

# Iconography

Adult Spiritual Enrichment

November 15, 2020

CLASS 8

## ST. PHOTINI (MARCH 20)

The Orthodox icon of the Holy Martyr Photini (Svetlana) is the Samaritan Woman who Jesus met at Jacob's well, near Sychar (John. 4:5-42). She is venerated as a saint with the name Photine (Φωτεινή also Photini, Photina, meaning "the luminous one" from φῶς, "light").

John 4:13 – “Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

After Pentecost, she, her five sisters (Anatole, Phota, Photis, Paraskevi, & Kyriaki) and her two sons (Victor, who later was renamed by Christ "Photinos", and Josiah) were baptized. They became great preachers of Christ in many different places, including Smyrna in Asia Minor, Carthage in North Africa, where they were arrested, and taken to Rome, and put in prison, where they stood up to the Emperor Nero's endless tortures (including beatings, poisonings, blindings, imprisonment, temptations, crucifixion, burning in a furnace, etc.), all while managing to convert one of his Dukes (St. Sebastian), his daughter, Domina (St. Anthousa), and his magician (St. Theoklitos), who all were martyred and are celebrated also on this day.

St. Photini is considered a Patron Saint for those repentant and those suffering carnal temptations, for those with physical or spiritual blindness, and for those suffering diseases of the head and trembling disorders.

## ***Iconography***



### **ST. ROMANOS (OCTOBER 1)**

St. Romanos was born in the Syrian town of Emesa in the fifth century. His parents were neither rich nor famous but they were good Christians and loving parents. Romanos grew up with love for God in his heart. When he grew old enough he became an altar boy, then a singer and reader, and a sexton in church - at first in his home town of Beirut and later in Constantinople in the cathedral church in the time of Patriarch Euthymius (490-504). Romanos wanted to serve God to the best of his ability; he prayed a great deal; and was the first to come to Church and the last to leave. He lit the vigil lights with great reverence for he loved the saints before whose images they burned. Most of all he liked the church choir and was always happy when he was allowed to sing.

In those days the service of Matins, celebrated on feast days was very different from what it is now. During the service, psalms and verses from the Old Testament were chanted and then a singer stepped out into the middle of the church and sang a hymn called a "kontakion" which was much longer than the kontakions we sing today and explained the meaning of the event celebrated by the feast. Very often these singers improvised, that is to say, they thought up the words as they sang them and the faithful in the church would chant the response. Of course good singers were very much appreciated, for they had to be good musicians, as well as talented and well educated to be able to improvise such hymns. It was an honored position.

## **Iconography**

The Bishop of Constantinople became very fond of the new young singer Romanos. He saw his good life and how devoted he was to his service in church. Very soon he made Romanos one of the official readers and singers of the greatest church in Constantinople - Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom). The other singers did not like this at all. They were very proud of their voices and of their ability to compose hymns and they resented that an inexperienced newcomer like Romanos was singing like them.

Christmas was drawing near and the great church of Hagia Sophia opened her doors to crowds of worshippers. On Christmas Eve, especially, Vespers were celebrated very solemnly, for the Emperor and his court were in church. The Patriarch himself officiated. When the time came for a singer to come out and sing his Christmas hymn, the jealous readers suddenly pushed Romanos to the center of the Cathedral. "If you are good enough to be an official singer," they said teasingly, "Go out now and do as we do - sing an appropriate hymn."

Romanos felt paralyzed. Everyone was looking at him and waiting. His mouth went dry. Not a single thought came to his mind, not a sound to his lips. In the silence the people waited smiling and whispering. At last, his eyes full of tears, Romanos escaped trying to hide behind the crowd of singers.

When the service had ended, Romanos remained alone for a long time in the dark and echoing cathedral. The fragrance of incense still filled the air and the vigil lights continued to glimmer in front of the icons. Romanos' eyes were drawn to the image of the Mother of our Lord. "Oh, gentle Mother," he prayed "help me, help me. My mind is empty, my lips are silent. How shall I glorify your new-born Son?"

Late that night Romanos returned home comforted by his long prayer and went to bed. While he slept he had a vision. The Mother of our Lord entered his room. She held in her hand a small scroll of paper and coming nearer to Romanos said very gently, "Open your lips." She then placed the paper in his mouth and ordered Romanos to swallow it. Romanos obeyed and immediately woke up. The room was empty, but his heart was full of great happiness and excitement while his mind was full of beautiful and sacred words.

It was Christmas morning and Romanos hurried to the Cathedral to attend Matins. As the moment came for a singer to step out and improvise a hymn, Romanos, without any hesitation, went forward. He was not afraid today; he did not hesitate to think. A beautiful melody burst from his lips and words that he had never heard before arranged themselves into sentences:

"Today the Virgin gives birth to the transcendent One,  
And the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable One;  
Angles with shepherds glorify Him!  
The wise men journey with the star,

Since, for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child!"

No one had ever heard the prayer before, but it was so beautiful that the choir and entire congregation of the faithful took up the last words:

"Since, for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child!"

## ***Iconography***

As soon as the service was over, the Patriarch hurried over and to Romanos and asked him who had taught him this wonderful hymn. Humbly, the young singer told of the miraculous vision and the gift he received.

Saint Romanos used his gift gratefully the rest of his life. He developed his God-given talent composing many beautiful hymns, and as you attend church services on major Holy Days, you may be sure that some of the prayers you hear were written by Saint Romanos. Romanos composed over a thousand Kontakia. He entered into rest as a deacon of the Great Church, Hagia Sophia. Romanos joined the angelic choirs in the year 510.



### **ST. ANASTASIA (OCTOBER 29)**

The Martyr Anastasia the Roman lost her parents in infancy, and was reared by the abbess of a women's monastery named Sophia. She raised Anastasia in the fear of God and obedience.

At this same time, the persecution of Christians by Emperor Decius (249-251) was taking place. The city administrator, Probus, on the orders of the emperor, commanded that Anastasia be brought to him. Blessed by her abbess to suffer for Christ, the young martyr Anastasia humbly

## ***Iconography***

came out to meet the armed soldiers. Seeing her youth and beauty, Probus first attempted flattery to make her deny Christ – “Why waste your youth, deprived of pleasure? What is there to gain by enduring tortures and death for the Crucified? Worship our gods, marry a handsome husband, and live in glory and honor.” Anastasia steadfastly replied, “My spouse, my riches, my life and my happiness are my Lord Jesus Christ, and you will not turn me away from Him by your deceit!”

Probus subjected Anastasia to fierce tortures. The holy martyr bravely endured them, glorifying and praising the Lord. In anger the torturers cut out her tongue. The people, seeing the inhuman treatment of the saint, became angry, and Probus was compelled to end the tortures by beheading the martyr. Thus, St. Anastasia received the crown of martyrdom.

Her body was thrown outside the city to be eaten by wild animals, but the Lord did not permit her holy relics to be dishonored. At the command of a holy angel, Abbess Sophia went to look for St Anastasia’s mutilated body. With the help of two Christians, she buried it in the earth.

Troparion (Tone 4) –

Your lamb Anastasia, calls out to You, O Jesus, in a loud voice:  
"I love You, my Bridegroom, and in seeking You I endure suffering.  
In baptism I was crucified so that I might reign in You,  
and I died so that I might live with You.  
Accept me as a pure sacrifice,  
for I have offered myself in love."  
Through her prayers save our souls, since You are merciful.

Kontakion (Tone 3) –

Purified by the waters of virginity,  
righteous Anastasia, you were crowned by the blood of martyrdom.  
You grant healing and salvation to those in need,  
and who call on you from their hearts,  
for Christ gives you strength, pouring out on you ever-flowing grace!

## Iconography



### **ST. MATTHEW (NOVEMBER 16)**

*Matthew, who was also called, Levi, was one of Jesus' 12 disciples. A publican (tax collector), he was called by Jesus as a disciple and immediately followed him. He was the first to write the Gospel. It was initially written by him in Hebrew and then in Greek.*

Matthew, son of Alphaeus, was a tax collector when the Lord saw him in Capernaum and said: "Follow me. And he arose, and followed Him." (MAT 9:9) After that, Matthew prepared a reception for the Lord in his home and thus provided the occasion for the Lord to express several great truths about His coming to earth. After receiving the Holy Spirit, *Matthew preached the Gospel to the Parthians, Medes, and Ethiopians. In Ethiopia he appointed his follower Plato as bishop, and withdrew to prayerful solitude on a mountain, where the Lord appeared to him. Matthew baptized the wife and the son of the prince of Ethiopia, at which the prince became greatly enraged and dispatched a guard to bring Matthew to him for trial.* The soldiers returned to the prince saying that they had heard Matthew's voice, but could not see him with their eyes. The prince then sent a second guard. When this guard approached the apostle, he shone with a heavenly light so powerful that the soldiers could not look at him; filled with fear, they threw down their weapons and returned. The prince then went himself. *Matthew radiated such light that the prince was instantly blinded.*

*However, the holy apostle had a compassionate heart; he prayed to God, and the prince was given back his sight. Unfortunately, he saw only with physical eyes and not spiritual eyes. He arrested Matthew*

## ***Iconography***

and subjected him to cruel tortures. Twice, a large fire was lighted on his chest, but the power of God preserved him alive and unharmed. Then the apostle prayed to God and gave up his spirit. The prince commanded that the martyr's body be placed in a lead coffin and thrown into the sea. The saint appeared to Bishop Plato and told him where the coffin bearing his body could be found. The bishop retrieved the coffin with Matthew's body from the sea. Witnessing this new miracle, the prince was baptized and received the name Matthew. After that, the prince left all the vanity of the world and became a presbyter and served the Church in a God pleasing way. When Plato died, the Apostle Matthew appeared to the presbyter Matthew and counseled him to accept the episcopacy.

He accepted the bishopric, and for many years, was a good shepherd until the Lord called him to His Immortal Kingdom. St. Matthew the Apostle wrote his Gospel in the Aramaic language. It was soon translated into Greek and the Greek text has come down to us, while the Aramaic text has been lost. It is said of this evangelist that he never ate meat, but only vegetables and fruit.



### **ARCH ST. MAMAS (SEPT 2)**

Mamas was born in Paphlagonia (now Central northern Turkey on the southern shore of the Black Sea) of renowned Christian parents, Theodotus and Rufina. His parents were cast into

## ***Iconography***

prison for Christ's name. His father died first in prison, and as soon as Rufina bore Mamas, she also died. Thus the newborn child was left alone between the dead bodies of his parents. However, God the Provider sent an angel to a noble widow, Ammia. Ammia saw the angel in a dream: he told her to go to the prison and take the child in. The local eparch granted Ammia permission to bury the dead and take the child to her home. When Mamas reach his fifth year, he began to talk and his first word was "Mama!" – for which he received the name "Mamas."

Mamas displayed unusal intelligence, and as he had been reared in a Christian spirit, he did not hide his faith, but confessed it to the other children and laughed at the idols. During the reign of Aurelian there was a bitter persecution of Christians. The pagans did not even spare the Christian children. Mamas was 15 years old when he was brought before the emperor. The emperor told him that he needed only to deny Christ verbally. Mamas replied, "Neither in my heart nor with my lips will I renounce my God and King, Jesus Christ."

The emperor ordered him to be beaten, burned with torches, and finally thrown into the sea. But an angel of God saved him, and took him to a high mountain near Caesarea. There he lived in solitude and prayer. Even the wild beasts were tamed by his sanctity. He was finally discovered by his persecutors and subjected to torture again. When he had overcome torture both by fire and by wild beasts, St. Mamas was run through with a trident by a pagan priest. Thus, he gave his holy soul to God, to Whom he had been faithful during all of his tortures. From his relics many healings of the sick have taken place.



## Iconography



### **ST. KASSIANI (SEPTEMBER 7)**

Saint Kassiani [1] was a Byzantine abbess, poet, composer, and hymnographer. *She is especially known as the composer of the Hymn of Kassiani. Kassiani is one of the first composers whose scores are both extant and able to be interpreted by modern scholars and musicians.*

Approximately fifty of her hymns are extant and twenty-three are included in the Orthodox Church liturgical books. The exact number is difficult to assess, as many hymns are ascribed to different authors in different manuscripts and are often identified as anonymous. In addition, some 789 of her non-liturgical verses survive. Many are epigrams or aphorisms called "gnomic verse". An example:

"I hate the rich man moaning as if he were poor."

She was born between 805 and 810 in Constantinople into an wealthy family and grew to be exceptionally beautiful and intelligent. Three Byzantine chroniclers, Symeon Metaphrastes, George the Monk (a.k.a. George the Sinner) and Leo the Grammarian, *claim that she was a participant in the "bride show" (2) organized for the young bachelor Theophilos the Iconoclast by his stepmother, the Empress Dowager Euphrosyne. Smitten by Kassia's beauty, the young emperor approached her and said: "Through a woman [came forth] the baser [things]", referring to the sin and suffering coming as a result of Eve's transgression. Kassia promptly responded by saying: "And through a woman [came forth] the better [things]", referring to the*

## Iconography

hope of salvation resulting from the Incarnation of Christ through the Theotokos. According to tradition, the dialogue was:

"Εκ γυναικός τα χείρω." (Ek gynaikós tá cheírō)

"Και εκ γυναικός τα κρείττω." (Kaí ek gynaikós tá kreíttō)

His pride wounded by Kassia's terse rebuttal, Theophilos rejected her and chose Theodora as his wife.

The Emperor Theophilos was a fierce iconoclast, and any residual feelings he may have had for Kassia did not preserve her from the imperial policy of persecution for her defence of the veneration of icons. Among other things, she was subjected to scourging with a lash. In spite of this, she remained outspoken in defence of the Orthodox Faith, at one point saying, "I hate silence when it is time to speak."

After the death of Theophilos in 842 his young son Michael III became Eastern Roman Emperor, with Empress Theodora acting as Regent. Together they ended the second iconoclastic period (814-842); peace was restored to the empire.

The next we hear of Kassiani is that in 843 she founded a monastery in the west of Constantinople, near the Constantinian Walls, and became its first abbess. Although many scholars attribute this to bitterness at having failed to marry Theophilos and becoming Empress, a letter from Theodore the Studite indicates that she had other motivations for wanting a monastic life. As such, Kassiani became known to the great Theodore the Studite, while she was still a young girl, and he was impressed by her learning and literary style. She not only wrote spiritual poetry, but composed music to accompany it. She is regarded as an "exceptional and rare phenomenon" among composers of her day. She had a close relationship with the nearby monastery of Stoudios, which was to play a central role in re-editing the Byzantine liturgical books in the 9th and 10th centuries, thus ensuring the survival of her work (Kurt Sherry, p. 56).

Kassia traveled to Italy briefly, but eventually settled on the Greek Island of Kasos where she died sometime between 867 and 890 CE. In the city of Panaghia, there is a church where Kassia's tomb/reliquary may be found.

She wrote many hymns for liturgies; the most famous being the eponymous Hymn of Kassiani, sung every Holy Wednesday (liturgically; actually chanted late in the evening of Holy Tuesday).

(1) : Also known as Kassia, Kassiane, Casia, Ikasia, Cassia, Kassiana, or Eikasia

(2) : The Bride show was the means by which Byzantine princes/emperors sometimes chose a bride, by giving a golden apple to his choice.

## ***Iconography***



### **ST. MARK (APRIL 25)**

**Mark** – was converted to Christianity by the Apostle Peter, at whose request and that of other Christians he wrote the Gospel, in Greek. He was second to write the Gospel.

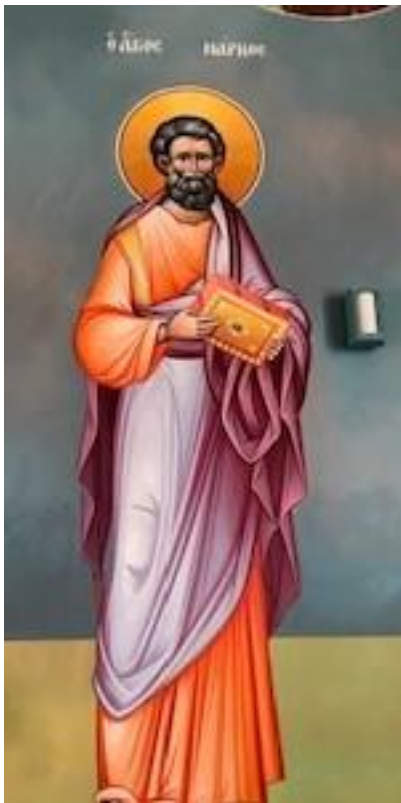
Mark was a traveling companion and assistant to the Apostle Peter, who, in his first Epistle, calls him his son – not a son according to the flesh but a son according to the spirit (1 PET 5:13). While Mark was in Rome with Peter, the faithful begged him to write down the saving teaching of the Lord Jesus, His miracles and His Life for them. Thus, Mark wrote his Holy Gospel, which the Apostle Peter himself saw and bore witness to as true. Mark was appointed a bishop by the Apostle Peter and was sent to Egypt to preach. Egypt was entirely oppressed by the thick darkness of paganism, idolatry, soothsaying, and malice. With the help of God, St. Mark succeeded in sowing the seed of the teaching of Christ throughout Libya, Ammonia, and Pentapolis. From Pentapolis St. Mark came to Alexandria, where the Spirit of God led him.

In Alexandria he succeeded in establishing the Church of God. In ordaining bishops, priests, and deacons, and in firmly strengthening them all in the honorable faith. Mark confirmed his preaching through many great miracles. When the heathens raised accusations against Mark as a destroyer of

## Iconography

their idolatrous faith, and when the governor of the city began searching for Mark, he again fled to Pentapolis, where he continued to strengthen his earlier work. After two years, Mark returned to Alexandria, to the great joy of all the faithful, whose number had greatly multiplied. On this occasion, the pagans seized Mark, bound him, and began to drag him over the cobble stone pavement, crying out: "Let us drag the ox to the pen."

Wounded and bloodied, Mark was cast into prison, where at first a heavenly angel appeared to him, encouraging and strengthening him. Then the Lord Jesus Himself appeared to him and said: "Peace be to thee, Mark, my evangelist!" To this Mark replied: "Peace be to Thee also, my Lord Jesus Christ!" The next day the vicious men brought Mark out of prison and again dragged him through the streets with the same cry: "Let us drag the ox to the pen." Completely exhausted and worn out, Mark uttered: "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit." Mark expired and his soul went to the better world. His holy relics were honorably buried by Christians and through the centuries, have given people healing from all afflictions, pains, and diseases.



# Iconography

## **ST. PORFIRIOS (DECEMBER 2)**

Saint Elder Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia, known previously to the world as Evangelos Bairatakris, was born on February 7, 1906 in the village of Saint John in Euboia (the second largest Greek island, also called "Evia", located off the eastern side of mainland Greece). His parents were Leonidas Bairaktaris and Eleni, her father being Antonio Lambrou. He was fourth out of five siblings. From a young age, the Elder was required to herd sheep on the mountain. He barely made it through first grade.

At the age of six, he journeyed to Chalkida where he worked for two to three years. Later, he went to Piraeus where he also worked for two years in a grocery store, which belonged to a relative. Finally, at the age of 12, overcoming the love for his parents, he went to the Holy Mountain. It was his desire to imitate the life of his beloved Saint John of Kafsokalyvia.

He settled in Kafsokalyvia, at the Hut of Saint George. There he lived in complete and joyous obedience to his two Elders, brothers by birth, to the hieromonk-spiritual father Panteleimon and Ioannikios. He became a monk at age 14, receiving the name Nikitas. Two years later, he was tonsured a great schema monk. Not long after that, God granted him the gift of clairvoyance, a type of clairvoyance which he sometimes called "spiritual television."

At age 19, he became gravely ill and was forced by pleurisy to depart the Holy Mountain and to go to the Monastery of Saint Haralambos in Lefka, Euboia.

In 1926, at the age of 20, he was ordained a priest at Saint Haralambos of Kymi by Bishop Porphyrios III of Sinaios, who gave him the name, Porphyrios. He became a spiritual father at age 22 and a little while later, an archimandrite. For a short period of time, he served as presiding priest and spiritual father across various regions in Euboia.

In 1940, he settled in Athens where he assumed the responsibilities of presiding priest and spiritual father at the Polykliniki (General Hospital) of Athens in Omonoia Square, at the intersection of Sokratous and Piraeus Roads. There, he ministered to the wounded people of God for 33 years. In 1955, he settled in Kallisia at the small monastery of Saint Nicholas. He cultivated the surrounding land, while at the same time he performed his spiritual duties, when in 1978, he suffered a heart attack.

In the summer of 1979, he settled in Milesi in Attica, initially inside of a motorhome. It was his dream to build a monastery. Later, he moved to a cement-tile home. In 1984, Saint Porphyrios relocated to a different property for the revival of a monastery. Despite being very sick and blind, he worked with great zeal for the completion of the Monastery (the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration of our Savior). In 1990, on February 26, he laid the foundations for the

## Iconography

Katholikon of the Monastery of the Transfiguration of our Savior. He then prepared himself for the end of his earthly life with a general confession.

In the early summer of 1991, he returned to the Holy Mountain, where he maintained a certain cell since 1984. Saint Porphyrios returned to the Hut of Saint George, the Hut where he first took his monastic vows. There, he fell asleep in the Lord in a state of holiness on the morning of December 2, 1991. The very next day, he was buried in the cemetery belonging to the church of the Kafsokalyvia dedicated to the Holy Trinity, in simplicity and without commotion, just as he desired.

His last words were those of the archpriestly prayer of Christ, which he often repeated frequently during the course of his life, namely, "That they may be one."

At the time when his relics were to be transferred, he gave the fathers of his Cell the command to transfer his bones to an unknown area within the nearby forest and to bury them there. So this is how it happened. In this way, he was able to flee postmortem honor and glory from the people. On November 27, 2013, the Holy Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate entered Porphyrios the Hieromonk of the Kafsokalyvia into the blessed ranks of the Saints of the Orthodox Church. In 2014, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church decreed that St. Porphyrios' name be added to their church calendar and commemorated on December 2. In 2017, the holy synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church also added him to their calendar on December 2, and included his troparion, kontakion, Synaxarion, and icon.

### Some of the many sayings by Saint Porphyrios:

"Your house can be a monastery, if you wish. There is no difference in this. It is sufficient for you to do what I am saying. It is not the place that makes the Monastery. It is the way of life. Go, pray, and have patience in everything...One can be in Omonia Square\*\*\*, and there have a concentrated nous like he on Mount Athos. And one can be on Athos, and not have a concentrated nous, like he is in Omonia."

**Note: "nous" is identified with the highest or divine intellect.**

-St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia

"My child, we Christians do not have money, nor power. Today, this world is governed by the mighty. Mighty powers, banks with a lot of money, other forces, very great...We are unable to cope with these forces and it is natural that these forces, many times, are antithetical to the Christian spirit, with the result being danger to Christians and those who desire to live according to the law of God. We cannot resist these forces, because in a worldly manner, we are unable. We, however, have Christ, my child. And if we ask Christ, then, we can resist whatever is difficult that comes our way, and we will be able to endure. Christ will conquer in the end, and righteousness and truth will prevail."

## **Iconography**

A spiritual child of St. Porphyrios spoke of the Saint: "He spoke to me, not of some piecemeal good effort, but on the decisive, definitive passing from an old life of sin into a new life of holiness, in which we live in Christ and Christ lives within us, and for this transition, we must give all our strength.

Once, he asked me: "Tell me, to study to become a lawyer, how many years does it take?" I answered him.

He asked again: "To study to be an engineer, a chemist, a physician, how many years does it take?" I answered correspondingly, curious as to the nature of his questions.

And the Elder continued: "Do we study to learn the will of God and to apply it?"

I understood what he was referring to, and I was reluctant to respond. What could I say? That most of us faithful are lazy, lukewarm, "amateur Christians"? He knew this.

And he told me: "One does not become a Christian with laziness. It requires work, much work."

He himself was an example, without showing off. He had dedicated himself with zeal all the years of his long life to studying and to living Christ.

He was a worker, bodily and spiritually, and he wished to transmit this love of work to others. He believed that laziness leads to despondency and to many afflictions of soul and body. He recommended occupational therapy. Especially for those who were disorganized and desperate.

For the Elder, it was never too late to make a new start. He perceived of course that the denial of worldly hopes and the crushing of selfishness as the best precondition for this beginning.

Everything is transformed with effort, both with the soul and the body.

Do not leave the prayer. Simply and without being forced, fervently entreat for others. You will benefit them with prayer, not with words.

Regarding my problems, St. Porphyrios told me: "If we spoke a little on the phone, you would see that everything had immediately gone well. Tire the body, do not fear effort. Everything is transformed with effort, both the soul and the body. If they ask you about it, say humbly: 'That's how I think, but whatever you think.'"

-From a spiritual child of St. Porphyrios, in an Anthology of Instructions of Elder Porphyrios

St. Porphyrios on the "Expectation of God" –

"When you desire and wait to be united with God, when you force God, He does not come. But He comes at a day that is not expected, and at the hour that you do not know." It is a most-holy way, but you cannot learn it from outside.

## ***Iconography***

-St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia

His sainthood was declared by the synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on November 27, 2013



### **ST. STEPHANOS (DECEMBER 27)**

(Greek: Στέφανος Stéphanos, meaning "wreath, crown" and by extension "reward, honor, renown, fame", often given as a title rather than as a name, Hebrew: סטפנוס הקדוש), (c. AD 5 – c. AD 34) traditionally *venerated as the protomartyr or first martyr of Christianity, was according to the Acts of the Apostles a deacon in the early church at Jerusalem who aroused the*



## ***Iconography***

enmity of members of various synagogues by his teachings. Accused of blasphemy at his trial, he made a speech denouncing the Jewish authorities who were sitting in judgment on him and was then stoned to death. His martyrdom was witnessed by Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee who would later become a follower of Jesus and known as Paul the Apostle. Also, the Most-holy Theotokos, standing on a rock at a distance with St. John the Theologian, witnessed the martyrdom of this first martyr for the truth of her Son and God, and she prayed to God for Stephen. This occurred one year after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles.

The primary source of information about Stephen is the New Testament book of the Acts of the Apostles. Stephen is mentioned in Acts 6 as one of the Greek-speaking Hellenistic Jews selected to participate in a fairer distribution of welfare to the Greek-speaking widows.

Stephen is first mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as one of seven deacons appointed by the Apostles to distribute food and charitable aid to poorer members of the community in the early church. According to Orthodox belief, he was the first of the seven whom the holy apostles ordained and appointed, and is therefore called "archdeacon". As another deacon, Nicholas of Antioch, is specifically stated to have been a convert to Judaism, it may be assumed that Stephen was born Jewish, but nothing more is known about his previous life. The reason for the appointment of the deacons is stated to have been dissatisfaction among Hellenistic (that is, Greek-influenced and Greek-speaking) Jews that their widows were being slighted in preference to Hebraic ones in the daily distribution of food. Since the name "Stephanos" is Greek, it has been assumed that he was one of these Hellenistic Jews. Stephen is stated to have been full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and to have performed miracles among the people (Acts 6: 5, 8).

It seems to have been among synagogues of Hellenistic Jews that he performed his teachings and "signs and wonders" since it is said that he aroused the opposition of the "Synagogue of the Freedmen", and "of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them that were of Cilicia and Asia" (Acts 6:9). Members of these synagogues had challenged Stephen's teachings, but Stephen had bested them in debate. Furious at this humiliation, they suborned false testimony that Stephen had preached blasphemy against Moses and God. They dragged him to appear before the Sanhedrin, the supreme legal court of Jewish elders, accusing him of preaching against the Temple and the Mosaic Law (Acts 6:9–14). Stephen is said to have been unperturbed, his face looking like "that of an angel".

In a long speech to the Sanhedrin comprising almost the whole of Acts chapter 7, Stephen presents his view of the history of Israel. The God of glory, he says, appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, thus establishing at the beginning of the speech one of its major themes, that God does not dwell only in one particular building (meaning the Temple). Stephen recounts the stories of the patriarchs in some depth, and goes into even more detail in the case of Moses. God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, (Acts 7:30–32) and inspired Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Nevertheless, the Israelites turned to other gods (Acts 7:39–43). This

## ***Iconography***

establishes the second main theme of Stephen's speech, Israel's disobedience to God. Stephen faced two accusations: that he had declared that Jesus would destroy the Temple in Jerusalem and that he had changed the customs of Moses. It is said that St. Stephen appealed to the Jewish scriptures to prove how the laws of Moses were not subverted by Jesus but, instead, were being fulfilled. Stephen denounces his listeners as "stiff-necked" people who, just as their ancestors had done, resist the Holy Spirit. "Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him."



### **ARCH ST. YPOMONI "PATIENCE" (MARCH 13 – HER DAY OF REPOSE & MAY 29 – THE DATE OF THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE AND DEATH OF HER SON, CONSTANTINE XI PALAIOLOGOS)**

St. Ypomoni, in the world known as Helen Dragash, and later the wife of Manuel II Palaiologos, "Helen in Christ God Augusta and Empress of the Romans, Palaiologos", was the daughter of Constantine Dragash, one of the many leaders and inheritors of the large Serbian kingdom of Stefan Dusan. She came from a royal and blessed generation. Many of her ancestors were

## **Iconography**

Saints (e.g. Stefan Newmania, the Serbian king and founder of the Holy Monastery of Chilandar on Mt. Athos and St. Symeon the Mrrrh-gusher).

Konstantine Dragash assumed the leadership of what is today the Bulgarian portion of northeast Macedonia, in the area between the rivers Axiou and Strymonos. Her birth took place immediately after the Dusan years. Her upbringing, education, and her treatment were greatly influenced by the Byzantine ideal, because the Serbs were greatly influenced by Byzantine culture.

They thought of themselves as more identifying with the culture and especially the national consciousness of the Byzantine Empire. Emotionally and essentially they were considered Byzantine, as she was later allowed to become Augusta and Empress due to her birth in the Serbian homeland.

Above and beyond these, she was raised with the family tradition of the unshakeable Orthodox faith in God. This faith guided and illumined her, and would inspire her life which would be full of sorrows and trials. She was about 19 years old when she married Manuel Palaiologos (1390), a few days before becoming Emperor.

The sign of the cross that was revealed to Constantine the Great, the first Byzantine emperor, who contributed to the establishment of the Christian faith, did not herald merely the triumphant justification of Christianity. At the same time, it also sealed and underlined the truth that those who assume any authority whatsoever have to be prepared to sacrifice themselves for their people or with their people.

Thus it was that the last emperor, Konstantinos Palaiologos refused to capitulate and willingly hand over the government of Constantinople to the enemy, even though he realized full well that disaster was on its way. He also refused to abandon the City, as the senators and patriarch advised him to do. "It may be" he said, "that my departure would benefit me personally, but it's impossible for me to go. How can I leave the Lord's churches, the throne and my people to such evil?"

He had no doubt been taught this moral stance by his mother, Empress Eleni, wife of Manouil II Palaiologos, who had successfully reared six boys and two girls. After the death of her husband, Eleni retreated from her worldly palace and lived as a nun for 25 years in the convent of Lady Martha, under the name of Ypomoni (Patience). She died a few years before the fall of the City and the Church honours her as a saint, celebrating her feast on 29 May. Saint Ypomoni may have chosen the monastic cell, but she always inspired a bold, peaceable and sacrificial mentality in her children.

It is typical that, when Konstantinos Palaiologos sent his brothers, Thomas and Dimitrios to Mistra as governors, although there was a coolness between them, Ypomoni was not content with the customary leave-taking. She summoned the emperor and her other two sons to the monastery, together with senators and a mutual friend, Frantzis. She gave them her advice and

## Iconography

then bound them with oaths to keep to the agreements and contracts: “So that no-one shall transgress onto the places or bounds of the other and seize them, but they shall work together in peace”. In other words, like a good governess and excellent mother, she achieved a meeting of minds. And this always happened, as Georgios Plithon-Gemistos notes. So her sons were always of the same mind and through the power of their mother’s intervention “resolved their differences quietly and calmly”.

Saint Ypomoni did not benefit only her family. Anyone near her garnered spiritual fruits. Typical of this is what G Scholarios (who became Patriarch after the capture of Constantinople) reports: when a wise person visited her, they left amazed at her wisdom; if an ascetic met her, they would leave after the meeting ashamed at the poverty of their virtue; a prudent person would find their prudence enhanced; a law-maker would become more careful; a judge, in talking to her, would realize that he had a veritable manual of law before him.

Scholarios goes on to say that a **bold person would retreat defeated, astonished at her patience, prudence and the strength of her character; charitable persons would have their generosity reinforced; a pleasure-seeker would acquire prudence and repent, recognizing the humility in her face and person; a person zealous for piety would become more so; people in pain felt their hurt assuaged; the arrogant reined in their selfishness; in general, no-one came into contact with her but left feeling a better person.**

It was a phenomenon in Byzantium that emperors, members, male or female, of the impartial family, or other officials who had been involved in the administration would embrace the monastic life, as a consequence of some event or other. But the abandonment of secular offices and the choice of the “contemplative monastic life” of “practical philosophy”, asceticism and prayer was accompanied by a variety of motives. Some fell out of favour or were deposed from their office and, rather than being sent to prison or into exile, were forced into an enclosed monastery. There were others, however, who were content to leave behind the things of this world and live “in repentance”. One such was Saint Ypomoni, who proved to be a model wife and mother and an example of the blessed life.

**Iconography**

