next morning Eustratius listened to his death sentence with a joyful heart. A prayer was on his lips when he entered a fiery furnace and gave his soul to the Lord.

Later in commemoration of the five holy martyrs (Eugenie, Auxentius, Eustratius, Mardarius and Orest), a monastery was built within the territory of the Olympus temple near Tzargrad. May the Lord save our souls through the prayers of holy Eugenie and the martyrs who suffered with him.

Troparion:

O Lord, your martyrs through their sufferings crowned by Thee, our God, and strengthened with your power, overthrew their torturers and trampled on the demons' futile impertinence. Through their prayers, O Lord save, our souls.

Prophet Daniel.

(Dec. 30, Dec.17 old calendar).

The prophet Daniel originally was born into a nobleman's family. During the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in the year of 606 BC. Daniel as a boy was taken by the Babylonians off into slavery together with Jehoiachim, King of Judah, and many other Israelites. There Daniel, who was then 15 years old and the other most capable young boys were picked out to be taught at school for preparing them to serve at the king's court.

Daniel's friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah studied with him in that school too. For several years they studied the local language and various Chaldean disciplines. When joining the school these three young men were renamed to Shadrach, Meshac and Abadnego. However, with the adoption of pagan names, the young men did not betray the faith of their fathers. Fearing defilement from eating heathen food, they persuaded their dean to let them have simple vegetables instead of the food from the king's table, sprinkled by the blood of idol sacrifice. The dean agreed on the condition that after ten days of such vegetable diet he would check on their state of health. At the end of trial period these youngsters were rendered healthier than other students who were eating meat from the king's table, so the dean allowed them to chose food to their discretion. The Lord rewarded their loyalty to the true faith by granting them success in their studies, and the Babylonian king present at the exam, had to confess that they were brighter than his Babylonian sages.

After the end of training Daniel with his three friends was assigned to work at the king's court and he remained there as a court dignitary throughout the rein of Nebuchadnezzar and his five successors. After the conquest of Babylon he became an adviser of king Darius the Median and of the Persian king Cyrus.

God endowed Daniel with the ability to discern the meaning of visions and dreams and this was proved by his having explained to Nebuchadnezzar his two dreams that had greatly embarrassed the king (Dan. chapters 2 and 4). In his first dream Nebuchadnezzar saw a huge frightful idol statue made of four metals. A stone rolled down from a hilltop, smote the idol into pieces that turned into chaff and were carried away by the wind, while the stone grew into a large

mountain. Daniel explained to the king that the idol emblemized four profane kingdoms that would succeed each other beginning with the Babylonian kingdom and finishing with the Roman one. The mysterious stone smashing the statue of an idol symbolized the Messiah, and the new mountain implied the Lord's eternal Kingdom (the Church).

In his book (titled by his name) Prophet Daniel tells about the act of bravery of his three friends who refused to bow to the gold idol (Madruc) and were thrown into a burning furnace as ordered by the king Nebuchadnessar. But an angel of God kept them unharmed, so that the children walked in the blazing furnace untouched by the fire and singing: "blessed art Thou, Lord God of our Fathers. The king was amazed. He stopped the torture and did the devout children great honors.

No details of the Prophet Daniel's life for the 7 years under the 3 three successors of Nebuchadnezzar came down to our time (they were Evil-Meredah, Neriglizzar and Lavosoardah). Nabonid, Lavosoardah's assassin, made his son Belshazzar his co-ruler. In the first year of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel had a vision about four kingdoms, after which he saw God in the image of a "Very Old One" and a "Human Son," approaching him, i.e., our Lord Jesus Christ.

In his book Prophet Daniel wrote down several prophetic visions related to the end of the world and to the Second Advent of Christ. The content of Prophet Daniel's book has much in common with the Revelation of the evangelist John the Theologian which is found at the very end of the Bible.

In 539 B.C. Median King Darius conquered Babylon, and it was then that king Belshazzar died as predicted by Prophet Daniel. When the king Belshazzar was eating and drinking with his guests at a feast out of consecrated vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem, an invisible hand wrote three words on the wall: 'Mene, Tekel, Upharsin'. No one could interpret these words but Daniel: "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting, and Thy kingdom divided and given to Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5:25).

Under Darius the Median, Daniel occupied an important governmental post. Envious profane courtiers slandered Daniel before king Darius and persuaded him to throw Daniel into a den of lions. But God kept His prophet safe. Having looked into the matter, Darius ordered the slanderers of Daniel to be subjected to this execution, and the lions tore them up immediately. Some time later Daniel received a revelation about 70 sevens, in which the time of the first advent of the Messiah and establishment of His Kingdom (Churches) was given (Chapter 9). The explanation of this prophecy is provided in part 2 of the booklet "Old Testament on Messiah."

Under king Cyrus, Daniel remained in the same position of a courtier. It was not without his influence that in 536 King Cyrus issued a decree liberating the Hebrews from captivity. According to a legend Prophet Daniel showed Cyrus a prophecy about him in the book of Prophet Isaiah who lived 200 years earlier (44:28-45, 13). Astonished by this prophecy, the king acknowledged the power of Jehovah over himself and told the Jews to build a temple in His honor in Jerusalem (1 Ezra, ch.1). During the rule of that king, Daniel was again saved from death which was punishment for his killing the dragon that had been worshiped by the pagans.

In the third year of king Cyrus's rein in Babylon, Daniel was deigned to receive a revelation about the further destiny of the God's people and the four pagan empires (Chapters 10-12). Daniel's prophecy about persecution of the faithful can at the same time be referred to persecutions of Antioch Epiphanus and the antichrist. Nothing is known about the subsequent years of Prophet Daniel's life, except that according to St. Cyril of Alexandria, Daniel and the Three Children lived to great old age in Babylon, and were beheaded with the sword for the true Faith. When Ananias was beheaded, Azarias held out his robe and caught his head, then Misael caught Aza-

rias's head and Daniel Misael's. An angel of God carried their bodies to Judea, to Mount Gebal, and placed them under a rock. According to a legend, these four men arose at the time of the death of the Lord Jesus and appeared to many, then fell asleep again. Daniel is revered as one of the four Great Prophets (with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel). He lived and prophesied halfway through the thousand years before Christ. His prophetic book consists of 14 chapters. The Lord Jesus Christ in His conversations with the Jews twice referred to Daniel's prophecies.

Troparion:

Great are the achievements of faith!/
In the fountain of flame, as in refreshing water,/
the Three Holy Children rejoiced./
And the Prophet Daniel proved a shepherd of lions as of sheep./
By their prayers, O Christ our God, save our souls.

The Holy Martyrs Sebastian, Zoe, and others.

(December 31, December 18 old calendar).

Holy martyr Sebastian, captain of the imperial guard, Nicostratus, the treasurer, his wife Zoe, Tranquillianus and those with them suffered for Christ in Rome under the emperor Diocletian around the year of 287.

Sebastian was born in the town of Narbonensis in Gallia. He was destined in his youth to be a soldier and after completing his education in Milan he became the head of the imperial guard troops. He secretly confessed the Christian faith, and prayed to the living God. An honorable, upright and merciful man, Sebastian was greatly loved by his soldiers. Whenever possible, he saved Christians from torture and death and, when this was not possible, gave them courage to die for Christ, the living God, without turning back. Two brothers, Marcus and Marcellinus, who were in prison for Christ and already on the verge of denying Him and worshipping idols, were confirmed in their faith and strengthened in their martyrdom by Sebastian. As he spoke with them, exhorting them not to fear death for Christ, his face was illumined like that of an angel of God. Sebastian supported his words by marvels: he healed Zoë, the wife of Nicostratus the treasurer, who had been dumb for six years, and brought Nicostratus and his whole household to baptism. He healed the two sick sons of Claudius the commander, and brought him and his whole household also to baptism. He healed Tranquillianus, the father of Marcus and Marcellinus, of gout and pains in his legs, which had troubled him for eleven years, and brought him to baptism together with his whole household. He healed the Roman Eparch, Chromatius, of the same infirmity and brought him and his son Tiburtius to baptism.

Zoë was the first to suffer, being seized while at prayer beside the tomb of the Apostle Peter. After torture, she was thrown into the river Tiber. Then Tiburtius was seized, and the judge placed live coals before him, challenging him to choose life or death: to cast incense on the coals and cense the idols, or to stand himself barefoot on the coals. St. Tibertius made the sign of the Cross and stood barefoot on the coals, and remained unharmed. He was then beheaded with the sword.

Later the Emperor Diocletian learned that Sebastian was also a Christian. The Emperor ordered that he be arrested and executed. St. Sebastian was stripped and shot at with arrows, until the martyr's whole body was so covered with arrows that it was invisible beneath them. When

they thought that he was dead, he showed himself alive and healed of all his wounds. Then the pagans beat him to death with staves and stones.

Other Christians were sentenced to suffer similar tortures. Presbyter Tranquillianus was stoned to death. Marcus and Marceilianus were put onto a tree stump and their feet were nailed to it. The next day they were run through by spears. Nicostratus, Castorus, Claudius, Symphorian and Victorinus were drowned in the sea. Castulus was buried alive. The relics of Saint Sebastian are preserved in Rome, in the church named after him.

Troparion, Tone 1

O Sebastian, thou didst spurn the gatherings of the wicked/ and bring together the illustrious martyrs who with thee cast down the enemy./ Deemed worthy of the Divine Presence,/ thou dost gladden those who cry to thee:/ Glory to Him Who has strengthen thee; glory to Him Who has crowned thee;/ glory to Him Who through thee works healings for all.

Holy Great Martyr Ignatius the Godbearer.

(January 2, December 20 old calendar).

The heritage of Saint Ignatius the Godbearer is of special importance to us because he was closely in touch with the apostles, heard them preaching Christianity and was a witness to the expansion and development of the first Christian communities. His seven letters are a depiction of the apostolic era for us.

Saint Ignatius was born in Syria during the last years of the Savior's life. From the story of his life we know that he was that very child who was picked up by the Lord and placed among the apostles saying: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Math.18:3) He was called the Godbearer because he loved the Lord so devotedly that he always carried His name in his heart and on his lips. He was later a disciple of the apostle St. John the Theologian, together with Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna. As we can see from the letter of St. Ignatius to the Smirna citizens, he was especially close to apostle Peter and accompanied him on some of the apostle's missionary trips. In 72 shortly before Jerusalem was destroyed, Evod, one of 70 disciples of Christ, died, and St. Ignatius succeeded him as a bishop at the cathedra of Antioch, the capital of Syria.

Saint Ignatius headed the Antioch church for 40 years (76-107). In a special vision he was granted the honor of witnessing heavenly sermons and hearing the angels sing in a choir. According to what he saw in that vision he introduced the antiphonal singing into the Church, in which two choirs alternate and as if call to one another. That kind of singing spread quickly from Syria to other domains of the early Church.

In 107 when the emperor Trajan launched a military campaign against Armenians and was passing through Antioch on his way there, Ignatius was reported to him as a preacher confessing Christ, teaching to despise wealth, retain purity and not make sacrifices to the Roman gods. The emperor summoned the holy man and ordered him to stop preaching Christianity and urged him to offer sacrifice to idols, so that he could be made a senator. The Emperor's urgings and threats were in vain, holy Ignatius was ordered to be put in fetters and sent to Rome escorted by ten soldiers. There he was to be thrown to the wild beasts in the Coliseum to entertain the public. The

seven letters that he wrote on his way to Rome came down to our days. In those messages to Christians, Saint Ignatius asks them not to make attempts to save him from death, “I entreat you not to render me your love at this inappropriate time. Leave me to be the food of the beasts, so that I could reach God through them. I am God’s wheat. Let the teeth of wild animals grind it for me to become a pure bread of Christ.” Having heard of Saint Ignatius’s endurance and courage, the emperor stopped persecuting Christians. His relics were brought to Antioch and later transferred back to Rome to be preserved in the church of Holy Martyr St. Clement, Pope of Rome.

In his letter to Eupheseans Saint Ignatius wrote, “Preserve your faith and love and be Christians in deed. Faith and Love are the alpha and omega of life. Faith is the beginning and love is the end, both being combined into the God's mission.” All the other virtues proceed from them. None of those confessing the faith would sin and none of those bestowed with love would have hatred.”

Kontakion:

The day of thy glorius struggle/ heralds the One to be born by the Virgin/ for, thirsting for His presence,/ thou didst hasten to be devoured by wild beasts./ Therefore thou wast named Godbeater, O glorius Ignatius

Holy Martyr Julianna and the 630 martyrs with her.

(January 3, December 21 old calendar).

Saint Martyr Julianna, a daughter of rich pagan parents, was born in Nicomedia (Asia Minor) in 286. When she was nine, her father, Afrikan, betrothed her to a rich young man of noble origin named Eleusius whose father was a court grandee. Both children being too young to marry, the wedding was postponed till the time when they become of age. In those years Julianna learned about the Christian faith and got baptized. She turned to Christ with all her heart and began to live in exact observance of the Lord’s commandments. Eleuseus in the meantime attained a position of the governor of Nicomedia. When the time of their marriage drew near, Juliana revealed to him that she was a Christian, and could not enter into marriage with him unless he accepted her faith, saying: ‘What would it profit us to be united physically but divided in spirit?’ Eleusius was exasperated, and denounced her to her father. Julianna refused to marry Eleusius. Her furious father poured scorn on her and whipped her, but Julianna said, “I worship Christ, I love Christ, I am not afraid to suffer tortures for Him.” Then her father handed her over to Eleusius for torture. The governor charmed by the beauty of his former bride, first tried kindly to persuade her denounce Christ and marry him. Then, seeing her firm determination, he started threatening her with all kinds of tortures. But neither his promises of earthly wealth, nor the fear of death could make her renounce Christ. He ordered that she be harshly beaten and tortured, then she was thrown into prison all torn and bleeding. But the Lord healed her in the prison, and she appeared before the governor whole and unharmed. He then put her into a glowing furnace, but the fire did not burn her. Back in her cell she was to face another trial: the Devil appeared before her disguised as an angel and tried to induce her to “reason and compromise.” By what he was saying Julianna guessed that it was the enemy of humankind that was talking to her and praying to God, she make the devil disappear in abashment.

Seeing Julianna's firmness and the wonders during her tortures, many came to believe in Christ the Lord. Five hundred men and a hundred and thirty women were converted. The governor condemned them all to death, and ordered that they be beheaded with the sword, and their souls entered into Paradise. After that Julianna, who turned 18 at the time, was executed too. It happened in the year of 304. God's punishment fell on Eleusius soon: sailing over the sea, his ship broke up and he fell into the water. He did not find death in the waves, but swam to an island, where the dogs tore him to pieces and devoured him.

Holy martyr Julianna is venerated as a patroness of chastity and purity. Parts of her relics are preserved in many churches.

Kontakion:

Thou wast a comely virgin/ and a martyr wounded by divine love./ Thou wast taken up to the heavenly bridal chamber/ where thou dost pray for those who honor thee.

Holy Martyr Anastasia the Deliverer.

(January 4, December 22 old calendar).

Saint Anastasia was a daughter of a rich and high born Roman. Being both beautiful and intelligent she got an excellent education. Her father was a pagan and her mother was a Christian. From her early youth, she possessed great love for the Lord Jesus Christ, guided both by her mother and a devout teacher, Chrysogonus. She learned the woes of life early in her youth. Her mother and her revered teacher were thrown into prison together with many other Christians. Visiting them Anastasia developed a deep feeling of compassion to all poor, offended and dejected people and tried to help them as much as she could.

Immediately after her mother's death, Anastasia's father made her marry a pagan rich landowner, Publius, against her will. He was a cruel and mean person, he tortured her harshly for her refusal to have physical relations with him. Her only consolation was to help poor people and visit the imprisoned Christians. She was giving big amounts of money away to bribe the guards so that she could have a free access to prisoners. When her husband discovered that she went secretly to the prisons of the Christian martyrs, ministering to their needs, washing their wounds and loosening their bonds, he was afraid that Anastasia would spend all of his fortune, he tortured her harshly by imprisonment and starvation. Deprived of the chance to visit the imprisoned, she wrote to her teacher Chrysogonos, "Pray for me to God, it is for my love to Him that I suffer to exhaustion." He replied, "Do not forget that the Christ walking on waters can subdue any storm."

Soon after that, by God's providence, she was freed from her wicked husband. Publius was sent to Persia by the Emperor, and got drowned in the sea. So she started to visit not only the prisons of Rome, but also of the neighboring towns. She brought the imprisoned food and clothing, washed their wounds and paid their guards to mitigate their brutal treatment of the jailed. For those acts of mercy she was called the Deliverer from Bonds. Once she could not find the imprisoned Christians whom she had visited the day before, she found out that they were executed that night and she started to cry bitterly. The commander of the jail understood that she was also a Christian and gave her to be judged by the ruler. During the court procedure Anastasia's

high origin was revealed and all measures were taken to make her denounce her faith. But she remained true to Christ. Then she was sentenced to be tied hands and feet to four pillars and burned alive. But God willed otherwise: before the flames got started, Anastasia's holy soul went peacefully up to heavens. It about the year of 304.

Kontakion, Tone 2

Those in temptations and afflictions hasten to thy temple/ and are restored by the grace that dwells in thee,/ for thou dost ever pour forth healings for the world,/ O Great Martyr Anastasia.

Holy Martyrs Eugenia, Claudia, and others.

(January 6, December 24 old calendar).

Saint Eugenia was born in Rome in the year of 183. Her father, Philip, was a governor of Egypt appointed by the emperor Commodore, and together with his family lived in Alexandria. At that time, the Christians had been driven out of Alexandria and were living outside the town. Eugenia received an excellent and comprehensive education. She was beautiful, but she did not want to get married. Having read the writings of Apostle Paul, Eugenia wanted to become a Christian with all the ardor of her heart.

At the age of 16, Eugenia, wishing to devote her whole life to God, fled from her parents' house wearing man's clothing and accompanied by her two faithful eunuchs, Protus and Hyacinthus. In a young man's disguise she turned to Bishop Elias asking him to baptize her and bless her to become a monk. The Prelate discerned her secret, but baptized her with a male name Eugenie. Her slaves got baptized too. After that all the three took the monastic vows.

Always dressed as a monk Eugenia so purified her heart by voluntary asceticism and prayer at the monastery that she not only was respected deeply by her brothers there, but also received from God the gift of healing the sick. When some years later the Father Superior of the monastery died, the monks asked Eugenia to succeed him. She opened the Gospel and read, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave..." (Matthew 20:26-27). But she had to concede to their resolution to make her Father Superior and she doubled her ascetic zeal. Everybody took her for a monk except her slaves.

One day a sick widow, Melanthia asked Eugenia for help, and the latter healed her making a sign of the cross over her. After this, the woman conceived a physical passion for her, not suspecting that she was a woman. Being firmly repulsed by Eugenia, this wicked woman, urged by the devil and out of revenge, went to the governor and slandered her just as Potiphar's wife had slandered chaste Joseph. So Eugenia was to be brought to court to Judge Phillip, who was her own father. During the trial, the governor recognized his missing daughter in the accused Father Superior and Melanthia was convicted for libel. Having reunited with the daughter, whose disappearance they had been mourning for so long her parents marveled at her spiritual beauty, believed in Christ and were baptized. Shortly after that Christians of Alexandria elected Phillip to be their Bishop. Hearing of this, the Roman Emperor sent a wicked general, Terence, who, coming to Alexandria in 262, killed Philip.

After her father's death St. Eugenia with her mother Claudia and her brothers returned to their family estate near Rome. Claudia set up a refuge home for the needy there and was helping

widows. Later on she suffered martyrdom during the rein of the emperor Galian (269-268). In Rome, St. Eugenia fearlessly and zealously brought pagans to the true Faith, especially maidens, and thus brought a beautiful maiden, Vassilia, an orphaned descendant of the Roman imperial family, to the Faith. Vassilia's wicked bridegroom reported to the emperor Gallian that the Christians preach singleness. Vassilia refused to obey the emperor's orders and to marry, so she was executed. The monks Protus and Hyacinthus, St. Eugenia's associates, were beheaded. When St. Eugenia was led to the temple of Diana to be sacrificed, her presence caused the temple to fall in ruins. St. Eugenia was accused of witchcraft and was first thrown into the river Tigris with a stone tied to her neck, but the rope got untied and she came out of the water unharmed. Then the torturers cast her into fire, but God preserved her. The Lord Jesus Himself appeared to her in the prison and told her that she would suffer on the day of His Nativity. And so it came about. She was beheaded with the sword on December 25th, 262, in Rome. Since later the 25th of December became Nativity celebration day, the day of veneration of St. Eugenia was shifted to be on the Eve of Nativity of Christ. Her relics were preserved in Rome in the church of Saint Apostles. After her death, Eugenia appeared to her mother in great glory, and comforted her.

Troparion:

O Jesus Christ, Eugenia, Thy lamb is crying out to Thee: loving Thee and seeking Thee, my Bridegroom, I suffer crucifixion and burial for Thy baptism, and martyrdom for Thee, as I triumph in Thee and die for Thee, and live in Thee. Accept me as an unblemished sacrifice, consecrating myself with love to Thee. Through Thy prayers save our souls, as you are merciful.

Troparion, Tone 3

In thy praise inspired by the Holy Spirit,/ thou didst receive the light of divine knowledge,/ O Eugenia, glorious Virgin of Christ./ And radiant among the choir of the righteous,/ thou didst triumph over the enemy in thy contest./ O glorious Martyr, entreat Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.

The Holy Protomartyr Stephen the Archdeacon.

(January 9, December 27 old calendar).

The Holy Protomartyr Stephen was a descendant of Jews living abroad, that is outside the borders of the Holy Land and in a Hellenic milieu. Those Jews were called the Hellenians as they were notably influenced by the Greek culture dominant in the Roman empire of those times. After the Holy Spirit descended onto the Apostles, the Church began growing rapidly and it became necessary to take care of the orphans, widows and poor people in general, who were baptized. The Apostles suggested that 7 righteous men be chosen to take care of the needy. Those seven men were ordained deacons (which means helpers, votaries). The Apostles made them to be their immediate assistants. Faithfulness and eloquence made Stephen outstanding among the deacons, he was the first of the seven deacons ordained for the service. That is why he was called the Archdeacon — the first, or chief, of them. Soon, in addition to helping the poor, the deacons began to take an active part in giving sermons.

Stephen preached the word of God in Jerusalem substantiating his words with presage signs and wonders. The wicked Jews disputed with him, but were always confounded by his wisdom and the power of the Spirit who acted through him. He was very successful in propagating the Faith, so the Pharisees, who were overseers of the Jewish law, hated him. They arrested him and brought him to Sanhedrin – the Supreme court of the Jews. There the Pharisees slandered Stephen, saying that he had blasphemed against God and against Moses, and quickly found false witnesses who supported their assertion. To justify his cause Stephen told the Sanhedrin the history of the Jewish people. He spoke of God’s manifold works and marvels, performed in the past for the People of Israel, and of the people’s manifold transgressions and opposition to God. He especially denounced them for the slaying of Christ the Lord, calling them ‘betrayers and murderers’ (Acts 7:52). And he supported his recount with illustrative examples of how they sinned against God and killed the God-sent prophets. Listening to him, the members of Sanhedrin were gnashing their teeth at him and could hardly contain their rage.

When Stephen stood before the people, all saw his face ‘like the face of an angel’: that is, his face was illumined by the light of grace as was the face of Moses when he talked with God. Stephen looked up and saw the heavens open and the glory of God, and spoke to the Jews of what he saw: ‘Behold, I see the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God’ (Acts 7:60). On hearing that the members of Sanhedrin became furious. Plugging their ears they threw themselves onto Stephen and dragged him out of the city. There according to their law, the witnesses who were the first to accuse Stephen started stoning him. A young man Saul guarding the clothes of the murderers was a witness to Stephen’s being stoned and he approved of the murder. Falling down under the hail of stones Stephen cried out, “Lord Jesus receive my spirit, do not hold this sin against them!” Evangelist Luke in the Book of Acts of the Apostles described both this event and Stephen’s speech at the Sanhedrin, chapters 6-8. At that time, the most holy Mother of God was standing on a rock at a distance with St. John the Theologian, and witnessed the martyrdom of this first martyr for the truth of her Son and God, and she prayed for Stephen. St. Stephen’s body was taken secretly and buried by Gamaliel in his own ground. He was a Jewish prince and a secret Christian.

Thus the Archdeacon Stephan became the first martyr (Protomartyr) for Christ in the year of 34 and this happened exactly a year after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. After that event the persecution of Christianity began in Jerusalem and Christians had to flee to other parts of the Holy Land and to neighboring countries. So the Christian Faith began to spread and reach other parts of the Roman empire. The blood of the Protomartyr Stephen was not shed in vain. Shortly after that event Saul, who had approved of St. Stephen’s death sentence, turned into a faithful Christian believer himself, was baptized Paul and became a famous preacher of the Gospel, one of the most successful evangelists and missionaries. Many years later on Paul’s visit to Jerusalem, he was also seized by a crowd of infuriated Jews who wanted to stone him to death. In his conversation with the crowd Paul reminded them about innocent Stephen’s murder and his own participation in the event (Acts, ch.22).

Troparion, Tone 4

Thou art crowned with a royal diadem/ for contests endured in Christ’s name, O First and holy Martyr;/ thou didst put to shame thy persecutors/ and see thy Savior at the right hand of the Father./ Ever pray to Him for our souls.

Holy Martyr Anisia.

(January 12, December 30 new calendar).

Saint Anisia was born in the Greek town of Thessalonica at the end of the 12th century. Her rich parents were devout and kind. They brought Anisia up in the spirit of Christianity. Orphaned in her young age, Anisia inherited a rich estate – many slaves, vast lands and much gold and jewelry.

Christians were persecuted severely at that time. By the order of emperor Maximian (284-305) all the Christians refusing to denounce Christ and make sacrifices to pagan gods were tortured and executed. Anyone could kill a Christian and get away with it unpunished. Knowing that it is hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, St. Anisia freed her slaves, sold her property and began to help widows, orphans, paupers and the imprisoned. St. Anisia not only helped them with money, but also looked after the sick, bandaged the wounds of the martyrs and consoled the sorrowful. When all of her money was spent, she became so poor that she had to start working in order to have food for herself. But she continued to visit prisons and comfort the aggrieved.

One day on her way to a meeting of Christians St. Anisia saw big crowds of people hurrying to the pagan temple of the god of the Sun. She shunned the loud crowd and continued her way, but one of the soldiers noticed her and asked her who she was and where she was going. She humbly replied, “I am a servant of Christ and I am going to my church.”

The soldier grabbed her rudely and wanted to force her to join the crowd, so that she would be compelled to make sacrifices to a pagan idol there. St. Anisia broke away from him saying, “Lord Jesus Christ forbid you!” Having heard the name of the Lord which he hated the furious pagan struck her with his sword. St. Anisia fell dead to the ground. Thus the young saint gave her innocent soul into the hands of Jesus. Christians buried the body of the martyr in Thessalonica near the town gates.

Troparion:

O Jesus Christ, Anisia, Thy lamb, is crying out to Thee: loving Thee and seeking Thee, my Bridegroom, I suffer crucifixion and burial for Thy baptism, and martyrdom for Thee, as I triumph in Thee and die for Thee, and live in Thee. Accept me as an unblemished sacrifice, consecrating myself with love to Thee. Through Thy prayers save our souls, as you are merciful.

The 1st issue is devoted to the meaning of sanctity, the 2nd – to martyrs for Christ, The 3rd – to monastic asceticism, the 5th – to fools for Christ.

The list of Lives of Saints in alphabetic order is placed at the end of the 1st issue; the meaning of personal names – at the end of the second issue.

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