

# God is Wonderful in His Saints

## Orthodox Saints commemorated in March

### MARCH 1

#### Martyr Eudocia of Heliopolis (2nd c.)

Eudocia was from Heliopolis of Phoenicia (now Baalbek in Lebanon). A surpassingly beautiful pagan, she led a licentious life and became wealthy from the gifts of her many lovers. One day an elderly monk, Germanus, came to Heliopolis and stayed with a Christian whose house adjoined Eudocia's. At night, he began to read aloud from the Psalter and a book on the Last Judgment. From next-door, Eudocia heard him. Her heart was reached, and she stood attentively all night, listening to every word in fear and contrition. The next day she begged Germanus to visit her, and he explained the saving Christian faith to her. Finally, Eudocia asked the local bishop to baptise her. She freed her servants, gave all her wealth to the poor, and entered a monastery.

"Her former lovers, enraged at her conversion, her refusal to return to her old ways, and the withering away of her beauty through the severe mortifications she practiced, betrayed her as a Christian to Vincent the Governor, and she was beheaded" (*Great Horologion*). According to some, this was under Trajan (98-117); according to others, under Hadrian (117-138).

The *Prologue* gives a somewhat different account: that after entering the monastery, Eudocia was permitted to pursue the monastic life in peace — with such devotion that, thirteen months after she entered the monastery, she was chosen as abbess. She lived for fifty-six years in the monastery, and was granted the gift of raising the dead. In her old age, a persecution of Christians arose, and Eudocia was beheaded along with many others. "Here is a wonderful example of how a vessel of uncleanness can be purified, sanctified and filled with a precious, heavenly fragrance by the grace of the Holy Spirit" (*Prologue*).

### MARCH 2

#### Hieromartyr Theodotus, bishop of Cyrenia (326)

Known for his wisdom and virtue, he was chosen as Bishop of Cyrenia on the island of Cyprus. When a persecution broke out against the Christians under the Emperor Licinius, Theodotus was arrested and subjected to many tortures. His torturer Sabinus urged him repeatedly to renounce Christ and worship the idols, but Theodotus replied, 'If you knew the goodness of my God, who, it is my hope, will by these brief tortures make me worthy of eternal life, you would wish to suffer for Him as I do.' The pagans then drove nails into his body, for which he thanked God. Believing that his death was approaching, he calmly gave counsel and instruction to the Christians around him. By God's providence, an order came from the new Emperor Constantine to free all Christians who were being held for the sake of Christ. Thus Theodotus was freed and, though greatly weakened by his torments, served his flock faithfully for two more years before reposing in peace.

#### Four Hundred and Forty Martyrs of Lombardy (379)

Forty of them were beheaded in one place in Lombardy (in Italy) because they refused to eat food offered to idols. Another four hundred were massacred because they refused to join with the Lombard pagans' practice of dancing around a goat's head that had been brought for sacrifice to the idols. Their deaths are recorded by St Gregory the Dialogist (Gregory the Great).

We sometimes imagine that the Roman Empire converted almost overnight to Christianity during the reign of St Constantine the Great. This incident, more than two hundred years into Europe's 'Christian era', reminds us that the progress of the Faith among the people was often slow and halting, and that paganism remained a force for many centuries.

#### Holy Martyr Euthalia (257)

She was a pagan maiden living in Sicily with her mother (also named Euthalia) and her brother Sarmilianus. When Euthalia's mother became ill with an issue of blood, the holy martyrs Alphius, Philadelphus and Cyrinus (May 10) appeared to her in a dream and told her that she would only be healed if she were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Heeding the dream, she believed, was baptised, and was healed. Her daughter Euthalia, seeing this wonder, was also baptised. Sarmilianus, despising and hating the Christian faith, first mocked his mother and sister for their conversion, then threatened them. The mother fled the house in fear. Euthalia remained, saying to her brother 'I am a Christian, and

have no fear of death.' The cruel Sermilianus persecuted her more and more harshly until finally, enraged by the futility of his threats, he beheaded his own sister by his own hand, unknowingly procuring for her a crown of eternal glory. "And thus in this example were fulfilled the words of Christ that He was bringing a sword among men which would divide those of one blood but not those of one faith (Matt. 10:34-35)." (*Prologue*)

#### MARCH 2 OR 3 (FEBRUARY 18 OC)

##### St Nicholas (Planas), priest in Athens (1932)

St Nicholas was a simple parish priest in Athens, humble, poor, and barely literate. He was born on Naxos in 1851 to moderately prosperous parents; but when his father died, his mother was reduced to near-poverty, and moved the family to Athens. St Nicholas married at the age of seventeen, but his wife died after a short time, leaving him with one son. He served the Divine Liturgy daily, never missing a day for fifty years, despite illness, storms, and war. His liturgies unfailingly lasted for several hours, mostly due to the hundreds of commemorations that he included. The faithful would give him sheets of paper containing names to be commemorated; he would carry all the sheets with him in bulging satchels. A few of his spiritual children made it their task to go through the papers secretly and discard the oldest and most worn, so that the commemorations would not increase without limit.

In his conversation, the Saint had a simple and childlike (his detractors would say childish) manner, and he was widely despised by more sophisticated laymen, priests and hierarchs, never being appointed to any but the smallest and poorest parishes. Many, however, discerned his holiness, and a large *synodia* of spiritual children slowly gathered around him.

Once, a very young altar boy ran out from the altar while Fr Nicholas was serving and, trembling with fear, cried to his mother, 'Mama, Father Nicholas is floating in the air!' His mother, trying to comfort him, said 'Don't be afraid, all priests do that when they serve the Liturgy.' St. Nicholas was often in difficulties with the hierarchy because he continued to keep the feasts according to the Old Calendar after the Church in Greece had adopted the New Calendar. Nonetheless, he never broke communion with the national church (nor they with him): his humility left no room for Church politics. He was later proclaimed a Saint, both by the official 'New Calendar' Church of Greece and their 'Old Calendar' opposition. Like St John Maximovich, his holiness has transcended the canonical disputes that bedevil the Church. He reposed in peace in 1932.

#### MARCH 3

##### Holy Martyrs Eutropius, Cleonicus and Basiliscus (308)

They were fellow-soldiers and kinsmen of St Theodore the Tyro (Feb. 17). When St Theodore received his martyrdom, they were kept in prison because the governor of Asia was unwilling to execute them. But a new and crueler governor, Asclepiodotus, took his place and ordered the three soldiers of Christ to be brought to him. At first, the governor used flattery and bribery to attempt to turn the three from Christ. He invited Eutropius to dine with him, but Eutropius refused, quoting the Psalm 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsels of the ungodly.' He then offered them a huge amount of silver, which they likewise refused, telling the governor that Judas lost his soul for silver. The governor then turned to torture, subjecting the three to extreme torments. At last, he condemned Eutropius and Cleonicus to crucifixion, for which they joyfully gave thanks that they had been found worthy to die the same death as Christ. Basiliscus was left in prison awhile longer in hopes that the deaths of his companions would weaken his resolve; but when he remained steadfast in the Faith, he was beheaded, on May 22 (on which he is also commemorated) in 308.

##### An Unknown Girl in Alexandria (?)

"She was from a wealthy house, having a good father who suffered much and had a difficult death, and an evil mother who had an easy life, died in peace and was buried with honour. In uncertainty whether to live by the example of her father or her mother, this maiden had a vision, in which the state of her father and of her mother were shown to her. She saw her father in the Kingdom of God, and her mother in darkness and torment. This determined her to devote her whole life to God, and, like her father, follow the commandments of God without regard to any opposition or misfortune that she might have to endure. And she followed the commandments of God to the end, with His help, and was made worthy of the Kingdom of heaven, in which she was reunited with her beloved father." (*Prologue*)

#### MARCH 4

##### St Gerasimos of the Jordan (475)

He was from Lycia in Asia Minor. After living there as a hermit for many years, he traveled to the Egyptian Thebaid and lived among the Desert Fathers. He then went to Palestine, where he founded the great Lavra, a community of about

seventy monks, that remains to this day. The monastery's rule was simple and strict: During the five weekdays, the monks would stay in their cells, praying and weaving baskets and mats. On these days they ate only a little dry bread and some dates. On Saturdays and Sundays the monks gathered for worship and ate boiled vegetables with a little wine. Each monk owned only one garment; if he left his cell he was required to leave it open so that anyone else could take whatever he needed from it. Saint Gerasimos himself was an example to all of them, exceeding even the rule that he laid upon them: during the Great Fast, he would eat nothing but what he received in Holy Communion.

In the desert, the Saint once saw a lion in great pain from a thorn in its paw. Moved by compassion, Gerasim approached it, made the sign of the Cross and pulled the thorn out. The lion followed the elder back to the monastery and remained there until the Saint's death. When Gerasimos died, the lion, overcome by grief, soon died also, lying upon the Saint's grave.

Saint Gerasimos was present at the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon, where he proved a strong champion of Orthodoxy, though he had inclined toward the Monophysite heresy in his youth. He reposed in peace in 475.

#### St James the Faster of Phoenecia (6th c.)

"He lived in the sixth century. He was so perfected in godliness that he was able to heal the gravest illnesses by his prayers. But the enemy of the human race brought a heavy temptation on him. There was once sent to him a woman who had been corrupted by some mockers. She pretended to weep before him, but enticed him to sin. Seeing that he would fall into sin, James put his left hand into the fire and held it there until it was completely burned. Seeing this, the woman was filled with fear and horror, repented and reformed her life.

"But on a second occasion he did not resist and fell with a young girl whom her parents had brought to him to be healed of her madness. He indeed healed her, but then sinned with her and, in order to conceal the sin, killed her and threw her into a river. As always, the path from lust to murder was not very long. James spent ten years after that as a penitent, living in a grave. He learned after that that God had forgiven him, because, when he at one time prayed for rain in a time of great drought from which both men and cattle were suffering, it fell.

"Here is an example, similar to that of David, of how wicked the evil demon is; how, by the permission of God, the greatest spiritual giants can topple, and how again, by sincere repentance, God in His compassion will forgive the greatest sins and does not punish those who punish themselves." (*Prologue*)

#### MARCH 5

##### Martyr Conon of Isauria (2nd c.)

The holy Martyr Conon lived in the days of the holy Apostles; he was born in the village of Bydane of Isauria in Asia Minor, to parents named Nestor and Nada. He was instructed in the Faith and baptised into Christ by the Archangel Michael himself, who, it is said, accompanied him for the rest of his life. His parents joined him in marriage to a pagan maiden named Anna; but on their wedding night he took a candle, put it under a vessel, and asked her 'Which is better, light or darkness?' She answered 'Light,' and he told her of the Christian faith and the joys of the spiritual life. She accepted Christ, and the two agreed to live in virginity. Conon went on to bring many pagans to Christ, including his own parents. His wife and both parents died after a few years (Nestor as a Martyr) and he gave himself up entirely to prayer, fasting, and contemplation on God. He was known as a wonder-worker, and even evil spirits were compelled to serve him.

During one of the persecutions, Magnus the governor of Isauria imprisoned Conon and had him tortured, beaten and stabbed with knives. Believers obtained some of his blood, and the sick who were anointed with it became well. A large crowd of Christians whom Conon had brought to Faith surrounded the governor's palace demanding Conon's release, and the frightened governor let him go. He lived for two more years in his own home, then reposed in peace.

##### St Mark of Athens (4th c.)

He was born in Athens of pagan parents, but believed and was baptized, and, forsaking everything, lived as a hermit in the desert beyond Egypt. He did not see another human being for ninety-five years, and we would know nothing of his life had not the monk Serapion come upon him. Mark was about to depart this life, and lived only long enough to tell Serapion his story. Serapion then gave him burial.

##### St Mark the Ascetic (5th c.)

St Mark was a disciple of St John Chrysostom, tonsured a monk at the age of forty by St John himself. He then withdrew to the Nitrian desert and lived for sixty years as a hermit, devoting himself to fasting, prayer, and writing spiritual discourses.

Saint Mark knew all the Holy Scriptures by heart. His compassion was so great that he wept at the distress of any of God's creatures: once he wept for the blind pup of a hyena, and the pup received its sight. Though he lived alone in the desert, it is said that he received Communion from an angel.

The holy and scholarly Patriarch Photios held his writings in the highest esteem, and at one time there was a saying, 'sell all that you have, and buy Mark.' Some of these beautiful and profound writings may be read in English in the first volume of the *Philokalia*.

### MARCH 6

#### The 42 Martyrs of Ammorion (345)

They were taken captive when Ammorion in Phrygia fell to the Muslims in 838, during the reign of Emperor Theophilus. Many of them were officers, and because of their status and reputation, their captors, rather than kill them, attempted to convert them to Islam. The forty-two were kept in a miserable dungeon in Syria, where they were alternately promised the highest honors and privileges if they would convert and threatened with the most horrible consequences if they refused. This continued for seven full years, but none would deny his faith in Christ. Finally, unable to shake their faith, their captors beheaded them all in 845.

### MARCH 7

#### Holy Hieromartyrs of Cherson: Basileus, Ephraim, Eugenios, Capito, Aetherios, Agathodoros, and Elpidios (4th c.)

These seven holy Bishops give a vivid picture of the dangers endured by those who traveled to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in the early centuries of the Church. All seven were sent as missionary bishops to Cherson on the Black Sea, and all seven died there as Martyrs. Hermon, Bishop of Jerusalem, first sent Ephraim and Basileus; Basileus raised the son of the prince of Cherson to life, after which many believed and were baptized. The unbelievers, though, bound him by the feet and dragged him through the streets until he died. Ephraim was beheaded when he refused to make sacrifice to the idols. Eugenios, Agathodoros, and Elpidios were then sent by the Bishop of Jerusalem; they were beaten to death with round stones. Aetherius was sent during the reign of Constantine the Great, and was able to govern the Church in freedom and peace, and to build a church in Cherson. Capito, the last to be sent, brought the Gospel to the fierce Scythians. To prove the power of his God, they asked him to go into a burning furnace, saying that if he was not consumed, they would believe. Putting all his trust in God, the holy Bishop vested himself, made the sign of the Cross, and entered the furnace. He stood in the flames, fervently praying, for an hour, and came out untouched. The spectators cried out 'There is one God, the great and powerful God of the Christians, who keeps His servant safe in the burning furnace!', and all those in the town and the surrounding countryside were baptized. This miracle was spoken of at the Council of Nicea (325). Later, Scythian unbelievers captured Capito and drowned him in the River Dnieper.

The *Prologue* says that Aetherios ended his life in peace; the *Great Horologion*, that he was drowned. All these holy missionaries labored around the beginning of the fourth century.

### MARCH 8

#### St Theophylactus, bishop of Nicomedia (845)

"Theophylact was from the east; his native city is unknown. In Constantinople he became a close friend of Tarasius, who afterwards became Patriarch of Constantinople (see Feb. 25). Theophylact was made Bishop of Nicomedia. After the death of Saint Tarasius, his successor Nicephorus (see June 2) called together a number of Bishops to help him in fighting iconoclasm of Emperor Leo the Armenian, who reigned from 813 to 820. Among them was Euthymius, Bishop of Sardis (celebrated Dec. 26), who had attended the holy Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 — he was exiled three times for the sake of the holy icons, and for defying the Emperor Theophilus' command to renounce the veneration of the icons, was scourged from head to foot until his whole body was one great wound, from which he died eight days later, about the year 830; Joseph of Thessalonica (see July 14); Michael of Symnada (see May 23); Emilian, Bishop of Cyzicus (see Aug. 8); and Saint Theophylact, who boldly rebuked Leo to his face, telling him that because he despised the long-suffering of God, utter destruction was about to overtake him, and there would be none to deliver him. For this, Theophylact was exiled to the fortress of Strobilus in Karia of Asia Minor, where after 30 years of imprisonment and hardship, he gave up his holy soul about the year 845. Leo the Armenian, according to the Saint's prophecy, was slain in church on the eve of our Lord's Nativity, in 820." (*Great Horologion*)

#### Hieromartyr Theodoretus (362)

The priest Theodoretus was custodian of a great cathedral in Antioch, built by the Emperor Constantine and known in its time as 'the golden church' for the beauty and luxury of its appointments. When Julian the Apostate came to the throne, he denied Christ and launched a persecution of Christians. The Emperor's uncle, also named Julian, came to Antioch to prosecute the persecution there. After plundering the church he brought Theodoretus to trial and demanded that he deny

Christ. Instead, the faithful priest confessed Christ fervently and rebuked the Emperor for having denied the faith and returned to idol-worship 'as a dog returns to its vomit.' In spite, the judge urinated in the golden church, for which Theodoretus prophesied that he would die a terrible death. Theodoretus was beheaded, and Julian his judge was seized with terrible abdominal pain from the moment he defiled the church until he died in torment.

Note: Theodoretus is commemorated on March 3 in the Greek Calendar.

#### MARCH 9

##### † The Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebastia (Sebaste) (320)

They were all soldiers under one general, taken captive in the time of Licinius for their faith in Christ. They were stripped naked and cast onto a frozen lake at Sebastia in Pontus. They endured the entire night, encouraging each other to be patient. Some accounts say that their persecutors placed warm baths in their sight on the shore to entice them to renounce Christ. Finally one of their number, broken by his sufferings, apostatized and left the company. One of the guards, named Aglaius, saw in a vision thirty-nine wreaths descending from heaven onto the heads of the faithful sufferers, and was moved to declare himself a Christian. He was immediately sent to join the martyrs on the frozen lake, keeping the number of forty complete. In the morning all of them, almost dead, were cast into fire, and their remains thrown in the lake. On the third day the martyrs appeared to Peter, the local bishop, and told him to search for them in the lake. The bishop went to the lake on a dark night with his clergy, and one account says that the bones of the martyrs rose to the surface and burned there like a candle. The relics were gathered and given honorable burial.

This is the most common account. The *Prologue* gives a somewhat different version, in which the martyrs were made to stand, not on the frozen lake, but in the freezing waters.

##### St. Caesarius (369)

He was the brother of St Gregory the Theologian and, like his brother, was a theological writer. In his works he gave an answer to the question: How long did Adam and Eve spend in Paradise before the Fall? Various writers had given estimates ranging from six hours to three days. Saint Caesarius wrote that our first parents' time in Paradise was forty days; and that for this reason Christ fasted for forty days in the wilderness, being tempted by the Devil. "For, while the old Adam was not able to withstand the devil's temptation in the abundance of Paradise, the New Adam withstood him as a true knight in hunger and thirst in the wilderness." (*Prologue*)

#### MARCH 10

##### Martyrs Codratus (Quadratus) and those with him (258)

'In a time of persecution of Christians, many of the faithful fled to the mountains and caves. The mother of this Codratus did so. She was pregnant at that time, and gave birth to Codratus in a forest, dying almost at once. He was kept safe and fed by the providence of God and his guardian angel. Codratus grew up in solitude with nature. He who gave manna from heaven to the Israelites in the wilderness released a sweet dew from a cloud onto the mouth of the child Codratus. when he was twelve years old, he went down to the town, and there some good people took a fancy to him and educated him. He studied medicine and then began to heal the sick, using both natural medicines and, more importantly, the spiritual power and prayer which had been with him from childhood. When a new persecution arose under Decius, Codratus was taken for trial and thrown into prison. Five of his friends stood beside him and confessed the name of Christ. They were: Cyprian, Dionysius, Anectus, Paul and Crescens. They were all dragged through the streets and struck with sticks and stones by the unbelievers, especially by the children, until they arrived at the scaffold. Here the martyrs prayed to God and were beheaded with the sword. A spring of water gushed out onto the earth at the spot, which to this day is called by Codratus' name and commemorates the heroic death for Christ of the holy six. They suffered with honour for the truth in Corinth in the year 250, in the time of the Emperor Decius and his governor Jason.' (*Prologue*)

##### Our Holy Mother Anastasia (563)

She was a noble lady at the Imperial court under the Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora. But when she was widowed she left Constantinople and all her privileges behind and fled to the Egyptian desert. There Abba Daniel tonsured her and, at her request, presented her to the brethren as the eunuch Anastasius, so that she might avoid discovery by imperial investigators. She closed herself in a small cell, where she spent twenty-eight years in prayer and askesis. Shortly before her death, her elder Daniel saw her face shining like the sun.

#### MARCH 11

##### St Sophronios, patriarch of Jerusalem (593)



He was born in Damascus to an eminent family, and was well educated in his youth. Discontented with the wisdom of the world, he entered monastic life in the monastery of St Theodosius, where he became the lifelong friend and disciple of John Moschos. Together they visited the monasteries and hermitages of Egypt; they later wrote down their discoveries among the holy monks in the classic *Spiritual Meadow*. After the death of his teacher, St Sophronius traveled to Jerusalem, which had just been liberated from the Persians. He was there to see the Precious Cross returned from Persia by the Emperor Heraclius, who carried it into Jerusalem on his back. A few years later, in 634, St Sophronius was elected Patriarch of Jerusalem, where he served his flock wisely for three years and three months. He was zealous in the defense of Orthodoxy against the Monothelite heresy: He convoked a Council in Jerusalem which condemned it before it was condemned at the Sixth Ecumenical Council. The holy Patriarch even traveled to Constantinople to rebuke the Patriarch Sergius and Emperor Heraclius, who had embraced the Monothelite error.

The years of peace were few for the Holy Land; for just as the Persian Empire was decisively defeated by Heraclius, the followers of Islam erupted out of Arabia, conquering most of North Africa and the Middle East in a few years. The Saint was so grieved by the capture of Jerusalem in 637 by the Caliph Omar that begged God to take him, so that he might not live to see the desecration of the holy places. His prayer was granted, and he reposed in peace less than a year later.

St Sophronios is the author of the *Life of Saint Mary of Egypt*, appointed to be read in the churches during every Great Lent. He also wrote the service of the Great Blessing of the Waters. Some have attributed the Vesperal hymn "Gladsome Light" to him, but we know that it dates from before the time of St Basil the Great, who mentions it in his writings. It seems though, that St Sophronios supplemented the hymn, and that its present form is due to him.

St John Moschos, author of the *Spiritual Meadow* (622)

He is commemorated today along with his disciple and friend St Sophronius (see above).

Holy Martyr Pionius (250)

"A priest of Smyrna, he suffered there in the time of Decius' persecution. They condemned him to be crucified, which was a great joy to him. And as soon as the soldiers assembled the cross and laid it on the ground, Pionius laid himself on it and stretched out his arms, calling to the soldiers to put the nails into his hands. The cross was inserted into the ground upside down, and a fire lit under the martyr's head. There were many bystanders. Pionius closed his eyes and prayed to God within himself. The flames could not succeed in igniting even his hair, and when the fire had at last gone out and everyone thought that he was dead, Pionius opened his eyes and cried out joyfully: 'O Lord, receive my spirit!', and breathed his last. This saint wrote the life of St Polycarp of Smyrna, together with whom he now makes merry in the Kingdom of Christ. He suffered and was glorified in 250." (*Prologue*)

## MARCH 12

St Gregory the Great (the Dialogist), Pope of Rome (604)

He was born in Rome to a wealthy senatorial family. He received a good education in secular and spiritual learning, and became Prefect of Rome. While still in the world, he used his great wealth mostly for the good of the Church, building six monasteries in Sicily and another in Rome itself. At this monastery, dedicated to the Apostle Andrew, Gregory was tonsured a monk. He was appointed Archdeacon of Rome, then, in 579, Papal legate to Constantinople, where he lived for nearly seven years. He returned to Rome in 585 and was elected Pope in 590.

He is famed for his many writings, his generous charity (he gave almost all his income to the poor, and often invited the poor to share his table), and for initiating missionary work among the Anglo-Saxon peoples. The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, celebrated on Wednesday and Friday evenings during Great Lent, was compiled by him. St Gregory introduced elements of the chanting that he had heard in Constantinople into Western Church chant: The Gregorian Chant which beautified the Western churches for many years is named for him. Its system of modes is related to the eight tones of the Eastern church. He is called 'the Dialogist' after his book *The Dialogues*, an account of the lives and miracles of Italian saints.

Saint Gregory reposed in peace in 604.

Our Holy Father Theophanes the Confessor (818)

He was born in 760 to an illustrious and very wealthy family — he was a kinsman of the Emperor Leo the Isaurian. In early life he lived in great luxury, married, and became a member of the Emperor's court. Later, with his wife's consent, he abandoned his home, his fortune and his rank to live humbly in a monastery. (His wife also entered monastic life; both of them entered monasteries that they had established with their wealth). Theophanes, though accustomed to a life of splendor and ease, joyfully lived as the lowest of monks for many years. He became so well-known for his faith, purity and wisdom that he was invited to the Seventh Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 787. He prayed unceasingly for the sick and distressed, and was granted the gift of wonder working; his prayers healed all kinds of illnesses, but especially mania and

madness. When he himself fell seriously ill for a long period, he refused to pray for his own healing, but accepted his infirmity with thanksgiving.

When a second iconoclast period arose under the Emperor Leo the Armenian, Theophanes, who was widely known for his defense of the holy icons, was taken to Constantinople and imprisoned under extremely harsh conditions for two years. The Emperor then sent him into exile on the island of Samothrace. There, his body broken by his cruel imprisonment, he lived for only twenty-three days before giving up his soul to God.

Repose of St Symeon the New Theologian (1021)

His main commemoration is on October 12.

### MARCH 13

Translation of the Relics (847) of St Nicephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople (827)

His main commemoration is on June 2; today we commemorate the return of his holy relics to Constantinople.

Nicephoros was Patriarch during the time of the iconoclasts, and openly opposed the Emperor Leo the Armenian's heretical policies. For this he was exiled to a monastery on the island of Prochonis, which he himself had built when Patriarch. After living there for thirteen years, he reposed around 827. In time, the iconoclast Emperors died, and the Emperor Michael, with his mother Theodora, came to the Imperial throne in 842; they appointed Methodios, a defender of the icons, as Patriarch. In 846, the incorrupt relics of St Nicephoros were returned to Constantinople and placed first in the Hagia Sophia, then in the Church of the Holy Apostles. The saint had been driven from Constantinople on March 13, and his relics were returned there on March 13, nineteen years later to the day.

### March 14

St Benedict of Nursia, abbot (547)

His name, *Benedictus*, means "Blessed" in Latin. He was born in 480 in Nursia, a small town northeast of Rome. He had only rudimentary schooling; he wrote later of his fear that through book-learning he might 'lose the great understanding of my soul.' At an early age he fled to a monastery where he was tonsured; he then withdrew to a remote mountain, where he lived for several years in a cave, perfecting himself in prayer. His only food was some bread brought to him by Romanus, the monk who had tonsured him. When he became known in the area, he fled his cave to escape the attentions of the pious; but flight proved useless, and in time a community of monks formed around him. He was granted many spiritual gifts: he healed the sick and drove out evil spirits, raised the dead, and appeared in visions to others many miles away.

Benedict founded twelve monasteries, most famously that at Monte Cassino. Initially, each monastic house had twelve monks, to imitate the number of the Twelve Apostles. The *Rule* that he established for his monks was based on the works of St John Cassian and St Basil the Great, and became a standard for western monasteries. Thus he is sometimes called the first teacher of monks in the West.

Six days before his death, the Saint ordered that his grave be opened, gathered all his monks together, gave them counsel, then gave his soul back to God on the day that he had predicted. At the moment of his death, two monks in different places had the same vision: they saw a path from earth to heaven, richly adorned and lined on either side with ranks of people. At the top of the path stood a man, clothed in light and unspeakably beautiful, who told them that the path was prepared for Benedict, the beloved of God. In this way, the monks learned that their abbot had gone to his rest.

St Theognostus, Metropolitan of Kiev (1353)

He was born in Greece and succeeded St Peter of Kiev as Metropolitan of that city. Some of his enemies among his own flock denounced him to the Mongol ruler, saying that he had paid the no tribute to obtain his position — as was often done by the clergy. Summoned before the Mongol prince and asked about this, he answered 'Christ our God bought His Church from the unbelievers with His precious Blood. For what do we pay tribute to unbelievers?' Returning home, he governed the Church for twenty-five more years and reposed in peace in 1353.

### MARCH 15

Martyr Agapius and seven with him (303)

These holy Martyrs contested during the reign of Diocletian (284-305), in Palestinian Caesarea. All eight were very young; only Agapius was a baptized Christian. Urbanus, the governor of the region, observed a pagan festival by having some Christians publicly tortured and executed: some by fire, others on the gallows, some by being thrown to wild beasts in the arena. Six of the youths (Timolaua, Dionysius, Rozmatus, Plesius, and two named Alexander), seeing the patience and serenity with which the Christians endured their torments, were reached by the Holy Spirit and, tying their own hands,

presented themselves to Urbanus saying 'We too are Christians!' They were immediately cast into prison. A few days later Agapius, a prominent Christian in that town, also presented himself along with a second Dionysius. All eight were beheaded together at Caesarea. Their martyrdom is recorded in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.

#### Holy Martyr Alexander (270-275)

"He was from the town of Side in Pamphylia. The Emperor Aurelian's governor asked him who he was, to which Alexander replied that he was a pastor of the flock of Christ. 'And where is this flock of Christ', further enquired the evil and suspicious governor. Alexander replied: 'Over the whole world live the people whom Christ the Lord created, among whom those who believe in Him are His sheep, but those who have fallen away from their Creator, who are enslaved to creation and the work of men's hands, to dead idols, such as you, are strangers to His flock, and at the Dreadful Judgement of God will be put to the left with the goats.' The wicked judge first commanded that he be whipped with iron flails and then thrown into a burning furnace. But the fire could in no way harm him. Then he was flayed and after that thrown to the wild beasts. But the beasts would not touch him. At last the governor ordered that he be beheaded. But as soon as the judge pronounced the sentence, an evil spirit took hold of him and made him rabid. He was led howling to his gods, the idols, but on the way the evil spirit wrested his wicked soul from him. St Alexander suffered between 270 and 275.' (*Prologue*)

He is commemorated March 14 on the Greek calendar.

#### MARCH 16

##### Martyr Sabinas of Hermopolis, Egypt (287)

He was the administrator (we would say mayor) of the city of Hermopolis in Egypt. During a persecution, he and other Christians fled to the mountains, where Sabinas shut himself in a hut and spent his days in fasting and prayer. A poor man who brought him food (and whom Sabinas had helped in many ways) betrayed him to the authorities for two pieces of gold. Sabinas and six others were arrested, bound and brought before the governor Arian. After harsh torture, Sabinas was drowned in the Nile.

##### Our Holy Father Christodoulos, Wonderworker of Patmos (1111)

He was from the region of Nicaea, and was named John by his parents Theodore and Anna. He took up the monastic life at an early age, and was renamed Christodoulos ('Slave of Christ'). After going far in the ascetical life, he was given permission by the Emperor Alexis I (1081-1118) to establish a church and monastery on the island of Patmos, dedicated to St John the Evangelist. Both the church and the monastery stand and continue in use to this day. When Patmos was attacked by the Arabs, he and his disciples fled to Euboea, where he reposed. The Saint's disciples brought his relics back to his own monastery, where they continue to work miracles today.

##### Holy Apostle Aristobulus of the Seventy, first Bishop of Britain (1st c.)

"He was the brother of the Apostle Barnabas and was born in Cyprus. He was a follower of the Apostle Paul, who mentions him in his Epistle to the Romans (16:10). when the great Apostle Paul created many bishops for different parts of the world, he made this Aristobulus bishop of Britain (i.e. England). In Britain there was a wild people, pagan and wicked, and Aristobulus endured among them unmentionable torments, misfortunes and malice. They smote him without mercy, dragged him through the streets, mocked him and jeered at him. But in the end this holy man came to success by the power of the grace of God. He enlightened the people, baptised them in the name of Christ the Lord, built churches, ordained priests and deacons and finally died there in peace and went to the Kingdom of the Lord whom he had served so faithfully." (*Prologue*)

Note: in the Greek calendar he is commemorated on March 15.

#### MARCH 17

##### St Alexis, the Man of God (411)

He was born of pious and noble parents in Rome in the time of the Emperor Honorius. His parents, Euphemiarius and Agalais, set a high standard of godly living; his father, though wealthy, sat down to dine only once a day, at sunset. By his parents' arrangement Alexis was married at a young age. However, without ever living with his new wife, he fled to Edessa in Mesopotamia, where he lived in asceticism for eighteen years, presenting himself as a beggar in order to avoid the praise of men. When, despite his efforts, he began to be known as a holy man, he fled the city and took ship for Laodicea. By divine providence, the ship was blown off course and forced to land in Rome. Taking this as a sign, Alexis, still disguised as a beggar, returned to his parents' house, where he sat at the gates, unrecognized by any of his family. His father, not knowing who he was, allowed him to live in a hut in his courtyard. There Alexis spent another seventeen years, living only on bread and water. He died clutching a piece of paper on which he had revealed his true identity. At the time



of his death, the pope of Rome heard a voice saying "Look for the Man of God," and revealing where he should look. It is said that the Emperor Honorius, the Pope and a large retinue came to the house, where they found Alexis dead in his tiny hut, his face shining like the sun. His parents and wife were at first overcome with grief to learn that their son and husband had been secretly living near them, but they were comforted when they saw that his body healed the sick and exuded a fragrant myrrh. Thus they knew that God had glorified him. His head is preserved at the Church of St Laurus on the Peloponnese.

#### St Patrick, Enlightener of Ireland (~461)

"Saint Patrick, the Apostle of the Irish, was seized from his native Britain by Irish marauders when he was sixteen years old. Though the son of a deacon and grandson of a priest, it was not until his captivity that he sought out the Lord with his whole heart. In his *Confession*, the testament he wrote towards the end of his life, he says, 'After I came to Ireland — every day I had to tend sheep, and many times a day I prayed — the love of God and His fear came to me more and more, and my faith was strengthened. And my spirit was so moved that in a single day I would say as many as a hundred prayers, and almost as many at night, and this even when I was staying in the woods and on the mountain; and I would rise for prayer before daylight, through snow, through frost, through rain, and I felt no harm.'

After six years of slavery in Ireland, he was guided by God to make his escape, and afterwards struggled in the monastic life in Aesir in Gaul [now France], under the guidance of the holy Bishop Germanus. Many years later he was ordained bishop and sent to Ireland once again, about the year 432, to convert the Irish to Christ. His arduous labours bore so much fruit that within seven years, three bishops were sent from Gaul to help him shepherd his flock, 'my brethren and sons whom I have baptized in the Lord — so many thousands of people,' he says in his *Confession*.

His apostolic work was not accomplished without much 'weariness and painfulness,' long journeys through difficult country, and many perils; he says his very life was in danger twelve times. When he came to Ireland, as its enlightener, it was a pagan country; when he ended his earthly life some thirty years later, about 461, the Faith of Christ was established in every corner." (*Great Horologion*)

The work of St Patrick and his brethren has been called the most successful single missionary venture in the history of the Church.

It is said of St Patrick that he chanted the entire Psalter every day.

#### MARCH 18

#### St Cyril, archbishop of Jerusalem (386)

He was born in Jerusalem in 315, ordained to the priesthood in 346, and succeeded Maximus as Archbishop of Jerusalem in 350. He was exiled three times by the Arian Emperors Constantius and Valens for his unwavering defense of the Faith. Restored by the Emperor Theodosius, he did not return to the throne, but lived for eight years in peace before reposing in 386.

He was known to all his people as a tireless defender of the poor, and as a great ascetic. He was gentle and humble in his bearing, pale and gaunt from fasting. He struggled throughout his time against the Arian heresy, which had become very strong, claiming the allegiance even of the Emperors. In addition, he lived through the reign of Julian the Apostate, who tried by many means to weaken and undermine the Church and the Christian Faith.

Of St Cyril's many writings, the best-known are his *Catecheses*, considered the oldest systematic summary of Christian teaching.

#### St Ananias (Aninus) the Wonderworker (?)

"Born in Chalcedon, he was little of stature, like Zaccheus, but great in spirit and faith. He denied himself to the world at the age of fifteen and settled near the River Euphrates in a little hut, where he atoned for his sins, and prayed to God, at first with his teacher Mayum and then, after Mayum's death, alone. By the power of his prayers he filled an empty well with water, healed the sick of various pains and tamed wild beasts. There was a tamed lion with him as his servant. He had insight into distant happenings. When robbers attacked a stylite, Pionius, at some distance from him, and beat him up to such an extent that he decided to come down from his pillar and go to complain to the judges, St Aninus saw his intention in his soul and sent him a letter by means of his lion, telling him to set aside his intention, to forgive his assaulters and to continue in his asceticism. He was inexpressibly generous. The bishop of Neo-Caesarea made a gift to him of a donkey, to ease his carrying of water from the river, but he gave this donkey to some poor man who had complained to him of his poverty. The bishop gave him a second donkey, but he gave that away. Then the bishop gave him a third donkey, not for his own but only to serve as a water-carrier, to be kept and returned. At the time of his death, he saw Moses, Aaron and Or coming to him and calling: 'Aninus, the Lord is calling you. Get up and come with us.' This he revealed to his disciples, and gave his spirit to the Lord whom he had served so faithfully. He was 110 years old when he finished his earthly

course." (*Prologue*)

Saint Nikolai (Velimirovic), Bishop of Ochrid and Zica, Serbia (1956)(March 5 OC)

He has been called 'The New Chrysostom' for his many grace-filled sermons and writings.

He was born in 1880 in the Serbian village of Lelich. After attending the Seminary of St Sava in Belgrade, he obtained doctoral degrees from both the University of Berne and Oxford University. In 1919, Archimandrite Nikolai was made Bishop of Zica.

In 1941 Bishop Nikolai was arrested by the Nazis and, after three years' imprisonment in Ljubostir Vojlovici Monastery, was sent to the infamous Dachau concentration camp along with the Serbian Patriarch Gavrilo. He both witnessed and personally underwent many tortures there until the camp was liberated by the US army in 1945.

After the war he fled Communist-controlled Yugoslavia and emigrated to the United States, where he taught at St Sava's Seminary, St Vladimir Seminary and St Tikhon seminary. It was at St Tikhon Seminary that he reposed in 1956. His relics rested for awhile at St Sava's Seminary in Libertyville IL, then were returned to Serbia, where they now reside.

Throughout his adult life, the holy monk and bishop poured forth a steady stream of beautiful homilies and theological and spiritual writings. He is the author of the *Prologue from Ochrid*, a Slavic *Synaxarion*. The luminous homilies included therein, one for each day of the year, give a good sample of his inspired writing.

His feast is kept on this day (March 5 OC, March 18 NC) by Orthodox Christians on both the Old and New Calendars.

Note: With the blessing of Bishop Jovan of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Mitrophan Chin is engaged in a project to translate St Nikolai's *Prologue* into Chinese. To learn more about this worthy project, see his web site:

<http://chineseorthodox.n3.net>

## MARCH 19

Martyrs Chrysanthos and Daria, and those with them at Rome (283)

Chrysanthos was the only son of Polemon, a prominent pagan in Rome. As befit his status, he was given every opportunity for secular learning, but seemed unable to acquire worldly wisdom. By God's providence, copies of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles came into his possession and, reading them avidly, he was enlightened and desired above all to be a Christian. He found a priest, Carpophorus, who instructed him in the Faith and baptised him. When his father discovered Chrysanthos' conversion, he was angry and did everything he could to turn his son back to paganism, using even threats and imprisonment. When none of these measures worked, Polemon arranged for his son to be married to a beautiful and learned young pagan woman named Daria, hoping that affection for her would draw his son away from Christ. But instead, Chrysanthos persuaded Daria of the truth of Christianity, and she was secretly baptised.

When his father died, Chrysanthos and his wife began to confess Christ openly and to live publicly as Christians. They were soon arrested and grievously tortured for their faith. The torturer, whose name was Claudius, was so moved by their endurance and patience that he himself embraced the Faith, along with his whole household. For this they were executed: Claudius by drowning, his two sons by beheading, and his wife by hanging. Finally Chrysanthos and Daria were buried alive in a pit and covered with stones. This was during the reign of the Emperor Numerian.

## MARCH 20

Our righteous Fathers martyred at the Monastery of St Sabbas the Sanctified (633? 796?)

The holy Monastery of St Sabbas is still in existence today, by the providence of God, though several times in its history it has been plundered and left empty. At one time it was attacked by Arab raiders. The monks considered fleeing, but their abbot, Thomas, said, 'We have fled from the world into this wilderness for the love of Christ; it would be shameful for us now to flee from the wilderness for fear of men. If we are killed here, we shall be killed through love for Christ, for whose sake we have come here to live.' So the monks agreed with one mind to wait their attackers unarmed. The Arabs killed some with arrows, and shut some in the cave of St Sabbas, lighting a fire at the entrance to suffocate them with smoke. The whole company of monks were thus privileged to give their lives for Christ's sake.

Accounts of the date differ substantially: the *Great Horologion* says that they died during the reign of the Emperor Heraclius, when St Modestus was Patriarch of Jerusalem (632-634); the *Prologue* that they died in 796 during the reign of Constantine and Irene, when Elias was Patriarch of Jerusalem.

St Photine the Samaritan Woman (66)

See her commemoration on February 26.

St Cuthbert the Wonderworker, Bishop of Lindisfarne (687)

'Saint Cuthbert was born in Britain about the year 635, and became a monk in his youth at the monastery of Melrose by the River Tweed. After many years of struggle as a true priest of Christ, in the service both of his own brethren and of the

neglected Christians of isolated country villages, he became a solitary on Farnham Island in 676. After eight years as a hermit he was constrained to leave his quiet to become Bishop of Lindisfarne, in which office he served for almost two years. He returned to his hermitage two months before he reposed in peace in 687.

'Because of the miracles he wrought both during his life and at his tomb after death, he is called the "Wonderworker of Britain." The whole English people honoured him, and kings were both benefactors to his shrine and suppliants of his prayers. Eleven years after his death, his holy relics were revealed to be incorrupt; when his body was translated from Lindisfarne to Durham Cathedral in August of 1104, his body was still found to be untouched by decay, giving off "an odour of the sweetest fragrantcy," and "from the flexibility of its joints representing a person asleep rather than dead." Finally, when the most impious Henry VIII desecrated his shrine, opening it to despoil it of its valuables, his body was again found incorrupt, and was buried in 1542. It is believed that after this the holy relics of Saint Cuthbert were hidden to preserve them from further desecration.' (*Great Horologion*)

#### MARCH 21

Our Holy Father James the Confessor, bishop, of the Studion (8th c.)

His birthplace and the place of his episcopate are unknown. He was a monk of the Studion monastery in Constantinople, and a disciple of St Theodore the Studite. As a bishop he was severely persecuted by the iconoclasts in the time of the Emperor Constantine Copronymus, enduring hunger, imprisonment and mocking, thus earning the title "Confessor." Saint Theodore wrote a homily in honor of him.

Our Holy Father Serapion (366)

'A companion of St Antony the Great, he lived in the Nitrian desert, in charge of the monastery of Arsina which contained 11,000 monks. Palladius and Sozomenes gave him the title "the Great". He entered into rest in about 366. St Serapion wrote: "Do not think that sickness is grave; only sin is grave... Sickness leads us only to the tomb, but sin follows the sinner beyond it".' (*Prologue*)

#### MARCH 22

Hieromartyr Basil of Ancyra (362)

St Basil labored for the Church during the reign of Julian the Apostate, who briefly attempted to return the Roman empire to paganism after the reign of St Constantine. The Saint had already suffered for the Faith as bishop of Ancyra (now Ankara, the capital of Turkey), and when Julian came to power, fresh persecutions began. Basil openly denounced the Emperor's anti-Christian policies, for which he was tortured and thrown in prison.

When the Emperor came to Ancyra, Basil was brought before him, and Julian urged the bishop to renounce the Faith, promising him wealth and position if he would do so. Basil replied, 'I believe in my Christ, whom you have denied and who gave you this earthly kingdom, by He will shortly take this from you. How can you have no shame before the altar under which you were saved from death as an eight-year-old child when they sought to kill you? Therefore He will soon take this earthly kingdom from you, and your body shall not be buried when you have spewed forth your soul in bitter torments.' The enraged Emperor ordered that seven strips be torn from Basil's body every day, a torture which was carried out for seven days. When the Saint was once again brought before the Emperor, he tore off a strip of his own flesh and threw it to Julian, saying 'Take this and eat it, Julian, if such food is sweet to you, but Christ is life for me.' At this the Emperor ordered that red-hot iron spits be driven through Basil; and thus the holy bishop at last received the crown of martyrdom.

Martyr Drosida of Antioch, and five nuns (109)

'The daughter of the Emperor Trajan, she was seized with five other women when they were gathering the bodies of the martyrs who had suffered for Christ by night, and was for this cruelly mutilated by the Emperor. The five women were terribly tortured and at last thrown into molten copper, where they surrendered their souls to their Lord. But Drosida remained under strict imperial guard. However, she escaped from the court and baptised herself in a river. After eight days she gave her soul into God's hands.' (*Prologue*)

#### MARCH 23

Monk-martyr Nikon and 199 disciples, in Sicily (251)

He was born in Neapolis (Naples) to a pagan father and a Christian mother, and became an officer in the Roman army. Though he was not baptised, his mother had secretly instructed him in the Christian faith. Once, in a battle, his company was completely surrounded by the enemy, and Nikon recalled his mother's counseling that, whenever he was in trouble,

he should make the sign of the Cross and call upon Christ. This he did, and was immediately filled with strength and resolution, so that the enemy's army was routed. Nikon went home, openly crying out 'Great is the God of the Christians!' to the great joy of his mother.

He traveled secretly to Cyzicus in Asia, where the bishop Theodosius baptised him. He then entered a monastery to spend his days in prayer and study. But some years later Theodosius, who was near death, had a vision in which he was told to consecrate Nikon as his successor. He summoned Nikon from the monastery and, to the monk's amazement, immediately ordained him a deacon, then a priest, then a bishop.

Later, bishop Nikon returned to Italy to preach the Gospel of Christ. In Naples, he found his mother still alive, and remained with her until her death. He then set out with nine disciples, former fellow-soldiers, to proclaim the Faith. Through the Saint's grace-filled preaching and example, many more disciples were soon added to this number. At that time a great persecution of Christians was underway, and Quintinianus, ruler of that region, seized Nikon and his companions and handed them over to the torturers. One hundred ninety of Nikon's companions perished under torture. Nikon himself was beaten, flayed, and even thrown from a high cliff, but was miraculously preserved. Finally he was slain by the sword and his body thrown in a field to be eaten by the beasts. A shepherd boy, possessed by a spirit of madness, found the body, fell on it, and was instantly healed. He told his story to some Christians, who found the body and gave it honorable burial. Saint Nikon contested during the reign of the Emperor Decius.

## MARCH 24

### Forefeast of the Annunciation

#### Saint Zacharias the Recluse of Egypt (4th c.)

His father, Carion the Egyptian, forsook his family to become a monk, taking Zacharias with him. Though very young, Zacharias manifested gifts of grace rarely seen among the elders of Sketis. Abba Moses once asked him, 'What does it mean to be a monk?', to which Zacharias replied by taking off his hat and treading it underfoot, saying 'If a man be not so broken, he cannot be a monk.' After shining as a great light among the holy monks of Scetis, he reposed at a young age.

#### Commemoration of the Miracle at the Monastery of the Caves in Kiev (?)

"Two friends, John and Sergius, swore brotherhood before the icon of the holy Mother of God in this monastery. John was a rich man, with a five-year-old son, Zachariah. John fell ill, and at his death commended his son to the care of Sergius, and left in Sergius' keeping a large sum of silver and gold for him to hand over to Zachariah when he had grown up. When Zachariah came of age, however, Sergius denied receiving anything from the deceased John. Then Zachariah said: 'Let him swear before the same icon of the most holy Mother of God, in front of which he accepted brotherhood with my late father, that he received nothing from John, and then I will seek nothing more from him.' Sergius agreed, but when he had sworn this and went up to kiss the icon, some force held him back and would not allow him to come near. Then, tormented all at once by a demon, he began to cry out: 'Holy fathers Antony and Theodosius, do not let this merciless angel destroy me!' The demon had attacked him by God's permission. He then told them of all the money which John had left. But when they opened the box, they found double the amount. Taking it, Zachariah gave it to the monastery and was himself tonsured as a monk. He lived a long time and was worthy of God's great gifts, entering peacefully into eternity." (*Prologue*)

## MARCH 25

### † The Annunciation of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

When Mary the Virgin was about fourteen years old, the Archangel Gabriel came to Joseph's dwelling, where she was living, and said to her, 'Rejoice, thou Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.' Receiving assurance that she had been chosen to be the Mother of God Himself, she answered in humility, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.' Immediately, the Holy Spirit came upon her, the power of the Most High overshadowed her, and the Incarnation, long awaited by the whole creation, took place: He who contains the whole universe consented to be contained in the womb of one woman, the most holy Theotokos.

The Church teaches us that it was within the holy Virgin's power to refuse the divine conception: her knowing and willing acceptance, the consummation of the faith of the whole righteous remnant of Israel, shows us that our very salvation is the fruit of the cooperation (*synergia*) of human faithfulness with God's saving grace.

Carrying in her womb the Savior of the Universe, the Virgin went to the hills of Judea to stay with her kinswoman Elizabeth, who six months before had conceived in her old age (by Zacharias the priest) St John the Forerunner. As the holy Virgin approached, the child John leaped in his mother's womb for joy, prophesying the coming of Emmanuel. Feeling the prophesy, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and blessed the holy Mary and the fruit of her womb. And Mary in turn glorified God, saying 'My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior' (Luke ch. 1).

## New Confessor/Hieromartyr Tikhon, patriarch of Moscow (1925)

Born in 1865, he was tonsured a monk in 1891, and consecrated a Bishop in 1891. From 1900, he was Bishop of Alaska, with oversight of the Church throughout North America. In America, he consecrated the first Orthodox monastery on the continent and worked tirelessly to unite all ethnic groups as one flock. In 1907 he was made Bishop of Yaroslavl and returned to Russia.

In 1917, he was elected to be the first Patriarch of Moscow since the abolition of the Patriarchate by Tsar Peter the Great more than 200 years before. Almost immediately, the Russian Church was plunged into new and terrible persecution as an atheist and totalitarian government seized control. Patriarch Tikhon always sought not to quarrel with the Communist government, but his refusal to deny his faith or his Church marked him in their eyes as an enemy. In 1925 he died under mysterious circumstances, and is generally thought to have been murdered by the Soviets. He is commemorated as a Confessor, and by many as a Martyr also.

*Note: because his commemoration falls on the Feast of the Annunciation, his service is usually transferred to the day before or after the Feast.*

## St Justin (Popovich) of Cheliye in Serbia (1979)

## MARCH 26

## † Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel

Each of the Great Feasts of the Church is followed by a commemoration of some holy one who figures in the events of the Feast. So, today we commemorate the Holy Archangel Gabriel, who brought the glad news of the conception of Christ to Mary, the Theotokos. The *Prologue* gives the following teaching:

"The herald of the incarnation of the Son of God, he is one of the seven great angels who stand before the throne of God. He revealed to Zacharias the birth of the Forerunner, and said of himself: 'I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God' (Lk. 1:19). His name, Gabriel, signifies 'man of God'. Speaking about the Annunciation, the holy Fathers comment that an angel with such a name was sent to signify who He was, and of what nature He was, who would be born of the most pure Virgin. He would be the Man of God, the Man-God, the strong and mighty God. Others have found that it was this same Gabriel who announced the conception of the Virgin Mary to Joachim and Anna, and that it was he who taught Moses in the wilderness to write the Book of Genesis. The holy Fathers consider that Gabriel belongs to the foremost and highest order of the heavenly powers, the seraphim, since the seraphim stand closest to God. And so he is one of the seven seraphim closest to God. The names of these seven are: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Selathiel, Jegudiel and Barachiel. Some would add Jeremiel to this number. Each has his own particular service, but all are equal in honour. Why did God not send Michael? For the reason that Michael's service is the suppression of the enemies of God's truth, while Gabriel's is the annunciation of the salvation of the human race."

## MARCH 27

## St Matrona of Thessalonica (4th c.)

She was a servant of the Jewish wife of the governor of Thessalonica. When she refused to enter the synagogue with her mistress, she was beaten, then locked in a cell until she starved to death. Finally, her mistress ordered her body thrown from the roof of the house and left to lie in the open. Christians took her body and buried it honorably, and the bishop, Alexander, built a church over her grave. The bishop of the city erected a church over her grave.

## MARCH 28

## St Hilarion the New, abbot of Peleceste, Confessor (754)

He took up the monastic life when very young, and lived as a recluse for many years, and gained the grace to heal sicknesses and drive out demons by his prayers. Later he became abbot of the Monastery of Pelekete in Bithynia. During the reign of the Emperor Leo the Isaurian, he and his monastery steadfastly upheld the holy icons, and were fiercely persecuted. Hilarion and his forty monks were exiled to a prison near Ephesus, where the Saint reposed.

## Repose of Gerontissa Gavrilina (1992) (March 15 OC)

*Mother Gavrilina, who was known to many who are still alive, has not been officially glorified by the Church, but is considered by many to be a Saint of our time. Her fine biography, Ascetic of Love, has been translated into English and several other languages. The account below is excerpted from that on the web site of St Gregory Palamas Monastery.*

"The Gerontissa Gabriella was born in Constantinople a hundred years ago on October 2/15, 1897. She grew up in the City until her family moved to Thessalonika in 1923. She went to England in 1938 and stayed there throughout the Second



World War. She trained as a chiropodist and physiotherapist. In 1945 she returned to Greece where she worked with the Friends Refugee Mission and the American Farm School in Thessalonika in early post-war years. Later she opened her own therapy office in Athens until 1954. In March of that year her mother died and the office was closed. Sister Lila left Greece and traveled overland to India where she worked with the poorest of the poor, even the lepers, for five years.

"It was not until 1959 that she went to the Monastery of Mary and Martha in Bethany, Palestine, to become a nun. When she arrived she asked Fr. Theodosius the chaplain for a rule of prayer. Fr. Theodosius was somewhat surprised to find that she could read even ancient Byzantine Greek. Fr. Theodosius said, "The great elders that we hear about no longer exist. I certainly am not one. You came here to save your soul. If I start giving you rules, you will lose your soul and I will as well. But here is Fr. John. He will be your elder." So for her first year in the monastery he set her to reading only the Gospels and St. John Climacus. (It should be noted that at that time the *Ladder* had not been published in modern Greek.)

"She was three years in Bethany. In April, 1962, word came that Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople sought to send an Orthodox monastic to Taizé in France. Sister Gabrielaia went by way of Taizé (she spoke fluent French from childhood) to America.

"In 1963 she was back in Greece. The Gerontissa was tonsured to the Small Schema by Abbot Amphilocheios (Makris) on Patmos in the Cave of St. Anthony under the Monastery of Evangelismos just before she and the nun Tomasina left again for India. Elder Amphilocheios was enthusiastic at the idea a nun who would be open to the an active outreach in the world. In India she was for three year in Nani Tal in Uttar Pradesh where Fr. Lazarus Moore was the priest and where he consulted the Gerontissa in his translations of the Psalter and the Fathers. Between 1967 and 1977 the Gerontissa traveled in the Mission field of East Africa, in Europe including visiting old friends and spiritual fathers Lev Gillet and Sophrony of Essex, again to America, and briefly in Sinai where Archbishop Damianos was attempting to reintroduce women's monasticism. She traveled extensively, with much concern and broad love for the people of God. Some of her spiritual children found her in Jerusalem beside the Tomb of Christ; others found her on the mission field of East Africa. For years beginning in about 1977, she lived hidden in a little apartment, the "House of the Angels" in Patissia in the midst of the noise and smog and confusion of central Athens. A little place, a hidden place, a precious place to those who knew her there.

"In 1989 she moved to Holy Protection hermitage on the island of Aegina, close by the shrine of St. Nectarios. There she called the last two of her spiritual children to become monastics near her, and there she continued to receive many visitors. At the start of Great Lent in 1990 she was hospitalized for lymphatic cancer. She was forty days in the hospital, leaving during Holy Week and receiving communion of Pascha. And to the puzzlement of the doctors, the cancer disappeared. It was not yet her time.

"The Gerontissa finally withdrew to quiet. With only one last nun she moved for the last time in this life, to the island of Leros. There they established the *hesychastirion* of the Holy Archangels. Only in this last year of her life did she accept the Great Schema at the hands of Fr. Dionysios from Little St. Anne's Skete on Athos. He came to give her the Schema in the Chapel of the Panaghia in the Kastro on the top of Leros.

"Gerontissa Gabrielaia passed from this world on March 28, 1992, having never built a monastery. Over the years, six of her spiritual children did become monastics, but never more than one or two were with her at a time. Only the angels could count the number of lives that God touched and changed through her. Her biography and collected writings were published in Greek in 1996, through the work of her last monastic daughter and the contribution of many, many others who held the Gerontissa dear. An English translation is in process [Note: it has now been published].

"Anyone who knew the Gerontissa realized that God has not left us without His saints, even down to the present day. The few words recorded here scarcely suggest the clarity and love of her soul. Words are only the tools of this world; the wonder of the Gerontissa was wrapped in the mystery of the silence of the world to come.

"She never sought a reputation. She never allowed anything about her to be published during her long life and only allowed her children to take photographs in her very last years. Those whom God touched through her called her Gerontissa; she never made herself anything but the nun Gabrielaia.

"She was humility and love incarnate."

The Gerontissa embodied an 'ecumenism' that might serve as a model for many in our time: she was completely loving and open to all people of all faiths, yet while working freely with protestants and Hindus in service to man, she never compromised any aspect of her Orthodox faith. Once, some protestant fellow-workers suggested that they pray together; Mother Gavriilia thanked them lovingly, but said 'I only pray in church or alone.'

## MARCH 25

Our Righteous Father Mark the Confessor, Bishop of Aethusa; Cyril the Deacon, and others martyred during the reign of

## Julian

"Saint Mark was Bishop of Arethusa in Syria. In the days of Saint Constantine the Great, Saint Mark, moved with divine zeal, destroyed a temple of the idols and raised up a church in its stead. When Julian the Apostate reigned, in 361, as the pagans were now able to avenge the destruction of their temple, Saint Mark, giving way to wrath, hid himself; but when he saw that others were being taken on his account, he gave himself up. Having no regard to his old age, they stripped him and beat his whole body, cast him into filthy sewers, and pulling him out, had children prick him with their iron writing-pens. Then they put him into a basket, smeared him with honey and a kind of relish of pickled fish, and hung him up under the burning sun to be devoured by bees and wasps. But because he bore this so nobly, his enemies repented, and unloosed him.

"Saint Cyril was a deacon from Heliopolis in Phoenecia. During the reign of the Emperor Constantius, son of Saint Constantine, he had also broken the idols in pieces. When Julian came to power, Saint Cyril was seized by the idolators and his belly was ripped open. The other holy Martyrs celebrated today, martyred in Gaza and Ascalon during the reign of Julian, were men of priestly rank and consecrated virgins; they were disemboweled, filled with barley, and set before swine to be eaten. The account of all the above Saints is given in Book III, ch. 3, of Theodoret of Cyrrhus' *Ecclesiastical History*. (Great Horologion)

## Our Holy Father John the Hermit (4th c.)

"He was the son of Juliana, a Christian woman of Armenia. While still a child, he left his mother and ran off to the desert. He was utterly aflame with love for Christ the Lord. In the beginning he entrusted himself to the guidance of a spiritual father, Pharmutius, who was so pleasing to God that an angel brought him bread every day. John later left him and withdrew into solitude. He let himself down into a dry well and lived there for a full ten years in fasting, prayer and vigils. St Pharmutius used to bring him some of the angel's bread, for the angel of God did not wish to bring bread to the young John in person, lest he grow proud through this, so sent it through Pharmutius his spiritual father. After ten years of arduous asceticism in his well, St John went to the Lord and his relics revealed wonderworking power. He lived and was glorified by God and men in the 4th century." (Prologue)

## MARCH 30

## St John Klimakos (John of the Ladder) of Sinai (649)

He is best known as the author of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, a treasury of spiritual wisdom which is read in its entirety in monasteries during every Lenten season. He is also commemorated on the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent.

Nothing is known of his life before he entered the monastery at Mount Sinai (now St Katherine's Monastery) at the age of sixteen; he remained there until his death at the age of eighty. After he first arrived, he spent nineteen years in strict obedience to his spiritual father, Martyrios. When Martyrios died, John retired to a nearby cave, where he lived in the strictest asceticism for twenty years. (It was during these years that he wrote the *Ladder*.) He reluctantly returned to the monastery when he was made abbot by the brethren, and spent the rest of his days guiding his spiritual children in the way of salvation.

Once he heard a monk criticize him for speaking too much; rather than reproach the monk, he himself kept silence for a full year, never uttering a word until the brethren begged him to speak again. At another time a large company of pilgrims came to Mt Sinai. At supper they all saw a young man, dressed as a Jew, serving at table and giving orders to the other servants, then suddenly disappearing. When they wondered among themselves what this could mean, John said 'Do not try to look for him; that was the prophet Moses serving you in his own home.'

When the holy abbot knew that his death was approaching, he appointed his own brother, George, as his successor. George grieved the approaching death of his beloved brother, but St John told him that, if he was found worthy to stand close to God after his death, he would pray that George be taken up to heaven in the same year. So it happened: ten months after St John's death, George reposed in the Lord.

## Commemoration of an Uncondemning Monk

"This monk died joyfully because he had never in his life condemned anyone. He was lazy, careless, disinclined to prayer, but throughout his entire life he had never judged anyone. And when he lay dying, he was full of joy. The brethren asked him how he could die so joyfully with all his sins, and he replied: 'I have just seen the angels, and they showed me a page with all my many sins. I said to them: "The Lord said: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." I have never judged anyone and I hope in the mercy of God, that He will not judge me.' And the angels tore up the sheet of paper.' Hearing this, the monks wondered at it and learned from it." (From the Prologue)

## MARCH 31

**St Innocent, enlightener of Alaska and Siberia (1879)**

He was born in Siberia in 1797 to a clerical family, and became a married parish priest in Irkutsk. A devout explorer, John Kriukov, told him of the great spiritual needs among the Russian and native peoples in Alaska, then Russian territory. Moved to serve Christ in this very difficult environment, he and his family arrived in Alaska in 1824. He quickly learned the Aleut language and worked humbly and tirelessly among the Aleuts. His spiritual classic, *An Indication of the Way to the Kingdom of Heaven*, was originally written in Aleut and later translated into many languages.

While he was visiting Russia in 1838, his wife died; one year later he was tonsured a monk and given the name of Innocent (he had been Fr John Veniamov). Almost immediately after his tonsuring he was, without warning, raised to the rank of Bishop of all Eastern Siberia and Russian America, probably the largest diocese in the world at that time. Returning to Alaska, he continued his missionary work with vigor, often traveling among Aleut and Tlingit settlements in his own kayak. Wherever he went, he found the Alaskan people hungry for the faith, and his labors bore rich fruit which is still obvious today: Alaska has more Orthodox churches *per capita* than any other state.

In old age he was made Metropolitan of Moscow, head of the entire Russian Orthodox Church. His concern for Christian mission was undiminished, and as Metropolitan he created the Orthodox Missionary Society. He reposed on Holy Saturday of 1879.

**Hieromartyr Hypatius, Bishop of Gangra (326)**

He was born in Cilicia in Asia Minor, and became Bishop of Gangra, the capital of Paphlagonia. He took part in the First Ecumenical Council, where he was praised by all for his piety and miracles. It is said that the Emperor Constantius kept a bust of Hypatius in his palace as a weapon against demonic powers. The Saint was murdered by the Novatians, a sect which believed that there is no forgiveness for sins committed after Baptism. [The popularity of this belief helps to explain why many believers at that time postponed baptism until very late in life.] As Hypatius was traveling home from Constantinople, they attacked him on the road and stoned him to death. A woman who took part in the attack went mad and began to beat herself with a stone; she was only healed when her friends took her to the grave of St Hypatius and prayed for her. Restored by his compassionate intercession, she spent the rest of her life in repentance and prayer.

**St Jonah, Metropolitan of Moscow (1461)**

He became a monk at the age of twelve and lived in the Simonov Monastery near Moscow. He later became Bishop of Ryazan, then was chosen as Metropolitan of Moscow (at this time the Russian Church was still under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and the Metropolitanate of Moscow was its highest office). But through some political intrigue, a man named Isidore became Metropolitan instead. It was this Isidore who attended the Council of Florence and voted for the infamous Union with Rome perpetrated there. When he returned to Moscow three years later he was condemned as an apostate and exiled. Bishop Jonah at last became Metropolitan in his place. In his lifetime he was widely known as a healer, wonder-worker, seer and spiritual father. In his last years he prayed to suffer greatly through some illness, so as to be purified by his sufferings. In answer to this prayer, he was given wounds in his feed, of which he died. His relics continued to perform many wonders. The *Prologue* recounts, "A dumb man, John, was brought to the saint's relics. John kissed Jonah's hand and, as he related afterwards, the hand grabbed hold of his tongue and he felt a sharp pain. When it let his tongue go, he went back to his friends — and spoke as if he had never been dumb."

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\* Indicates a Saint or day whose commemoration is at least "Doctology rank" (Great Doctology sung at Matins); there is generally some dispensation from fasting when these days fall on fast days.

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Assembled by John Brady. The opinions and errors contained herein are his own.  
 Lives are compiled mostly from: The *Synaxarion* published by Ormylia Monastery;  
 The *Prologue from Ochrid* by St Nikolai of Zlka (Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic);  
 and the *Great Horologion*, published by Holy Transfiguration Monastery.

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