

God is Wonderful in His Saints

Orthodox Saints commemorated in January

JANUARY 1

† The Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ

In keeping with the Law of Moses, the Savior's parents had Him circumcised eight days after His birth (see Luke ch. 2). On this day, following Jewish custom, he received the name Jesus (*Yeshua*, a form of *Joshua*), meaning "God saves." Thus, on this day, the Covenant of Moses was fulfilled and brought to an end, and the Salvation of God's people was proclaimed to the world.

† Our Father among the Saints Basil the Great (379).

In its services, the Church calls St Basil a "bee of the Church of Christ": bringing the honey of divinely-inspired wisdom to the faithful, stinging the uprisings of heresy. He was born in Cappadocia to a wealthy and prominent family. Their worldly wealth, however, is as nothing compared to the wealth of Saints that they have given to the Church: his parents St Basil the Elder and St Emmelia; his sister St Macrina (July 19), the spiritual head of the family; and his brothers St Gregory of Nyssa (January 10), and St Peter, future bishop of Sebaste (January 9).

Inspired and tutored by his father, a renowned professor of rhetoric, the brilliant Basil set out to master the secular learning and arts of his day, traveling to Athens, where he studied alongside his life-long friend St Gregory of Nazianzus. When he returned from his studies in 356, he found that his mother and his sister Macrina had turned the family home into a convent, and that his brothers had also taken up the monastic life nearby. Puffed up by his secular accomplishments, he at first resisted his sister's pleas to take up a life devoted to God, but at last, through her prayers and admonition, entered upon the ascetical life.

After traveling among the monks of Egypt, Palestine and Syria, he settled in Cappadocia as a hermit, living in utter poverty and writing his ascetical homilies. A monastic community steadily gathered around him, and for its good order St Basil wrote his Rule, which is regarded as the charter of monasticism. (St Benedict in the West was familiar with this Rule, and his own is modeled on it.)

In about 370 he was consecrated Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia. Even as bishop, he continued to live without any possessions save a worn garment to cover himself. At this time the Arian heresy was rending the Church, and it became St Basil's lot to defend Orthodoxy in Sermons and writings, a task which he fulfilled with such erudition and wisdom that he is called "Basil the Great." He reposed in peace in 379, at the age of forty-nine.

JANUARY 2

Beginning of the Forefeast of Theophany

† St Seraphim of Sarov (1833)

"Saint Seraphim was born in the town of Kursk in 1759. From tender childhood he was under the protection of the most holy Mother of God, who, when he was nine years old, appeared to him in a vision, and through her icon of Kursk, healed him from a grave sickness from which he had not been expected to recover. At the age of nineteen he entered the monastery of Sarov, where he amazed all with his obedience, his lofty asceticism, and his great humility. In 1780 the Saint was stricken with a sickness which he manfully endured for three years, until our Lady the Theotokos healed him, appearing to him with the Apostles Peter and John. He was tonsured a monk in 1786, being named for the holy Hieromartyr Seraphim, Bishop of Phanarion (Dec. 4), and was ordained deacon a year later. In his unquenchable love for God, he continually added labours to labours, increasing in virtue and prayer with titan strides. Once, during the Divine Liturgy of Holy and Great Thursday he was counted worthy of a vision of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who appeared encompassed by the heavenly hosts. After this dread vision, he gave himself over to greater labours.

"In 1794, Saint Seraphim took up the solitary life in a cell in the forest. This period of extreme asceticism lasted some fifteen years, until 1810. It was at this time that he took upon himself one of the greatest feats of his life. Assailed with despondency and a storm of contrary thoughts raised by the enemy of our salvation, the Saint passed a thousand nights on a rock, continuing in prayer until God gave him complete victory over the enemy. On another occasion, he was assaulted by robbers, who broke his chest and his head with their blows, leaving him almost dead. Here again, he began to recover after an appearance of the most Holy Theotokos, who came to him with the Apostles Peter and John, and pointing to Saint Seraphim, uttered these awesome words, 'This is one of my kind.'

"In 1810, at the age of fifty, weakened by his more than human struggles, Saint Seraphim returned to the monastery for the third part of his ascetical labours, in which he lived as a recluse, until 1825. For the first five years of his reclusion, he spoke to no one at all, and little is known of this period. After five years, he began receiving visitors little by little, giving counsel and consolation to ailing souls. In 1825, the most holy Theotokos appeared to the Saint and revealed to him that it was pleasing to God that he fully end his reclusion; from this time the number of people who came to see him grew daily. It was also at the command of the holy Virgin that he undertook the spiritual direction of the Diveyevo Convent. He healed bodily ailments, foretold things to come, brought hardened sinners to repentance, and saw clearly the secrets of the heart of those who came to him. Through his utter humility and childlike simplicity, his unrivalled ascetical travails, and his angel-like love for God, he ascended to the holiness and greatness of the ancient God-bearing Fathers and became, like Anthony for Egypt, the physician for the whole Russian land. In all, the most holy Theotokos appeared to him twelve times in his life. The last was on Annunciation, 1831, to announce to him that he would soon enter into his rest. She appeared to him accompanied by twelve virgins martyrs and monastic saints with Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Theologian. With a body ailing and broken from innumerable hardships, and an unspotted soul shining with the light of Heaven, the Saint lived less than two years after this, falling asleep in peace on January 2, 1833, chanting Paschal hymns. On the night of his repose, the righteous Philaret of the Glinsk Hermitage beheld his soul ascending to Heaven in light. Because of the universal testimony to the singular holiness of his life, and the seas of miracles that he performed both in life and after death, his veneration quickly spread beyond the boundaries of the Russian Empire to every corner of the earth. See also July 19." (*Great Horologion*)

July 19 is the commemoration of the uncovering of St Seraphim's holy relics, which was attended by Tsar Nicholas II.

Saint Seraphim's life became a perpetual celebration of Pascha: in his later years he dressed in a white garment, greeted everyone, regardless of the season, with "Christ is Risen!" and chanted the Pascha service every day of the year.

St Sylvester, Pope of Rome (335)

He was a native of Rome. Because of his virtue and love for all, the faithful made him Pope against his will upon the death of Pope Miltiades in 314. He was Pope when Constantine the Great ended the persecution of the Church, and personally instructed the Emperor in the Faith. Unable to attend the Council of Nicaea personally, he sent delegates to represent him and uphold the Orthodox faith there. He reposed in peace in 325.

Once, in a debate between the Saint and Zambrius, a Jewish scribe and occultist, Zambrius whispered a magic word in the ear of a bull, upon which the animal fell down dead. Zambrius then challenged the Pope to do as much in the name of Christ. The holy bishop replied, 'My God gives life and resurrection, not death.' Lifting his hands to heaven, he restored the creature to life. The Emperor and the crowd who witnessed the debate cheered the Saint, and many decided to be baptized.

Venerable Juliana of Lazarevskoye (1604)

The daughter of a devout and generous official in the Tsar's court, she was orphaned at the age of six and reared by relatives. At the age of sixteen she was given in marriage to George Ossorguin, a nobleman who lived on an estate at Lavarevskoye, near Murom.

The couple were a model of Christian marriage. When her husband was at home, they would devote much of their time to praying together. When he was away in service to the Tsar, she would devote whole nights to prayer and handiwork. Since she was not free to give away her fortune as she desired, she earned money for almsgiving by the work of her hands, something unheard-of for a lady of her rank. When anyone died in the village she prayed for him at length, and if he was indigent she would pay for his funeral.

When two of the pious couple's sons died, Juliana asked her husband to let her enter a monastery. He refused because they had other young children who needed her care; but he gave her permission to live a monastic life under his roof. From this time forward, she increased her fasts, spent her nights in prayer, and slept on the floor. When her husband died ten years later, her wealth was at her own disposal, and she devoted all of it to works of mercy. When her family criticized her for depriving herself so harshly, especially for her severe fasting, she answered 'Whatever my body loses now won't be food for worms later. What is the point of fattening the flesh only to lose the soul?'

From 1601 to 1603, Russia was struck for three years by the worst famine in its history, so severe that men ate human flesh in their desperation. Saint Juliana sold all her livestock, gave away all the provisions in her barns, and freed all her serfs who wished to leave. Those who remained became her family, with whom she shared all she had. By her prayers, bitter and inedible plants became palatable so that they could be made into bread. The holy woman, despite almost killing privation, never complained, but seemed more cheerful than ever before.

Saint Juliana reposed in peace at the age of seventy in 1604. At the moment of her death a bright halo was seen above her head. Ten years later her body was found incorrupt, and her tomb filled with a fragrant myrrh. She was venerated among the Russian people from that time forward, though it was not until 1983 that she was officially glorified by the

Moscow Patriarchate.

Holy New Martyr George the Georgian (1770)

A native of Georgia, he was sold as a slave to a Turk and made a Muslim in his youth. He lived a long life as a Muslim, seemingly having no memory of the faith or language of his parents. Without warning, however, when he had reached the age of seventy, his conscience awakened, he presented himself to the judge and stated that he had been born a Christian and wished to die a Christian. The old man remained immovable under questioning, exhortation, threats and, finally, torture; he would only say 'I am a Christian; I want to die a Christian!' The executioners hanged him, then cut him down to see if this last trial would change his mind. When he assured them once again that he was a Christian, they hanged him again, and he was allowed to claim his martyrdom.

JANUARY 3

Prophet Malachi (~400 BC)

He is the last of the twelve Minor Prophets and the last of all the Prophets of the Old Testament. His name means 'My Angel' or 'My Messenger.' He returned with the exiled Jews from Babylon and took part in the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. His prophecy announces to the ear of faith that the Lord will soon bring the Hebrew priesthood to an end in the coming of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2), the eternal Priest.

Holy Martyr Gordius of Caesarea (4th c.)

"The Martyr Gordius, who was from Caesarea of Cappadocia, was a centurion by rank. Unable to bear the impiety of the heathen, he withdrew to the wilderness to purify himself through prayer and fasting. After he perceived that his ascetical training had prepared him sufficiently, he came down from the mountains when a certain pagan festival was held in Caesarea, attended by all, and presented himself to the multitude. Although the spectacles of the festival continued, no one paid them any heed, but all eyes were turned upon him. From his sojourn in the mountains, his look was wild, his beard was long, his raiment squalid, his body like a skeleton; yet a certain grace shone round about him. He was recognized, and a loud shout and tumult was made, as his fellow Christians rejoiced, and the enemies of the truth cried out for his death. He boldly professed his faith before the Governor, and after torments was beheaded, in the reign of Licinius in the year 314. Saint Basil the Great delivered a homily on Saint Gordius, mentioning that some of those in his audience had been present at the Saint's martyrdom." (*Great Horologion*)

Our Holy Mother Genevieve of Paris (~502)

She was born near Paris to a family of wealthy landowners. When she was about ten years old St Germanus of Auxerre (July 31), passing through the region on his way to Britain, discerned a special divine purpose for her, and told her parents that she had been chosen for the salvation of many. "He asked her that day, and early the next, if she would consecrate herself to holy virginity for Christ and, on both occasions, she answered that it was her dearest wish. Then he blessed her and gave her a copper coin inscribed with the Cross to wear around her neck, telling her never to wear gold, silver or pearls, but to elevate her mind above the small beauties of this world in order to inherit eternal and heavenly adornments." (*Synaxarion*)

Convents were unknown at that time in Gaul, so Genevieve lived as a solitary, in a cell in her own house, first with her parents then, after their death, with her godmother in Paris. She devoted herself to the poor, giving away everything that came into her hands, except the small amount that she needed to feed herself on bread and beans. (When she passed the age of fifty, she was commanded by the bishops to add some fish and milk to her diet). She kept Lent from Theophany to Pascha, during which time she never left her house. She was never afraid to rebuke the powerful for their oppression of the weak and the poor, and thus earned many powerful enemies; but the people's love for her, and the support of the Church, kept her from persecution.

It became her custom to walk to church on Sundays in procession with her household and many pious laypeople. Once the candle borne at the front of the procession (it was still dark) blew out in a rainstorm. The Saint asked for the candle and, when she took it in her hand, it re-lit and stayed lighted until they reached the church. At several other times, candles lit spontaneously in her hand; for this reason her icon shows her holding a candle.

She traveled throughout Gaul (modern-day France) on church business, being greeted with all the honors usually accorded a bishop. Several times she saved the city of Paris from the assaults of barbarian tribes through her prayers, by pleading with barbarian chieftains, and once by organizing a convoy to bring grain to the besieged city.

Saint Genevieve reposed in peace at the age of eighty. Through the centuries since then, she has shown her holy protection of the city of Paris countless times, and her relics in the Church of Saint Genevieve have wrought innumerable healings. Her relics were many times carried in huge processions in times of war, pestilence or other national trial. These relics were mostly burned and thrown into the River Seine by the godless Revolutionaries in 1793, but, as the *Synaxarion*

concludes, "those who continue to invoke Saint Genevieve with faith, find her to be well and truly alive."

JANUARY 4

Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles.

In addition to the Twelve Apostles, our Lord appointed seventy disciples to go forth and bring the Good News to the world (see Luke ch. 10). Others were later added to this company by the Holy Apostles, so that their number in fact exceeds seventy, though all are still referred to as "of the Seventy."

On this day we also commemorate the company of those who have been sent forth by the Holy Spirit through the centuries to proclaim the joyous Gospel of Christ.

The Ethiopian Eunuch of Queen Candace

His baptism by the holy Apostle Philip is told in Acts ch. 8. He was already seeking out the things of God — the story shows him reading the Book of Isaiah, and specifies that he was going to Jerusalem to worship. He returned home ("rejoicing", say the scriptures) and proclaimed the Gospel of Christ in his native land; the ancient Church of Ethiopia traces its beginnings to his mission. He died a martyr's death.

Venerable Apollinaria (5th c.)

She was a maiden of high rank, the daughter of a magistrate named Anthimus in the city of Rome. Filled with love for Christ, she prevailed on her parents to allow her to travel on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In Jerusalem she dismissed most of her attendants, gave her jewels, fine clothes and money to the poor, and went on to Egypt accompanied only by two trusted servants. Near Alexandria she slipped away from them and fled to a forest, where she lived in asceticism for many years. She then made her way to Sketis, the famous desert monastic colony, and presented herself as a eunuch named Dorotheos. In this guise she was accepted as a monk.

Anthimus, having lost his elder daughter, was visited with another grief: his younger daughter was afflicted by a demon. He sent this daughter to Sketis, asking the holy fathers there to aid her by their prayers. They put her under the care of "Dorotheos", who after days of constant prayer effected the complete cure of her (unknowing) sister. When the girl got back home it was discovered that she was pregnant, and Anthimus angrily ordered that the monk who had cared for her be sent to him. He was astonished to find that "Dorotheos" was his own daughter Apollinaria, whom he had abandoned hope of seeing again. After some days the holy woman returned to Sketis, still keeping her identity secret from her fellow-monks. Only at her death was her true story discovered.

JANUARY 5

Eve of Theophany

Holy Martyrs Theopemptus and Theonas (~290)

Theopemptus was a bishop (some say in Nicomedia) who contested for Christ during the fierce persecutions of the Emperor Diocletian. For openly confessing the Faith, he was arrested and brought before the Emperor himself, whom he fearlessly convicted for his cruelty and ungodliness. The saint was then subjected to several cruel tortures, from which he miraculously emerged unhurt. He was given a deadly poison to drink, prepared by a sorcerer named Theonas. When Theonas saw that the holy bishop was unharmed by his potion, he was led to confess Christ. Finally, St Theopemptus was beheaded, and Theonas thrown in a pit and buried alive.

Our Venerable Mother Syncletike (4th c.)

She was the daughter of wealthy and devout parents in Alexandria. Though much desired as a bride for her great beauty, intelligence and wealth, she showed no interest in any worldly attraction and, when her parents died, gave away all of her large fortune. She then fled with her blind sister to the desert, where she became the foundress of monastic life for women in the Egyptian desert, just as St Anthony had for men. At first she attempted to struggle in solitude, hiding her ascetic labors from all and keeping strict silence before all people. But in time her holiness became known, and a company of young women formed around her, seeking to emulate and share in her way of life. At first she kept her silence even with them, but at last was forced out of love to give way to their pleas and reveal to them the wisdom that had been implanted in her. A settled monastic community grew around her, and she became known to all as Amma, the feminine form of the title Abba.

At the age of eighty-five, she was stricken with an agonizing cancer that slowly destroyed and putrefied her body. She bore these heavy trials with patience and thanksgiving, and told her disciples: "If illness strikes us, let us not be distressed as though physical exhaustion could prevent us from singing God's praises; for all these things are for our good and for the purification of our desires. Fasting and asceticism are enjoined on us only because of our appetites; so if illness has blunted their edge, there is no longer any need for ascetic labors. To endure illness patiently and to send up thanksgiving to God is

the greatest ascesis of all."

Eventually her illness deprived her even of the power of speech, but it was said that the sight of her joyful and serene countenance amid her sufferings was better than any other teaching, and the faithful continued to flock to her to receive a blessing. After a three-month martyrdom, she departed this life, having predicted the day of her death.

It is said that St Syncletike was the virgin who sheltered St Athanasius the Great when he was driven into hiding for more than a year by the Arians. Her biography, which the *Synaxarion* calls "one of the basic texts of Orthodox spirituality," is attributed to St Athanasius.

JANUARY 6

† The Holy Theophany of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ

'About the beginning of our Lord's thirtieth year, John the Forerunner, who was some six months older than our Saviour according to the flesh, and had lived in the wilderness since his childhood, received a command from God and came into the parts of the Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance unto the remission of sins. Then our Saviour also came from Galilee to the Jordan, and sought and received baptism though He was the Master and John was but a servant. Whereupon there came to pass those marvellous deeds, great and beyond nature: the Heavens were opened, the Spirit descended in the form of a dove upon Him that was being baptized, and the voice was heard from the Heavens bearing witness that this was the beloved Son of God, now baptized as a man (Matt. 3:13 17; Mark 1:9 11; Luke 3:1 22). From these events the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and the great mystery of the Trinity were demonstrated. It is also from this that the present feast is called "Theophany," that is, the divine manifestation, God's appearance among men. On this venerable day the sacred mystery of Christian baptism was inaugurated; henceforth also began the saving preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven.' (*Great Horologion*)

When Thou was baptized in the Jordan, O Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest; for the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the certainty of the word. O Christ our God, Who hast appeared and hast enlightened the world, glory be to Thee. — Troparion of Theophany

'But Christ's descent into the river has also a further significance. When Christ went down into the waters, not only did he carry us down with Him and make us clean, but He also made clean the nature of the waters themselves... The feast of Theophany has thus a cosmic aspect. The fall of the angelic orders, and after it the fall of man, involved the whole universe. All God's creation was thereby warped and disfigured: to use the symbolism of the liturgical texts, the waters were made a "lair of dragons". Christ came on earth to redeem not only man but through man the entire material creation. When He entered the water, besides effecting by anticipation our rebirth in the font, he likewise effected the cleansing of the waters, their transfiguration into an organ of healing and grace.' Bishop Kallistos, "Background and meaning of the Feasts" in the *Festal Menaion*.

The western feast of Epiphany, also on this day, commemorates not Christ's baptism but the adoration of the Magi.

JANUARY 7

† The Synaxis of the Venerable and Illustrious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist of the Lord, John.

On the day after a great Feast we usually honor the servant of the Mystery; today we honor him who baptized the Lord: the blessed Forerunner, "greatest of the Prophets, most noble of those born of women, voice of the Word, herald of Grace, swallow presaging the spiritual spring, torch and beacon of the divine Light, spiritual dawn announcing the Sun of Righteousness, and as terrestrial angel and celestial man, stationed at the border of heaven and earth, uniting the Old and the New Testaments" (*Synaxarion*).

New Martyr Athanasius of Attalia (1700)

A native of Attalia, he lived in Smyrna. Once he unguardedly spoke the opening words of the Muslim confession of faith, "There is no god but God." Hearing this, some Turks immediately surrounded him and took him to the court, claiming that he had embraced Islam. This he vehemently denied, assuring them that he was a Christian and that the words he had spoken would be unremarkable to any Christian. He was thrown into prison as an apostate and, after a sham trial, beheaded. His body was thrown to the dogs, but the usually voracious animals refused to touch his body, and it was removed by some pious Christians and given honorable burial.

JANUARY 8

Our Venerable Mother Domnica (Domnina) (~474)

She was born in Rome and reared in the love of Christ. She secretly left her parents' house and traveled by ship to

Alexandria, where she found lodging with four virtuous pagan maidens. By her example and counsel these four were in time led to abandon idolatry and embrace Domnica's faith. The five then sailed to Constantinople, where it is said that the Patriarch Nectarius (October 11) was notified of their coming by an angel and met them at the dock. The Patriarch baptized the four maidens himself, giving them the names Dorothea, Evanthia, Nonna and Timothea, then settle them and Domnica in a monastery.

Soon the fame of Domnica's pure life, wise teaching, and wondrous healings spread throughout the city, and even the Emperor Theodosius, with the Empress and his court, came to see her. Soon the crowds made it impossible for her and her sisters to live the heavenly life for which they had entered the monastery; so they relocated the monastery to a remote, demon-haunted location where executions had once commonly been performed, since everyone avoided the area. Here a new monastery was built by order of the Emperor, and the sisters found peace.

Saint Domnica's fame continued, and she became not only a healer but an oracle for the city of Constantinople, prophesying the death of the Emperor Theodosius and the unrest which followed it. She reposed in peace, having first entrusted the care of the monastery to Dorothea. At the moment of her death, the whole monastery was shaken, and those present saw Saint Domnica dressed as a bride, being borne heavenward escorted by a company of white-clad monks and nuns.

Saint Atticus, Patriarch of Constantinople (425)

Born in Sebaste in Armenia, he was reared by monks who held to the heresy of Macedonius, which denied the uncreated divinity of the Holy Spirit; but when he came of age he rejected this error and embraced the Orthodox faith. He settled in Constantinople and became a priest in the Great Church. Though he had little formal education, his amazing memory, his zeal for Christ, and his powerful sermons recommended him to all, and he was elected Patriarch in 406, during the reign of the Emperor Arcadius. He served as shepherd to the Church for twenty years, ruling always with wisdom and moderation. Though he was unbending in upholding the Faith exactly, he took a conciliatory, persuasive approach to heretics and schismatics; in this way he was able to restore many to the Church rather than driving them away. His best-known single act is his restoration of the name of St John Chrysostom to the diptychs. Saint John had been unjustly denied commemoration in the Patriarchate since his exile, which had led to a schism; restoration of his commemoration not only corrected a grave injustice but healed a schism. Saint Atticus also presided over the rededication of the Agia Sophia, which had been burned in 404 in the rioting that followed St John Chrysostom's exile. He reposed in peace in 425.

Saint Severinus (482)

St. Severinus came to the borderland of present-day Germany and Austria from the east — possibly the Egyptian desert — to care for the Roman Christians who were endangered by invading barbarians during the collapse of the Roman Empire. He remained there until the end of his life. While he was there he advised both common people and kings to put eternal life first, and taught them to be generous to one another and to lead a true Christian life. He built a monastery and protected from harm those who gathered around him. As he foretold, the monks and other Christians who had followed him escaped to safety in Italy, taking St. Severinus' incorrupt relics with them. His relics are still honored in Prattamaggiore, Italy (near Naples).

— from the 2006 *Saint Herman Calendar*

JANUARY 9

Holy Martyr Polyeuctus (~250)

Polyeuctus and Nearchus were fellow-officers and close friends, serving in the Roman army at Miletene in Armenia. Nearchus was a Christian. Polyeuctus, though abundant in virtues, was still imprisoned in idol-worship. When the Emperor Decius' persecution broke out (239-251), an edict was issued requiring all soldiers to show their loyalty by making public sacrifice to the gods. Nearchus sadly told Polyeuctus that because of the decree they would soon be parted. But Polyeuctus, who had learned about the Christian faith from his friend, answered that Christ had appeared to him in a vision, exchanging his military uniform for a shining garment and giving him a winged horse. Polyeuctus took the vision as a sign that he was to embrace the Faith, and that he, with Nearchus, would soon be lifted up to heaven. Almost immediately, he first tore down the Emperor's edict in front of a startled crowd, then smashed the idols being carried in a pagan procession. He was quickly arrested and subjected to beating and scourging for sacrilege, but he only proclaimed more forcefully that he was a Christian. When the persecutors saw that Polyeuctus' patient endurance was bringing other idolaters to the faith, they condemned him to death.

Polyeuctus walked to the place of execution with the expression of a slave walking toward freedom, calling encouragement to the Christians who accompanied him. Fearlessly extending his neck to receive the sword, he received baptism in his own blood and received the martyr's crown.

Saint Peter II, Bishop of Sebaste (4th c.)

He was the tenth and youngest child of a family of saints, the brother of St Basil the Great, St Macrina and St Gregory of Nyssa. His father died shortly after his birth in 319, and he was reared mostly by his sister St Macrina. He was ordained to the priesthood by his brother St Basil in 370, and consecrated Bishop of Sebaste at the opening of the Second Ecumenical Council (381). Saint Peter took an active part in the Council, oversaw his flock wisely, and reposed in peace.

Venerable Eustratius the Wonderworker (9th c.)

He was born to pious parents in Tarsia in Bithynia. At the age of twenty he entered monastic life at the Monastery of Agaures near his home. There he became a model of prayer, asceticism and zeal for holiness — he possessed nothing but the cloak he wore, and did not even have his own cell, choosing instead to sleep on the bare ground. When he slept he would not lie on his back or his left side, but always on his right side. In church, he stood repeating 'Lord, have mercy!' to himself throughout the services. He was ordained to the priesthood, and in time was made abbot of the community. But just at that time, Leo the Armenian became Emperor and revived the iconoclast heresy. The monks of Agaures, who held to the Orthodox Faith, scattered to caves and forests to escape persecution. Eustratius himself was imprisoned for a time, and was only able to re-gather the community and resume its direction when Leo died and Orthodoxy was restored in 842.

As abbot, Eustratius continued to live as the humblest of the brethren, spending the day sharing in their manual labor, and most of the night in prayer and prostrations. He often traveled among the dependencies of his large monastery to offer counsel and encouragement to the brethren. While traveling he would often give his coat or even his horse to anyone in need whom he met on the way. Once he gave the monastery's only ox to a peasant who had lost his own. Once, on a visit to Constantinople, he was given a large sum of money by the Emperor for the monastery; on the way back he distributed all of it to the poor. Once, on the road, he met a man who had despaired because of his sins and was about to hang himself. The Saint took the man's hand and said 'My child, may the weight of your sins lie on me from now on. On the day of Judgment, I will answer for them instead of you. Only throw away this rope and hope in God.'

During his own life, Saint Eustratius performed countless miracles by his prayers: healing the sick, quenching fires, raising the dead. He reposed in peace in Constantinople at the age of ninety-five, having spent seventy-five years in monastic life.

Saint Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow (1569)

He was born in 1507 to a noble family, and served briefly in the royal court. At the age of thirteen he entered the Solovki Monastery on the White Sea, within the Arctic circle. Here he lived in great austerity and eventually became Abbot. Through his labors and prayers the monastery soon became a center of spirituality and culture throughout the region. His fame reached the attention of Tsar Ivan IV ("the Terrible"), who in 1566 made him Metropolitan of Moscow, much against the Abbot's desire.

Tsar Ivan revered Philip ("even as Herod had revered Saint John the Baptist," says the *Great Horologion*), and had been a generous benefactor of Solovki Monastery.

But no sooner was Metropolitan Philip installed than he began to reprimand the Tsar for the brutal reign that he had imposed upon the people. Despite many warnings and threats from the Tsar, the holy bishop refused to be silent in the face of massive injustice, telling Ivan that he had never sought to be Metropolitan, that he had desired only to live quietly in Solovki, but now that he was shepherd of his flock, he was unable to remain silent. "I cannot obey your command rather than God's. I stand for what is true and right and shall continue to do so, even though I be deprived of my office and suffer the worst of torments; otherwise our faith would be vain, and in vain too would be the apostolic office."

Finally the Tsar gathered various false witnesses against the Metropolitan, and called a council against him in 1568. Saint Philip was condemned and imprisoned in Moscow, but soon the Tsar, fearful of the people's love for their bishop, sent him to a monastery in Tver, where he lived confined and in great hardship.

"On December 23, 1569, a royal messenger came, asking the Metropolitan's blessing for the Tsar's expedition to Novgorod. Saint Philip told him to do that which he came to do, then raised his hands in prayer to God. The Tsar's messenger fell upon him and suffocated the holy hierarch with a pillow. In 1591 his relics were transferred to Solovki, and in 1652 to the Dormition Cathedral in Moscow; many miracles were wrought through his holy relics." (*Great Horologion*)

JANUARY 10

Our Holy Father Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (395)

"Saint Gregory, the younger brother of Basil the Great, illustrious in speech and a zealot for the Orthodox faith, was born in 331. His brother Basil was encouraged by their elder sister Macrina to prefer the service of God to a secular career (see July 19); Saint Gregory was moved in a similar way by his godly mother Emily, who, when Gregory was still a young man, implored him to attend a service in honour of the holy Forty Martyrs at her retreat at Annesi on the River Iris. Saint

Gregory came at his mother's bidding, but being wearied with the journey, and feeling little zeal, he fell asleep during the service. The Forty Martyrs then appeared to him in a dream, threatening him and reproaching him for his slothfulness. After this he repented and became very diligent in the service of God. He became bishop in 372, and because of his Orthodoxy he was exiled in 374 by Valens, who was on one mind with the Arians. After Valens' death in 378 he was recalled to his throne by the Emperor Gratian. He attended the Local Council of Antioch, which sent him to visit the churches of Arabia and Palestine, which had been defiled and ravaged by Arianism. He attended the Second Ecumenical Council, which was assembled in Constantinople in 381. Having lived some sixty years and left behind many remarkable writings, he reposed about the year 395. The acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council call him "Father of Fathers." (*Great Horologion*)

Our Holy Father Theophan the Recluse (1894)

This modern-day Church Father was born in Chernavsk in central Russia. The son of a priest, he entered seminary at a young age, then completed the four-year course in theology at the Academy of Kiev. Though he distinguished himself as a student, his heart turned increasingly toward the monastic life, and he was tonsured a monk and ordained a priest upon completion of his studies. During his time at the Academy he often visited the Lavra of the Caves, and there became a spiritual child of Father Parthenius (March 25).

His desire for monastic life was not fulfilled immediately, for the Church felt need of his intellectual gifts. He served as a professor at the Theological Academy in St Petersburg, then worked for seven years in the Russian Mission to the Near East, mostly in Palestine. During this time he gained a perfect mastery of Greek and studied the works of the Church Fathers in the original languages. Returning to Russia, he was soon consecrated a bishop; but after seven years of episcopal service, he at last achieved his heart's desire, resigning as bishop and retiring to a small monastery at Yvschen, where he spent the rest of his days.

After taking full part in the liturgical and communal life of the monastery for several years, he took up the life of a recluse in 1872. He lived in two small rooms, subsisting almost entirely on bread and tea, visited only by his confessor and the abbot of the monastery. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy every day in his cell. All of his time not taken up by inner prayer was devoted to translating the works of the Fathers into Russian and, increasingly, to writings of his own. Most importantly, he prepared a Russian-language edition of the *Philokalia* which had a deep impact upon Russian spiritual life.

Though he received no visitors, St Theophan entered into correspondence with many earnest Christians who sought his counsel, and so in time became the spiritual father of many believers throughout Russia. He reposed in peace in 1894.

In addition to the *Philokalia*, St Theophan produced (among other works): a *Spiritual Psalter* of selections from St Ephraim the Syrian; *The Path to Salvation*, an exposition of Orthodox Spirituality written in clear, plain language for those living in the world; collections of his letters to spiritual children; and *Unseen Warfare*, a treatise on prayer and the ascetical life. This last has an unusual history. In its original form it was written by Lorenzo Scupoli, an Italian Roman Catholic priest. St Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, recognizing the book's merit, produced a Greek edition in which he corrected various deviations from Orthodoxy in the original. St Theophan in turn revised the Greek edition extensively, removing some material and adding passages of his own; so that the Italian, Greek and Russian versions are in fact three substantially different books. Many of St Theophan's works (including *Unseen Warfare*) are available in good English translations. They are almost unique in presenting the undiluted hesychastic spirituality of the Orthodox Church in plain, straightforward language accessible to most people.

JANUARY 11

† Our Holy Father Theodosius the Cenobiarch (519)

"This Saint had Cappadocia as his homeland. He lived during the years of Leo of Thrace, who reigned from 457 to 474. The Saint established in the Holy Land a great communal monastery wherein he was the shepherd of many monks. While saint Sabbas was the head of the hermits of Palestine, Saint Theodosius was governor of those living the cenobitic life, for which reason he is called the Cenobiarch. Together with Saint Sabbas, towards whom he cherished a deep brotherly love in Christ, he defended the whole land of Palestine from the heresy of the Monophysites, which was championed by the Emperor Anastasius and might very well have triumphed in the Holy Land without the opposition of these two great monastic fathers and their zealous defence of the holy Council of Chalcedon. Having lived for 103 years, he reposed in peace." (*Great Horologion*)

The Venerable Vitalis (5th c.)

He lived for many years as a monk in Palestine, then went to Alexandria to labor for the salvation of women living as prostitutes. He worked with his hands by day, keeping only a tenth of his earnings for himself. By night, he would take the rest of his earnings to the prostitutes' quarter and offer his money to one of them, on condition that she would not give

herself up to sin that night, but instead stay with him, praying all night for his salvation. When he left her, he would make her promise to tell no one of this arrangement. Not surprisingly, complaints soon reached the Patriarch, St John the Merciful (November 12) about this monk who was causing scandal by his immoral life; but the Patriarch, discerning Vitali heart, did nothing. When St Vitalis died, a writing tablet was found near his body, on which was written: "Inhabitants of Alexandria, judge not before the time, until the coming of the Day of the Lord." Then many women who had been converted from an immoral life by the Saint came forward and told of his good deeds. The people of Alexandria honored him with a lavish funeral.

Saint Vitalis shows us in at least two ways that the wisdom of the holy is foolishness to the world: He never sought to justify himself in the eyes of the world, but on the contrary did everything he could to hide his virtues; and, for all his holiness, he counted himself more sinful than the "fallen," asking them to pray for his salvation.

Venerable Michael of Klops, Fool for Christ (1456)

In 1412, the monks of the Monastery of Klops (near Novgorod) found an unknown man, dressed as a monk, in the church, reading from the Epistles by candle-light. After the service they found him writing in one of the cells. He would not identify himself, but only repeated the questions that they asked him. They were about to eject him from the monastery, but the abbot, who was gifted with spiritual discernment, ordered that he be given a cell and allowed to remain. From that day on he lived in strict obedience and asceticism — he would eat only bread and water on Sundays, keeping a complete fast the rest of the week — but would never reveal his name or background.

In 1419 Prince Constantine Dimitrievitch, brother of Basil I, Grand Prince of Moscow, visited the monastery. During the meal, the still-unknown monk was assigned to read from the Lives of the Saints, and Prince Constantine immediately recognized him as Michael, son of his cousin Maxim, who had disappeared without a trace many years earlier. Constantine revealed his identity to the abbot; this same Constantine later became a monk himself.

Monk Michael lived for many more years at the monastery. In later years he was granted gifts of prophecy: once, meeting a young boy in the street, he accurately predicted that the boy would become Archbishop Jonas; he foretold the deaths of princes and archbishops, and predicted, years before the fact, that Novgorod would lose its independence. He reposed in peace in 1456.

JANUARY 12

Holy Martyr Tatiana (~230)

She was the daughter of a wealthy Roman consul. She became a deaconess in Rome, and was seized as a Christian during the reign of Alexander Severus. Before the tribunal she fearlessly confessed Christ and, when she was taken to the temple in an effort to force her to make sacrifice, she cast down the idols by the power of her prayer. At this, the soldiers seized her and subjected her to many indignities and tortures, finally throwing her into a raging furnace. When this did not harm her, she was thrown to the wild beasts, but they refused to harm her. At last she was beheaded and thus gained her crown.

Venerable Benedict Biscop, Abbot of Wearmouth (689-690)

He came from a noble Northumbrian family in Britain, and was tonsured a monk in 653 at Lerins in Gaul. In 669 he was made Abbot of the Monastery of Saints Peter and Paul in Canterbury. He traveled to Rome in 671 to be instructed in monastic practice according to the *Rule of Saint Benedict* (of Nursia). Returning to Northumbria he established two new monasteries, the first to follow St Benedict's Rule in the British Isles. He went to Rome once again in 678-679, this time bringing back the archcantor of St Peter's, who taught the monks of St Benedict's monasteries the chant and liturgical practices used in Rome.

Under the holy abbot's guidance, these monasteries became flourishing centers of Christian worship, scholarship and art. The Venerable Bede (May 26) was one of his disciples. Saint Benedict reposed in peace in 689 or 690, having greatly strengthened the Church and the Christian faith in Britain.

JANUARY 13

Holy Martyrs Hermylus and Stratonicus (315)

Hermylus was a deacon in Singidunum (modern-day Belgrade) during the reign of Licinius. When he was arrested he joyously welcomed the soldiers who came to seize him. When he confessed Christ before the magistrate, he was beaten, tormented, then thrown in jail. There he prayed to be allowed to partake in Christ's saving Passion, and heard a voice assuring him that in three days he would receive a Martyr's crown.

Stratonicus, his jailer, was a kind-hearted man and secretly a Christian, and wept to see the torments to which Hermylus was subjected. Seeing this, the soldiers began to question him; and, seeing that his hour had come, he in turn openly confessed Christ. For this he was seized, flogged and thrown into prison with his brother in Christ. The following day, both

were bound, tied in a net and thrown into the Danube, where they received their divinely-promised crowns. Their bodies were washed up a few days later, recovered by Christians and buried with honor.

Our Holy Father Maximos Kavsokalybites (the Hut-burner) (1365)

A native of Lampsacus on the Hellespont, he became a monk at the age of seventeen. When his spiritual Father died, he went on pilgrimage to Constantinople, where he took up the asceticism of folly for Christ, pretending madness in order to conceal his virtues and struggles from the world. He then went to the Great Lavra of St Athanasius on Mount Athos, where he lived as a simple monk in complete obedience. One day, he was told in a dream to go to the summit of Athos to receive (like Moses) the tablets of the spiritual law. He prayed continuously atop the Holy Mountain for three days, after which the Mother of God appeared to him surrounded by angels. She gave him a miraculous loaf for his sustenance and told him to live in solitude on the wild slopes of Mount Athos. Henceforth he lived apart, barefoot in all weather. He would build himself crude shelters of branches and brush; after living in one for a short time he would burn it and move to a new place. Thus he received the name Kavsokalybites "the Hut Burner" from the other monks, who dismissed him as a madman.

Saint Gregory the Sinaite (April 6), one of the great Hesychasts, heard of St Maximos, and hurried to meet him. When they met, St Maximos put aside his usual silence at St Gregory's pleading, and they discoursed together for many hours. Saint Gregory was astonished at the wonders that God had accomplished in St Maximos, at his depth of spiritual understanding and his eloquence. Returning to the nearby monks, he said "He is an angel and not a man!" He begged St Maximos to give up his nomadic life and his pretended madness, and to live among his fellow monks for their edification. This St Maximos did. He settled in one of his crude huts, living on bread miraculously provided from heaven and on seawater, which was made sweet by his prayer. He received and counseled any monks who sought him out, and over the years was visited by two Emperors and by the Patriarch of Constantinople. In his last years he returned to a small cell in his Lavra, where he reposed in peace at the age of ninety-five. The monks of Mt Athos immediately venerated him as Saint.

Our Holy Father Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers (369)

"The holy Hierarch Hilary was born of pagan parents in Gaul, and was trained in philosophy and rhetoric. At a time when paganism was still strong in Gaul, Saint Hilary understood the falsehood of polytheism, and became a Christian, a great defender of his new Faith. About the year 350 he was ordained Bishop of Poitiers, when Arles and Milan were in the hands of the Arians and the Arian Constantius was sole Emperor. Like his contemporary Saint Athanasius, Saint Hilary's episcopate was one long struggle against the Arians. As Bishop of Poitiers, Saint Hilary foresaw the future greatness of Martin (see Nov. 12), and attached him to himself. In 355, when required to agree to the condemnation of Saint Athanasius passed by the Council of Milan, Hilary wrote an epistle to Constantius convicting the wrongs done by the Arians and requesting, among other things, the restoration of the Orthodox bishops, including Athanasius. For this, Hilary was banished to Asia Minor, where he wrote his greatest work, *On the Trinity*. Saint Hilary returned to his see in 360, where Saint Martin sought him out again. It was at this time that Saint Hilary blessed Martin to found a monastery near Poitiers, where Martin remained until being consecrated Bishop of Tours in 371. In his last years, Saint Hilary strove for the deposition of Auxentius, the Arian Bishop of Milan, but by affecting an Orthodox confession Auxentius retained his see. Saint Hilary reposed in peace about the year 368. Auxentius died in 374 and was succeeded by Saint Ambrose, who continued Saint Hilary's battle against Arianism." (*Great Horologion*)

JANUARY 14

Leavetaking of Theophany

Saint Nina, Equal to the Apostles and Enlightener of Georgia (335)

She is called "Nino" in many accounts. This holy maiden was a Cappadocian, the only daughter of Zabulon, a kinsman of the Great Martyr George. She was captured and enslaved by the Iberians (later called the Georgians) and taken away to their homeland. In captivity, she lived a sober and pious life, devoting every free moment day and night to prayer. Her exceptional virtue attracted the attention of many, especially those hungry for Truth, and she simply and boldly proclaimed the Gospel to all who inquired of her.

Once she healed a woman's sick child by her prayers, and the report of this wonder reached the Queen of Georgia, who was herself suffering from an incurable disease. She asked the slave to come to her, but Nina refused out of humility, so the Queen had her servants take her to Nina's dwelling. The Saint prayed and the Queen was healed instantly. Returning home in joy, the Queen praised Nina and her faith to the King, whose name was Mirian. The king paid her little heed, but later, while hunting, he was suddenly engulfed by a dark cloud, so that he lost his way and was stricken by fear. Remembering his wife's report, he prayed "to the god whom Nina worships," and vowed that if he were delivered he would worship Him alone. Immediately the cloud vanished and the King received the light of faith. Hastening home, he found Nina and, King

though he was, cast himself at the feet of the slave and told her that he had resolved that he and his whole nation should be baptized. He sent emissaries to Constantine the Great, who quickly dispatched bishops and priests to the barbarian kingdom.

When the conversion of the country was well under way, Nina, though now freed, determined to stay in Georgia, where she withdrew to the wilderness and prayed fervently that the people would be confirmed in the Faith of Christ. Saint Nina reposed in peace, surrounded by the King, his court and the clergy. Thus did a powerless slave woman, by the power of God, convert an entire nation.

Our Holy Father Sava (Sabbas), Enlightener and first Archbishop of Serbia (1236)

This best-loved Saint of the Serbian people was born in 1169, the son of Stephen Nemanja, Grand Prince of Serbia. He was named Rastko by his parents. At the age of fifteen he was appointed governor of the province of Herzegovina, but worldly power were of no interest to him, and he began to wish to give himself more fully to God. He secretly left home and traveled to Mount Athos, where he became a novice at the Monastery of St Panteleimon. His father learned where he had gone and sent soldiers to bring him back, but before the soldiers could claim him, he was tonsured a monk with the name of Sabbas (Sava), after St Sabbas the Sanctified (December 5).

In time, under the influence of his son, Stephen Nemanja abdicated his kingship, and in 1196 he became a monk under the name of Symeon, traveling to the Holy Mountain to join his son. Symeon was quite old, and unable to endure all the ascetic labors of long-time monks, so his son redoubled his own ascetical struggle, telling his father, "I am your ascesis." The two monks together founded the Chilandir Monastery, which became the center of Serbian piety and culture. Saint Symeon reposed in 1200, and his body soon began to exude a miracle-working myrrh; thus he is commemorated as St Symeon the Myrrh-streaming (February 13).

Saint Sava retired to a hermit's life in a cell on the Holy Mountain, but was compelled to return to the world: his two brothers were at war with one another, causing much bloodshed in Serbia. The Saint returned home with his father's holy relics, mediated between his brothers, and persuaded them to make peace with one another over their father's tomb, restoring peace to the Serbian land. At the pleas of the people, St Sava remained in Serbia thereafter. He persuaded the Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople to grant autocephaly to the Church in Serbia. Against his will, he was ordained first Archbishop of his land in 1219. He labored tirelessly to establish the Orthodox Faith, for, though his father had been a Christian, many of the people were still pagan. In old age he resigned the episcopal throne and went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. While returning from his pilgrimage, he fell asleep in peace in 1236.

The Holy Fathers slain at Sinai and Raithu (4th - 5th c.)

The Holy Fathers at Mount Sinai lived in the wilderness around the holy mountain before the Emperor Justinian built the famous Monastery there in 527. The brethren were attacked by a band of Saracen barbarians who massacred Doulas, the superior of the community, and most of the other monks. They only stopped when a pillar of fire rose to the sky from the summit of Sinai, causing them to flee in fear.

The Forty-three Holy Fathers at Raithu were massacred on December 22, but are commemorated together with the fathers of Sinai. They lived the monastic life on the shores of the Red Sea. One day about three hundred Ethiopian barbarians raided the area, killing many Christians and enslaving their wives and children. They attacked the church at Raithu, where forty-three fathers had taken shelter. Their abbot Paul enjoined them to persist in prayer to the end, putting no stock in the passing life of this world, which they had renounced when they came to the desert. No sooner had he finished his prayer than the barbarians broke in, slaughtering all the monks but one, who escaped to bring news of the attack to Mt Sinai. When the barbarians returned to their ships they found that the Christians had run their vessels onto the rocks. Enraged, they killed all their prisoners. They themselves were massacred by a band of armed Christians who arrived soon afterward.

JANUARY 15

Our Holy Father Paul of Thebes (342)

He was born in Egypt in the reign of the Emperor Decius. Though his parents left him a large inheritance, he abandoned it and fled into the desert around the year 250 to escape the bloody persecution of Christians raging at that time. After walking for several days, he found an isolated cave with a large palm tree and a spring of fresh water nearby. Settling here in solitude, he gave himself up to constant prayer.

Many years passed. Saint Anthony the Great, having reached the age of ninety (in about the year 342) was tempted by the thought that no one else had ever lived a life so dedicated to God as his. That night, he was told in a dream that there was another hermit in the desert more perfect than himself, who had reached the age of 113 years. Anthony rose, took up his staff, and walked straight into the desert, trusting God to lead him where he should go. He was threatened by various

beasts sent by the Devil, but he tamed them with the sign of the Cross, and they showed him the way he should go. Finally a wolf brought him to St Paul's cave. They embraced as brothers in Christ and spent the night in prayer. The next day Paul confided to Anthony that he was about to die, and that God had brought Anthony thence to give him honorable burial. As he had said, St Paul reposed the next day and, with many tears, St Anthony buried him in a cloak given him by St Athanasius the Great, assisted by two lions who dug out the grave with their paws.

Our Holy Father John Kalyvites (the hut-dweller) (~450)

He was the son of Eutropius, a prominent senator, and Theodora, who lived in Constantinople. At the age of twelve, he secretly fled his home, taking nothing but a Gospel book with him. Entering the Monastery of the Unsleeping Ones in the City, he gave himself up with fervor to a life of prayer, self-denial and obedience. For three years he ate only on Sundays after taking communion, and became so thin and haggard that he bore no resemblance to the young nobleman who had entered the monastery.

Tormented by longing to see his parents, but unwilling to give up the ascetic struggle, he left the monastery with his Abbot's blessing, dressed in beggar's rags, and took up residence in a poor hut near the gate of his parents' house. Here he lived, mocked by those who had once been his servants and despised by his own parents, who no longer recognized him.

After three years, Christ appeared to him and told him that his end was drawing near, and that in three days angels would come to take him home. John sent a message to his parents, asking them to visit his hut. In perplexity, they came, and John, showing them the Gospel book that they had given him as a child, revealed to them that he was their son, and that he was about to die. They embraced him, rejoicing at their reunion but weeping for his departure from this life. Immediately, he gave back his soul to God.

The whole City of Constantinople was stirred by the story, and great crowds came to John's burial service. A church was later built on the site of his hut, and many miracles were wrought there through the Saint's prayers.

Saint Ita of Kileedy, Ireland (570)

The gentle and motherly St. Ita was descended from the high kings of Tara. From her youth she loved God ardently and shone with the radiance of a soul that loves virtue. Because of her purity of heart she was able to hear the voice of God and communicate it to others. Despite her father's opposition she embraced the monastic life in her youth. In obedience to the revelation of an angel she went to the people of Ui Conaill in the southwestern part of Ireland. While there, the foundation of a convent was laid. It soon grew into a monastic school for the education of boys, quickly becoming known for its high level of learning and moral purity. The most famous of her many students was St. Brendan of Clonfert (May 16). She went to the other world in great holiness to dwell forever with the risen Lord in the year 570.

—from the 2003 *Saint Herman Calendar*

JANUARY 16

† Veneration of the precious Chains of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Peter.

The story of St Peter's imprisonment and miraculous release by an Angel of God is told in Acts ch. 12. The chains which fell from his hands were collected by Christians and passed down through the generations as precious relics, finally coming to Constantinople and being placed in the Church of St Peter, where they worked many miracles and healings.

There is nothing superstitious about the veneration of clothing and other objects belonging to the Saints; the Acts of the Apostles describes how handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched the Apostle Paul would heal the sick (ch. 19), and even the shadow of the Apostle Peter healed those on whom it fell (ch. 5). In the twentieth century, a shirt worn by St Nektarios on his death-bed healed a paralyzed man. The sanctity of those united to God extends not only to their bodies but at times to their garments.

JANUARY 17

† Our Holy Godbearing Father Anthony the Great (356).

'Saint Anthony, the Father of monks, was born in Egypt in 251 of pious parents who departed this life while he was yet young. On hearing the words of the Gospel: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor" (Matt. 19:21), he immediately put it into action. Distributing to the poor all he had, and fleeing from all the turmoil of the world, he departed to the desert. The manifold temptations he endured continually for the space of twenty years are incredible. His ascetical struggles by day and by night, whereby he mortified the uprisings of the passions and attained to the height of dispassion, surpass the bounds of nature; and the report of his deeds of virtue drew such a multitude to follow him, that the desert was transformed into a city, while he became, so to speak, the governor, lawgiver, and master-trainer of all the citizens of this newly-formed city. But the cities of the world also enjoyed the fruit of his virtue. When the Christians were being persecuted and put to death under Maximinus in 312, he hastened to their aid and consolation. When the Church

was troubled by the Arians, he went with zeal to Alexandria in 335 and struggled against them in behalf of Orthodoxy. During this time, by the grace of his words, he also turned many unbelievers to Christ.

He began his ascetical life outside his village of Coma in Upper Egypt, studying the ways of the ascetics and holy men there, and perfecting himself in the virtues of each until he surpassed them all. Desiring to increase his labours, he departed into the desert, and finding an abandoned fortress in the mountain, he made his dwelling in it, training himself in extreme fasting, unceasing prayer, and fierce conflicts with the demons. Here he remained, as mentioned above, about twenty years. Saint Athanasius the Great, who knew him personally and wrote his life, says that he came forth from the fortress "initiated in the mysteries and filled with the Spirit of God." Afterwards, because of the press of the faithful, who deprived him of his solitude, he was enlightened by God to journey with certain Bedouins, until he came to a mountain in the desert near the Red Sea, where he passed the remaining part of his life. Saint Athanasius says of him that "his countenance had a great and wonderful grace. This gift also he had from the Saviour. For if he were present in a great company of monks, and any one who did not know him previously wished to see him, immediately coming forward he passed by the rest, and hurried to Anthony, as though attracted by his appearance. Yet neither in height nor breadth was he conspicuous above others, but in the serenity of his manner and the purity of his soul."

'So passing his life, and becoming an example of virtue and a rule for monastics, he reposed on January 17 in the year 356, having lived together some 105 years.' (*Great Horologion*)

Speaking of the demonic temptations and struggles with the passions that beset those who seek their salvation, St Anthony said: "All these trials are to your advantage. Do away with temptation and no one will be saved."

Pious Emperor Theodosius the Great (395)

He was born in Spain, became a general in the Imperial Army, and was crowned Emperor of the East in 379. He quickly made his Orthodoxy clear by decisively rejecting Arianism, which had divided Christians, troubled the Church, and confused previous emperors, for many years. He summoned the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381, which reaffirmed the doctrine of Nicaea and proclaimed the divinity of the Holy Spirit. While Constantine had outlawed the persecution of Christians and made Christianity the religion of the state, Theodosius outlawed the worship of idols within the Empire.

Theodosius was several times guilty of anger and bloodshed during his reign, but, when corrected, always expressed sincere repentance and submitted himself to the authority and discipline of the Church. He endured a long excommunication and penance from Ambrose, bishop of Milan (December 7), for a massacre perpetrated at his order. Once he was about to enact bloody punishment of the people of Antioch for a rebellion, but relented when St Placilla (September 14) and Patriarch Flavian enjoined him to be merciful. In this, he showed a humility and submission to the Church almost unknown in Christian rulers before or since.

Having reigned for sixteen years, the Emperor Theodosius reposed in peace in 395 at the age of sixty.

Our Holy Father Makarios (Kalogeras) of Patmos (1737)

He was born to a prosperous family on the island of Patmos. As soon as he was old enough to leave home, he attended the Patriarchal School in Constantinople, where he distinguished himself. He became a monk, then a deacon, but always refused to be ordained to the priesthood, though the Metropolitan of Nikomedia wished Makarios to be his successor. Instead, he returned to Patmos in 1713 and entered the Monastery of St John the Theologian, where he remained until his death.

Though he lived in great asceticism and constant prayer, Saint Makarios was moved by a concern for the salvation and education of the Orthodox people, who often lived in great ignorance, even of their own faith, under Ottoman rule. He established a school in a building adjacent to the monastery, and offered courses free of charge to any who could come. Modeling the curriculum on that of the Patriarchal School, he served more as a spiritual father than a worldly professor. The school grew steadily, partly due to generous contributions from a few wealthy Greek families and trade guilds in Constantinople. But students, many of them very poor, still had to pay for their own needs, and Saint Makarios used his own funds to aid the poorest of them. In addition, he secretly distributed any money that came to him personally to the poor on Patmos. The school at Patmos became famous throughout the Greek Church, and its head became a spiritual father not only to his students but throughout the Greek nation. Bishops often asked him to write homilies; about sixty of these were published in book form as *The Trumpet of the Gospel*, which is still widely read today by the faithful. Having greatly edified thousands while laboring tirelessly for the salvation of his soul, Saint Makarios reposed in peace in 1737.

JANUARY 18

† Our Holy Fathers Athanasius the Great (373) and Cyril (41), Patriarchs of Alexandria

Saint Athanasius, pillar of Orthodoxy and Father of the Church, was born in Alexandria in 275, to pious Christian parents.

Even as a child, his piety and devotion to the Faith were so notable that Alexander, the Patriarch of the city, took Athanasius under his protection. As a student, he acquired a thorough education, but was more interested in the things of God than in secular learning, and withdrew for a time into the desert to sit at the feet of Saint Anthony (January 17), whose disciple he became and whose biography he later wrote. On returning to Alexandria, he was ordained to the diaconate and began his public labors for the Church. He wrote his treatise *On the Incarnation*, when he was only twenty. (It contains a phrase, still often quoted today, that express in a few words some of the depths of the Mystery of the Incarnation: God became man that man might become god.)

Just at this time Arius, a priest in Alexandria, was promoting his enticing view that the Son and Word of God is not of one essence with the Father, but a divine creation of the Father. This view, which (as Athanasius realized) strikes at the very possibility of mankind's salvation, gained wide acceptance and seemed for a time to threaten the Christian Faith itself. In 325, the Emperor Constantine the Great convoked a Council of the Church at Nicaea to settle the turmoil that had the Arian teaching had spread through the Church. Athanasius attended the Council, and defended the Orthodox view so powerfully that he won the admiration of the Orthodox and the undying enmity of the Arians. From that time forth his life was founded on the defense of the true consubstantiality (homoousia) of the Son with the Father.

In 326, not long before his death, Patriarch Alexander appointed Athanasius to be his successor, and Athanasius was duly elevated to the patriarchal throne. He was active in his pastoral role, traveling throughout Egypt, visiting churches and monasteries, and working tirelessly not only to put down the Arian heresy, but to resolve various schisms and moral declines that effected his territory.

Though the Arian heresy had apparently been condemned once and for all at Nicaea, Arius had many powerful allies throughout the Empire, even in the Imperial court, and Athanasius was soon subjected to many kinds of persecution, some local, some coming from the Imperial throne itself. Though he was Patriarch of Alexandria for more than forty year large amount of that time was spent in hiding from powerful enemies who threatened him with imprisonment or death. Twice he fled to Rome for protection by the Pope, who in the early centuries of the Church was a consistent champion of Orthodoxy against its various enemies. From his various hiding places, Athanasius issued tracts, treatises and epistles which helped to rally the faithful throughout Christendom to the Orthodox cause.

In 366, the Emperor Valens, fearing a revolt of the Egyptians on behalf of their beloved Archbishop, officially restored Athanasius to favor, and he was able to spend the last seven years of his life in peace. Of his forty-seven years as Patriarch, about seventeen were spent in hiding or exile. He reposed in peace in 373, having given his entire adult life, at great suffering, to the defense of the Faith of Christ.

With St Athanasius, the Church commemorates St Cyril (Kyrillos), also Archbishop of Alexandria (412-44). His lot was to defend the Faith against the heretic Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who denied that Christ in his Incarnation truly united the divine with the human nature. Cyril attempted in private correspondence to restore Nestorius to the Christian faith, and when this failed he, along with Pope Celestine of Rome, led the defense of Orthodoxy against Nestorius' teaching. Saint Cyril presided at the Third Ecumenical Council in 431, at which the Nestorian error was officially overthrown. After guiding his flock for thirty-two years, he reposed in 444.

JANUARY 19

† Our Holy Father Macarius (Makarios) the Great (~390)

He was born around 300 in Egypt and in his youth was a camel driver. While still living in his village, he withdrew to a small cell to devote himself exclusively to asceticism and prayer. When the people there wanted to make him a priest, he fled to another village. There a young woman who was discovered to be pregnant falsely accused Macarius of being the father. Macarius was seized, reviled and beaten, but made no effort to defend himself; instead he took on more work in order to provide for the mother and her child. When his innocence was finally discovered, the townspeople came to ask his forgiveness; but he fled to the desert of Sketis (now called Wadi Natrun). He was then thirty years old, and for the rest of his life he dwelt in the desert.

His humility and detachment from earthly things were so great that once, when he discovered a thief stealing his few possessions, he helped the man load them onto his camel, even pointing out to him the few things he had missed. Once a demon spoke to him thus: "Everything you do, I do too: you fast, but I never eat; you keep vigil, but I never sleep; you only exceed me in one way: your humility. Because of this I am helpless against you." The Saint said that the demons could be put in two categories: those who arouse passions such as anger, lust and greed; and others, much more dreadful, who deceive us by spiritual illusion, blasphemy and heresy.

Saint Macarius soon became known throughout Egypt, and many visitors came to his isolated home. He welcomed all

with joy, judging no one and providing hospitality for all. His compassion extended to all, and he prayed even for the damned. Once he found the skull of a pagan priest, which addressed him, saying, "Each time you have pity on us who are in torment, immersed in fire and darkness, we receive a measure of comfort and are allowed to see the faces of our fellow sufferers."

Saint Macarius became a disciple of St Anthony the Great, and in his turn became the spiritual Father of many who came to live near him in the desert. He is considered the founder of the ancient and venerable monastic community at Sketis. At the age of forty he was ordained a priest at the urging of St Anthony, so that he and his brethren would not have to walk the forty miles of desert to Nitria to go to church.

Knowing that he was soon to die, he visited his disciples one last time, saying to them with tears in his eyes, "Let us weep, brethren, so that our eyes flow ceaselessly with tears, before we go to where our tears will scald our bodies." Soon thereafter he reposed. His relics now rest in the Coptic monastery that bears his name. The collection of fifty Spiritual Homilies attributed to St Macarius is a treasury of Orthodox spirituality.

Our Holy Father Mark Eugenikos, Metropolitan of Ephesus and Confessor of the Orthodox Faith (1443)

This holy defender of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church labored in the final days of the Byzantine Empire, when, pressed on all sides by the Turks, the Emperor in desperation sought union with (or rather submission to) the Papacy in hopes of obtaining aid from the West. It was St Mark who stood almost alone to prevent such a disaster to the Faith.

He was born in Constantinople in 1392 to devout parents. He received a thorough education and seemed destined for a secular career, but at the age of twenty-six he abandoned all worldly claims and became a monk in a small monastery in Nicomedia. Soon the Turkish threat forced him to return to Constantinople, where, continuing in the monastic life, he wrote a number of treatises on prayer and the dogmas of the Church. In time he was ordained priest, then, at the insistence of the Emperor John VIII Paleologos was made Metropolitan of Ephesus. The Emperor also prevailed on him to join the delegation which traveled to the Council of Florence to consider the reunion of the Orthodox Church and the churches under the Papacy. (Saint Mark went as exarch of the Patriarchs of Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria, who were unable to attend.)

The Greek delegation included the Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople. All, including Metropolitan Mark, began with great hopes that a true union in faith might result from the Council, but as the sessions proceeded, it soon became clear that Pope Eugenius and his theologians were interested only in securing submission of the Eastern Church to the Papacy and its theology. The Metropolitan spoke forcefully against various Latin dogmas such as the filioque and Purgatory, but the Greek delegation, desperate for western aid, bowed to expediency and agreed to sign a document of Union which would have denied the Orthodox Faith itself. Saint Mark was the only member of the delegation who refused to sign. When the Pope heard of this, he said "The bishop of Ephesus has not signed, so we have achieved nothing!"

When the delegation returned to Constantinople, the signers of the false Union were received with universal condemnation by the people, while Metropolitan Mark was hailed as a hero. The churches headed by Unionists were soon almost empty, while the people flocked to the churches headed by those loyal to Orthodoxy. Saint Mark left the City to avoid concelebrating with the Unionist Patriarch. He was exiled by the Emperor to Lemnos, but was freed in 1442. He continued to oppose the Union until his repose in 1444. In 1452 the Union was officially proclaimed in Constantinople, but the hoped-for Western aid was not forthcoming, and the City fell to the Turks in 1453.

JANUARY 20

† Our Venerable Father Euthymius the Great (473)

This Saint, who was from Melitine in Armenia, was the son of pious parents named Paul and Dionysia. He was born about 377. Since his mother had been barren, he was named Euthymius which means "good cheer" or "joy" for this is what his parents experienced at his birth. He studied under Eutroius, the Bishop of Melitene, by whom he was ordained and entrusted with the care of the monasteries of Melitene. Then, after he had come to Palestine about the year 406, he became the leader of a multitude of monks. Through him, a great tribe of Arabs was turned to piety, when he healed the ailing son of their leader Aspebetos. Aspebetos was baptized with all his people; he took the Christian name of Peter, and was later consecrated Bishop for his tribe, being called the "Bishop of the Tents." Saint Euthymius also fought against the Nestorians, Eutychians, and Manichaeans. When Eudocia, the widow of Saint Theodosius the Younger, had made her dwelling in Palestine, and had fallen into the heresy of the Monophysites which was championed in Palestine by a certain Theodosius, she sent envoys to Saint Symeon the Stylite in Syria (see Sept. 1), asking him his opinion of Eutyches and the Council of Chalcedon which had condemned him; Saint Symeon, praising the holiness and Orthodoxy of Saint Euthymius near whom she dwelt, sent her to him to be delivered from her error (the holy Empress Eudocia is commemorated Aug. 13). He became

the divine oracle of the Church, or rather, "the vessel of divine utterance," as a certain historian writes. He was the instructor and elder of Saint Sabbas the Sanctified. Having lived for ninety-six years, he reposed in 473, on January 20.' (*Great Horologion*)

Saint Peter the Tax Collector (6th c.)

"Saint Peter, being of patrician rank, was appointed by the Emperor Justinian (527-65) to administer the Roman province of Africa. Harsh and without an ounce of compassion, he became universally known as 'the Miser'. One day a beggar was importuning him insistently for alms, so he picked up one of the warm loaves which his servant had just brought in and threw it like a stone at his head. The beggar seized it with delight and made off. Two days later Peter suddenly fell ill with the fever and saw himself appear at the Last Judgment to give an account of all his deeds. A pair of scales was brought before him and swarthy creatures placed all his evil actions on to the left-hand dish, while bright angels stood to the right, in dismay at having nothing by way of a good deed to put on to the right-hand side except the loaf which he had thrown in anger at the beggar. Peter then woke up with a start and, forgetful of his illness, hastened to give away all his goods to the needy, even his clothing. Afterwards in a dream, he saw Christ wearing the clothes he had given away, and so he decided not to stop at that but to sell himself as slave to a goldsmith in order to give alms of the price paid for him. Some time later, fearing lest his identity be discovered, he fled to Jerusalem and thence to Constantinople, where he gave back his soul in peace to God in his old house." (*Synaxarion*)

The source of this story is the longer *Life of St John the Merciful* (November 12).

JANUARY 21

Our Venerable Father Maximos the Confessor (662)

He was born to a noble family in Constantinople in 580. (But, according to a recently-discovered account, he may have been born in Palestine.) He showed uncommon piety and depth of theological understanding from an early age, and wrote some of the Church's most profound theological works. He became the chief secretary of the Emperor Heraclius and his grandson Constans. But when the Monothelite heresy took hold in the royal court, Maximos could not bear to be surrounded by this error and left for the Monastery at Chrysopolis, where he later became abbot. From the monastery, he battled Monothelitism in homilies and treatises that exercised a considerable influence; so much so that the Emperor Constans ordered him either to accept Monothelite belief or keep silence. Maximos refused to do either, and he was arrested. His tongue was torn out, his right hand cut off, and he was sentenced to exile. He died of his wounds and torments while still in prison awaiting deportation, at the age of eighty-two, in the year 662. The *Great Horologion* comments that "at that time only he and his few disciples were Orthodox in the East." Nonetheless, his lonely and costly stand, whose fruit he did not see in his own lifetime, preserved the Orthodox Faith when emperors and patriarchs alike had fallen away.

Saint Maximos' right hand is venerated today at the Monastery of St Paul on Mt Athos.

Holy Martyr Agnes of Rome (~304)

She was a virgin of noble birth who lived in Rome during the reign of Diocletian. She was martyred at the age of twelve. From an early age she loved chastity (agne, the origin of her name, means "pure" or "chaste" in Greek. Her purity became so well known that she was sought out by many women of Rome, whom she exhorted to accept Christ as the one true God, and to honor him with their chastity. For this she was in time arrested and brought before the City Prefect. When she refused to deny Christ, the Prefect had her handed over to a brothel; but everyone who attempted to violate her was mysteriously prevented, and one especially vicious and lewd attacker was miraculously struck dead. In front of the Prefect's soldiers, Agnes prayed to God and the dead man was restored to life. Many pagan spectators, and the Prefect himself, cried "Great is the power of the Christians!" But others claimed that Agnes had performed this wonder by sorcery and should be killed. The Prefect ordered that she be burned to death. She gave up her life serenely and with prayers on her lips. Some Christians gathered her relics and placed them in a tomb where a magnificent church was later built. Saint Agnes' holy relics remain a source of healing to this day.

Our Holy Father Maximos the Greek (1556)

He was born Michael Tivolis in 1470. In his early youth he traveled to Italy, where many scholars had fled to preserve Hellenic culture despite the fall of Constantinople. After completing his studies in Florence, he went to the Holy Mountain in 1507 and entered Vatopedi Monastery, where he received the name of Maximos. Ten years later he was sent to Russia in answer to a request of Grand Prince Basil Ivanovich, who sought someone to translate works of the Holy Fathers on the Psalter, as well as other Church books, into Slavonic. Maximos completed this work with such success that he was made to stay in Russia to correct the existing translations (from Greek to Slavonic) of the Scriptures and liturgical books, and to preach. His work aroused the jealousy of some native monks, and Maximos was falsely accused of plotting against the Prince. In 1525 he was condemned as a heretic by a church court and banished to the Monastery of Volokolamsk, where he

lived as a prisoner, not only suffering cold and extreme physical privation but being denied Holy Communion and the use of books.

One day an angel appeared to him and said 'Have patience: You will be delivered from eternal torment by sufferings here below.' In thanks for this divine comfort, St Maximus wrote a canon to the Holy Spirit on the walls of his cell in charcoal, since he was denied the use of paper and pen. (This canon is sung on Pentecost Monday in some Russian and Serbian Monasteries). Six years later he was tried again and condemned to indefinite imprisonment in chains at a monastery in Tver. Happily, the Bishop of Tver supported him, and he was able to continue his theological work and carry on a large correspondence despite his confinement. He endured these grim conditions for twenty years. Toward the end of his life, he was finally freed by the Tsar in response to pleas on his behalf by the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria and the intervention of pious Russian nobles. He was received with honor in Moscow, and allowed to carry on his theological work at the Lavra. The Tsar Ivan IV came to honor him highly, partly because the Saint had foretold the death of the Tsar's son. When the Tsar called a Church Council to fight the doctrines of some who had brought the Calvinist heresy into Russia, he asked St Maximos to attend. Too old and weak to travel, the Saint sent a brilliant refutation of the heresy to the Council; this was his last written work. He reposed in peace in 1556, aged eighty-six. Not long after his death, he was glorified by the Church in Greece as a Holy Confessor and 'Enlightener of Russia.' In 1988 (1) he was added to the calendar of Saints by the Moscow Patriarchate.

JANUARY 22

Holy Apostle Timothy

This is the Apostle to whom two of St Paul's Epistles are addressed. He was from Lystra in Lycania, born to a pagan Greek father and a Jewish mother. His mother, whose name was Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, brought him up in piety and love of the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul converted the two women during his first missionary visit to Lystra; returning seven years later, he found Timothy full of zeal for Christ, and baptized him. Timothy became his closest disciple; in his epistles, St Paul calls him "my dearly beloved son." So that Timothy would be able to preach the Gospel in the synagogues, St Paul personally circumcised him.

The Apostle Paul consecrated Timothy as the first bishop of Ephesus. As such, he became a disciple and exarch of St John the Evangelist, who supervised all the churches in Asia. In AD 97, he attempted to oppose the celebration of a festival to Artemis; the pagans, enraged, mobbed him and beat him to death. He was buried near the tomb of St John. In 356 his precious relics were translated (along with those of Sts Andrew and Luke) to Constantinople and enshrined in the Church of the Holy Apostles. In 1204 they were stolen by the Latin Crusaders when they pillaged the city.

Holy Martyr Anastasius of Persia (628)

He was a Persian, the son of a Magus, a soldier in the Persian army under Chosroes II, who at that time was making inroads into the Christian Empire. His Persian name was Magundat. Chosroes captured Jerusalem in 614, and carried away the Precious Cross as a trophy. Magundat heard of this, and of all the miracles worked by the Cross; and he wondered why the ruins of an instrument of torture were so revered by the Christians. Seeking out Christian elders to answer his questions, he learned of the Incarnation, life, Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Christ, and with joy embraced the Christian Faith as Truth. He was baptized by St Modestus, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and given the name of Anastasius. At the same time, he took monastic vows. For a time he lived in a monastery in Jerusalem, but then went forth, found some Persian Magi at Caesarea, and chastised them for embracing delusions. Since he was in Persian territory (as he well knew), he was taken to the Persian governor, interrogated, imprisoned, and finally taken with other captives to Persia. There, despite many severe tortures, he refused to return to his former error, and was hanged by one hand, strangled, then beheaded.

JANUARY 23

Hieromartyr Clement of Ancyra, and Martyr Agathangelus (296)

He was from Ancyra in Galatia, son of a pagan father and a Christian mother named Euphrosyne. His mother prophesied on her deathbed that he would suffer great torments for Christ over many years. After her death he was adopted and reared by a pious woman named Sophia. From the age of twelve, he began to fast and pray like the monks, so that he was soon ordained a deacon, and became Bishop of Ancyra at the age of twenty. His piety and zeal for the faith attracted the attention of the Imperial Governor of the region, who had him arrested. Thus began Clement's twenty-eight years of almost continuous suffering for the Faith. When he stood firm despite many tortures, he was sent to the Emperor Diocletian in Rome. The Emperor showed him a table set with costly vessels on one side, and another decked with instruments of torture on the other, and bade Clement to make his choice. The Saint replied: "These precious vessels remind how much more

glorious must be the eternal good things of Paradise; and these instruments of torture remind me of the everlasting punishments of hell that await those who deny the Lord."

The Saint was viciously tortured, then transported to Nicomedia, where a converted pagan named Agathangelus ('good angel') became his companion. For many years they endured unspeakable torments alternating with long imprisonments, but nothing would move them to deny the precious Faith of Christ. After twenty-eight years of suffering, Agathangelus was beheaded; but Clement was briefly paroled and allowed to celebrate the services of Theophany and to give the holy Communion to his fellow-Christians. A few days later, as he was again celebrating the Divine Liturgy, some pagan soldiers burst into the church and beheaded him at the altar.

JANUARY 24

† Our Holy Mother Xenia of Petersburg, fool for Christ (~1800)

She was born about 1730, and as a young woman married an army colonel named Andrei, a handsome and dashing man fond of worldly living. When she was twenty-six years old, her husband died suddenly after drinking with his friends, leaving Xenia a childless widow. Soon afterward, she gave away all her possessions and disappeared from St Petersburg for eight years; it is believed that she spent the time in a hermitage, or even a monastery, learning the ways of the spiritual life. When she returned to St Petersburg, she appeared to have lost her reason: she dressed in her husband's army overcoat, and would only answer to his name. She lived without a home, wandering the streets of the city, mocked and abused by many. She accepted alms from charitable people, but immediately gave them away to the poor: her only food came from meals that she sometimes accepted from those she knew. At night she withdrew to a field outside the city where she knelt in prayer until morning.

Slowly, the people of the city noticed signs of a holiness that underlay her seemingly deranged life: she showed prophecy, and her very presence almost always proved to be a blessing. The *Synaxarion* says "The blessing of God seemed to accompany her wherever she went: when she entered a shop the day's takings would be noticeably greater; when a cabman gave her a lift he would get plenty of custom; when she embraced a sick child it would soon get better. So compassion, before long, gave way to veneration, and people generally came to regard her as the true guardian angel of the city."

Forty-five years after her husband's death, St Xenia reposed in peace at the age of seventy-one, sometime around 1800. Her tomb immediately became a place of pilgrimage: so many people took soil from the gravesite as a blessing that new soil had to be supplied regularly; finally a stone slab was placed over the grave, but this too was gradually chipped away by the faithful. Miracles, healings and appearances of St Xenia occur to this day, to those who visit her tomb or who simply ask her intercessions. Her prayers are invoked especially for help in finding employment, a home, or a spouse (all of which she renounced in her own life). A pious custom is to offer a Panachida / Trisagion Service for the repose of her husband Andrei, for whom she prayed fervently throughout her life.

Saint Xenia was first officially glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia in 1978; then by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1988.

Our Venerable Mother Xenia of Rome, with her two maidservants (5th c.)

She was the daughter of a noble Christian family in Rome, and was named Eusebia in Baptism. Though she desired to offer up her virginity to Christ, her parents arranged a marriage for her against her wishes. On her wedding night, she fled the city, accompanied by two slaves, and took ship for Alexandria. When she reached the island of Kos, she changed her name to Xenia ('Stranger'), and prayed to God that, as he had sent the Apostle Paul to St Thecla (see September 24), he would send her a true guide on the path to salvation. Soon a holy Elder named Paul found her and made her his spiritual child. He took her and her two companions to Myiassa in Caria (where he later became Bishop), and established them in a monastery there. For many years they lived the 'angelic life' very fully, and Xenia reposed in peace at an advanced age. At her funeral, a luminous cross appeared in the sky over the procession, following the burial party and disappearing only when the Saint's body was buried.

Our Holy Father Macdonian (ca. 430)

He lived in asceticism in the wild hills outside Antioch. For forty-five years he had no tent or house of any kind, but wandered from place to place, living in caves or in clefts. In his old age, his disciples finally prevailed on him to build a small hut. Altogether he spent seventy years living in solitary asceticism.

Once a hunter met the recluse and asked him what he did in the mountains. The Saint answered 'Like you, I have come to the mountain to hunt. I am hunting for God, whom I long to see. I ardently desire to catch Him and will never tire of so excellent a chasel'

Once the people of Antioch rioted and tore down a pair of statues of the Emperor Theodosius and his wife. Two

generals came from Constantinople, planning to inflict a bloody punishment on the people. Saint Macedonian, learning of this, came to the city and sought out the generals, asking them to take a message to the Emperor: that he, being human and subject to weakness like all men, should not be immoderately angry with other men; and that he should not, in return for the destruction of lifeless images, destroy those who are the very image of God.

During his lifetime Saint Macedonian was granted the gifts of spiritual insight and wonderworking, by which he worked many miracles of healing for the people of Antioch and its surroundings. He reposed in peace around 430, and was buried with honor in Antioch.

JANUARY 25

† Our Father among the Saints Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople (389)

This light of the Church is one of only three holy Fathers whom the Church has honored with the name "the Theologian" (the others are St John the Evangelist and Theologian, and St Symeon the New Theologian).

He was born in 329 in Arianzus in Cappadocia to a pious and holy family: both his father Gregory, mother Nonna, brother Caesarius and sister Gorgonia are all counted among the Saints of the Church. His father later became Bishop of Nazianzus. He studied in Palestine, then in Alexandria, then in Athens. On the way to Athens, his ship was almost sunk in a violent storm; Gregory, who had not yet been baptized, prayed to the Lord to preserve him, and promised that henceforth he would dedicate his entire life to God. Immediately the storm ceased.

In Athens, Gregory's fellow students included St Basil the Great and the future Emperor Julian the Apostate. The friendship between Gregory and Basil blossomed into a true spiritual friendship; they were loving brothers in Christ for the rest of their lives. After completing their studies, Sts Gregory and Basil lived together as monks in hermitage at Pontus. Much against St Gregory's will, his father ordained him a priest, and St Basil consecrated him Bishop of Sasima (in the Archdiocese of Caesarea, over which St Basil was Archbishop).

In 381 the Second Ecumenical Council condemned Macedonius, Archbishop of Constantinople, and appointed St Gregory in his place. When he arrived in the City, he found that the Arians controlled all the churches, and he was forced to "rule" from a small house chapel. From there he preached his five great sermons on the Trinity, the *Triadika*; these were so powerfully influential that when he left Constantinople two years later, every church in the City had been restored to the Orthodox.

St Gregory was always a theologian and a contemplative, not an administrator, and the duties of Archbishop were agonizing to him. In 382 he received permission from a council of his fellow-bishops and the Emperor to retire from the see of Constantinople. He returned to Nazianzus (for which reason he is sometimes called St Gregory of Nazianzus). There he reposed in peace in 391 at the age of sixty-two.

His writings show a theological depth and a sublimity of expression perhaps unsurpassed in the Church. His teaching on the Holy Trinity is a great bastion of Orthodox Faith; in almost every one of his published homilies he preaches the Trinity undivided and of one essence.

JANUARY 26

Our Holy Father Xenophon, his wife Mary and their sons Arcadius and John (6th c.)

Xenophon was a wealthy senator in Constantinople during the reign of Justinian. He and his wife Mary had two sons, Arcadius and John, to whom they gave every advantage of education. When they were of age, Xenophon sent them both to study law in Berytus (Beirut). But the ship on which they set out was wrecked in a storm, and the two brothers were cast ashore, alive but separated, neither knowing whether the other had survived.

Both brothers gave thanks to God for their salvation and, newly conscious of the vanity of earthly things, both became monks: John in Tyre and Arcadius in Jerusalem. Two years later, having heard no news from his sons, Xenophon made inquiries and found that they had never arrived at Beirut, and that they had seemingly perished in a shipwreck. Giving thanks to God, who gives and takes away, both Xenophon and his wife Mary put on coarse garments and went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In Jerusalem, they met the spiritual father of Arcadius, who told them that both their sons were alive and that they would soon see them.

By God's providence, John and Arcadius met one another at Golgotha and, joyfully reunited, spent some time serving Arcadius' holy Elder. Two days later Xenophon and Mary, visiting the Elder, spent time with their two sons but did not recognize them until the Elder revealed their identity. The parents wept for joy and decided immediately to take up the monastic life themselves. Giving away their considerable wealth, the two entered monasteries in the Holy Land. Both parents and sons went far in the life of prayer, being granted the power to work miracles and foreknow future events.

St Ammonas of Egypt, disciple of St Anthony the Great (350)

<http://www.abbamoses.com/months/january.html>

26/03/2008

"Saint Ammonas was a disciple of Saint Antony the Great and became his successor at the head of the hermits of the outer mountain of Pispix, after having spent fourteen years at Scetis in ceaseless prayer to the Lord to be granted victory over anger. He was afterwards consecrated bishop, probably by Saint Athanasius the Great. He possessed impassibility to the extent of being as though ignorant of the existence of evil, and incapable of passing judgment on anyone.

"One day some people came to ask him to settle a difference among them. The Saint responded by pretending to be insane, and answered a woman who treated him as a madman: 'You don't realize how much trouble I've given myself in the desert to acquire this madness and I have lost it today because of you!' On another occasion when he was taken to visit a brother with a bad reputation, he sat on the barrel where his concubine was hiding while his accusers searched his cell in vain. Then, taking his leave of the unfortunate man, he simply said: 'Brother, have a care for yourself!'

"When he was asked which deeds of asceticism are most pleasing to God, he replied: 'Just sit in your cell and eat a little every day, always keeping the prayer of the Publican in your heart (Luke 18:13), and you can be saved.' He also said that the fear of God begets moans and tears and these cause joy to arise in the soul, filling it with divine strength to do what is pleasing to God, and that this power from on high establishes us in the company of the Angels. Raised thus from height to height as we humbly pray to be delivered from sin, we shall (he said) receive as if of itself, revelation of the mysteries of God." (*Synaxarion*)

Our Holy Mother Paula of Rome (404)

She was born in 347 to a noble family in Rome, and at age sixteen married Toxotius, a prominent nobleman. Though her husband was a pagan, he was devoted to her and gave her freedom to keep a Christian home and rear her children as Christians. They were blessed with five children. When she was thirty-two her husband died suddenly, and Paula resolved to turn her large house in Rome into a monastery. Later she traveled to the Holy Land with her spiritual father St Jerome (June 15). In Bethlehem she established two monasteries, one for women (where she dwelt) and one for St Jerome's companions. Every day the nuns chanted the entire Psalter, which they were required to learn by heart. Paula was exceptionally austere in her fasting and lavish in her almsgiving, often giving away to the poor even the goods needed by her community for subsistence. She aided her spiritual father and brother Jerome in his controversies with Origen's followers: St Jerome himself was hot-tempered, and St Paula often exhorted him to confront his enemies with patience and humility.

When she was fifty-six years old, she felt her death approaching, and heard Christ say to her 'Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone' (Song of Songs 2:10-11). To this she replied 'The time of harvest has come. I shall truly see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living,' and gave up her soul joyfully. Her funeral was attended by throngs of monks, nuns and poor people, all of whom revered her as their mother and benefactress.

JANUARY 27

† Translation of the relics (437) of St John Chrysostom.

In the year after the Saint's repose both the Emperor Arcadius and his wife Eudoxia, who had been most responsible for St John's exile, died. Their son Theodosius II succeeded to the throne. Soon most of the exiled supporters of St John were restored to their sees. In 434 St Proclus, a disciple of St John Chrysostom, was made Archbishop of Constantinople, and persuaded the Emperor to have St John's relics solemnly translated from Comana to Constantinople. But all efforts to disinter his remains failed, as if his coffin were sealed in the earth. Learning of this, the Emperor wrote a letter to St John asking forgiveness for his father's persecution, and pleading with him to agree to return to the Imperial City for the benefit of the faithful. As soon as this letter was placed over the Saint's tomb, his coffin was removed with no difficulty and conveyed solemnly to Constantinople.

When the cortege reached Constantinople, the Emperor met it and prostrated himself before it, once again begging the Saint's forgiveness for the sins of the State against him. At last, the relics were deposited beneath the altar of the Church of the Holy Apostles, where they worked many miracles during the celebration of the Liturgy. Since then, the relics have been scattered throughout the world, where they never fail to reveal the Saint's loving presence.

JANUARY 28

Today we commemorate two shining stars of the life of prayer and stillness, both of them Syrians.

Our Holy Father Ephraim the Syrian (373)

He is often called "The Harp of the Holy Spirit" for the sublimity of his writings. He was born in Nisibis of Mesopotamia about the year 306. He embraced the Christian faith while young and for this was driven from his home by his father, a pagan priest. He came under the care of St James of Nisibis (January 13), who was one of the bishops at the Council of

Nicaea. He took up a strictly ascetical life, renouncing all possessions and denying himself all comforts. It is said that his eyes constantly flowed with tears: tears of compunction for his own sins, or tears of joy as he contemplated the wonders of God's grace.

He was baptized at the age of twenty and withdrew to the desert, then settled in Edessa. Once, as he was walking to the city, a harlot approached him. Pretending to accept her proposition, he took her to the city's public square and suggested that they lie together there, in plain view. Horrified, the woman rebuked him, saying 'Have you no shame?' The Saint answered, 'Poor woman, you are afraid of being watched by other people; but why are you not afraid of being seen by God, who sees everything and, on the last day, will judge all our actions and most secret thoughts?' The woman repented and, with the Saint's help, embarked upon a new life.

The Saint returned to the desert for a time, then to Nisibis to aid the Persian Christians, persecuted because they were seen as allies of the Romans. When Nisibis finally fell under Persian rule, St Ephraim and his spiritual father St James both settled in Edessa. At that time Edessa was troubled by the gnostic heretic Bardaisan, one of whose devices was to compose attractive hymns, which became popular and enticed many away from the truth. Taking up Bardaisan's own weapons, St Ephraim composed a number of hymns, beautiful in word and melody, which poetically set forth the true Faith.

Hearing of the sanctity of St Basil the Great, St Ephraim traveled to Cappadocia to meet him. It is recorded that at their first meeting, St Basil greeted him: 'Art thou the Ephraim who hath beautifully bended his neck and taken upon himself the yoke of the saving Word?'; to which St Ephraim replied, 'I am Ephraim who hinder myself from traveling the way to heaven.' After discoursing with the Syrian Saint for some time, St Basil cried out 'O, if only I had thy sins!' Basil then ordained St Ephraim to the diaconate. He would have ordained him a priest but St Ephraim, feeling unworthy, refused to be ordained, then and for the rest of his life.

The Saint returned to a life of solitude; but when a famine broke out in Edessa in 372, he came forth to rebuke the wealthy for failing to share their wealth with the poor. Some replied that they knew no one whom they could trust with their goods, so St Ephraim persuaded them to give their alms to him for distribution to the poor. A true deacon, he cared for the sick with his own hands. The following year, he reposed in peace.

St Ephraim was the first to use hymnody and song to express the teaching of the Church, and so might be called the Church's first hymnographer. His works were probably an inspiration to St Romanos the Melodist, also a Syrian. He is said to have written more than three million lines of verse in Syriac, in addition to many homilies and treatises. Only a fraction of his work has been translated.

A beautiful selection of St Ephraim's writings can be found in *A Spiritual Psalter*, a collection edited by St Theophan the Recluse, available in English.

Our Holy Father Isaac the Syrian, bishop of Nineveh (7th c.)

He was born early in the seventh century in the East. His birthplace is unclear: the *Great Horologion* says that he was born in eastern Arabia (present-day Qatar); the *Synaxarion* that he was born in Kurdistan. While still young he entered the Lavra of St Matthew with his brother, but after a few years of monastic life, having advanced far in obedience and the practice of prayer, he withdrew into the desert. His reputation for holiness reached the city of Nineveh, where the people prevailed on the hierarchy to consecrate him as their bishop in 670. Reluctantly but obediently, St Isaac took up the duties of shepherd of his flock in Nineveh. After a few months, he was called on to settle a dispute between two of the faithful, but they rejected his counsel and said 'Leave your Gospel out of this matter!' The holy bishop said, 'If they are not prepared to obey Our Lord's commandments, what need have they of me?', and retired to live as a hermit in the mountains of Kurdistan. Later, he settled in the monastery of Raban Shapur, where he wrote his Ascetical Homilies and other jewel-like works on the spiritual life. There he reposed in peace.

The fame of St Isaac's Homilies spread, and about one hundred years after their writing they were translated from Syriac into Greek by two monks in Palestine. In this form they spread throughout the monastic world, becoming a treasured guide to those who seek the fullness of the life of prayer. The *Synaxarion* says, "The book of Saint Isaac is, with the Ladder of Saint John Climacus, the indispensable guide for every Orthodox soul to journey safely toward God. Hence, not many years ago, a holy spiritual father, Jerome of Egina (d. 1966), recommended begging, if necessary, in order to be able to purchase a copy." We are blessed to have a good translation of the Ascetical Homilies available in English.

Saint Isaac is a very unusual case of an Orthodox Saint who lived outside the canonical boundaries of the Church: he was a bishop of the "Nestorian" communion, now sometimes called the "Oriental Orthodox." The purity of his own Orthodox faith is so clearly evident in his writings that the Church has nonetheless recognized his sanctity.

For his life, see December 20.

After his martyrdom, devoured by wild beasts in the amphitheater in Rome, only a few bones remained. These precious relics were gathered by the faithful, who took them back to Antioch, where they were received with joy by his former flock.

St Andrei Rublev, iconographer (1430)

Many consider him the greatest iconographer of all time, and his "Holy Trinity" the finest icon. Very little is known of his life. He was born around 1360, and probably studied with the Byzantine iconographer Theophanes the Greek. He is known to have created icons for the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Moscow and the Cathedral of the Dormition at Vladimir. He created a highly spiritual and distinctively Russian iconographic style that set the standard for Russian iconography for centuries thereafter. It is said that he knew St Sergius of Radonezh (July 5). In his later years he became a monk.

Our Holy Father Aphrahat the Persian (4th c.)

He was from the pagan Persian aristocracy, but came to faith in Christ and left his home for the Christian city of Edessa, where he was baptized. He later moved to Antioch, where he lived in prayer and asceticism a short distance from the city. He ate nothing but a small amount of bread until he was extremely old, when he added some greens to his diet. Though he knew very little Greek, he was empowered by the Holy Spirit to win many converts to Christ and to confound the learned Arian heretics who were disturbing the Church in Antioch.

When Aphrahat learned that the Arian Emperor Valens was persecuting Christ's Church, he moved to the city to support the true Faith. One day the Emperor himself met Aphrahat in the city square and asked him why he had left his solitude and come to Antioch. The Saint answered 'Tell me this: if I were a maiden at home in my secluded apartment and saw someone setting fire to my father's house, would you not advise me to put out the blaze as soon as possible? That is what I am doing now, because the Church, the heavenly Father's house, is burning down in the fire that you have set!' One of the Emperor's attendants threatened Aphrahat with death for this impertinence; but the attendant himself later perished, drowned as he was heating water for the Emperor's bath. This made the Emperor afraid to persecute the holy one, who continued to preach the true Faith and to perform many miracles. He reposed in peace.

JANUARY 30

† Synaxis of the Three Holy Hierarchs: St Basil the Great, St Gregory the Theologian, and St John Chrysostom

This feast was instituted during the reign of Alexis I Comnenus (1081-1118). A dispute arose in Constantinople among various prominent citizens and clergy, about which of the three Fathers Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, or St John Chrysostom was the greatest. In typically Byzantine fashion, the people of the City joined into the dispute, which became more animated, dividing the populace into three hostile factions styling themselves Basilians, Gregorians and Joannites. At last, desiring to restore peace to the City and the Church, the three holy hierarchs themselves appeared to the monk John Mauropus; they revealed to him that they stand together in harmony and in equal glory before the heavenly throne, and instructed him to compose a common service for the three of them. Saint John (Mauropus) obeyed, and chose January 30 as the date of the commemoration, since each of the three hierarchs is commemorated separately in January.

Saint Peter, King of Bulgaria (970)

"Saint Peter was a humble, devout and peace-loving man, unlike his father, Tsar Symeon the Warrior (d. 927), during whose reign there had been perpetual warfare. By contrast, Peter's long reign was peaceful, and notable for the restoration of good relations with Byzantium and with the West. Peter married Maria, the grand-daughter of the Emperor Roman Lacapenus, who recognized him as *basileus* (tsar or king), and he obtained independence from Constantinople for the Bulgarian Church with its own Patriarch. He had a great love for Saint John of Rila (19 Oct.), whom he would often consult, and he kept in touch with renowned ascetics of the time like Saint Paul of Latros (15 Dec.). The King acted energetically against the Bogomil heresy, an offshoot of Manicheism, by which some of his people, lacking sufficient instruction in the faith, were being misled. He called a council in order to condemn the heresy and reassert Christian principles. Nevertheless, the infection was to remain active for many years in Bulgaria. Following the invasion of the north of his Kingdom by Prince Svyatoslav of Kiev in 969, Peter abdicated and became a monk. He died in the following year, having consecrated his final days to God alone." (*Synaxarion*)

A note on the Bogomils: The Bogomils flourished in the Eastern Europe as an organized church from the 10th to the 15th century. In theology they were dualistic, incorporating some Manichean and Gnostic ideas from the Paulicians. They were nationalistic and gained much support through their opposition to Byzantine dominance over the Slavic peoples. They disappeared as an organized body around the fifteenth century, but elements of their beliefs persisted in popular thinking for many centuries afterward.

JANUARY 31