

THE BURNING BUSH

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FROM THE LIFE OF SAINT JOHN THE MERCIFUL PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA

Saint John was born on the island of Cyprus and was the son of Prince Epiphanius. He was reared well, and the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, was rooted in his heart. When he reached manhood, he was compelled by his parents to take a wife, and begot children, but first his children died and then his wife, for it was pleasing to God that John be freed from bondage to things of the flesh and that he devote himself to the spiritual life. John thanked God for this freedom, and from that time forth, delivered of all hindrance, began to labor more zealously for the Lord. He exercised himself in frequent prayer and in every God-pleasing work, and was especially compassionate to all who suffered from poverty. God glorified him among men on account of his virtues, and he was held in honor and revered not only by his equals but by the Emperor as well. When the patriarchal throne of Alexandria was vacant, the Emperor Heraclius appointed John to fill it. Although John did not desire the rank of Patriarch, he was forced to accept consecration, becoming the pastor of the Church of Alexandria.

As he began to shepherd Christ's rational sheep, John's first concern was to cleanse his flock of heresy. Once this was done, John devoted himself to the fulfillment of God's commandments and the care of the poor. He permitted no one to depart from him disappointed, but gave alms to everyone who asked of him. He comforted all who sorrowed, not only by words but by deeds as well. The hungry he fed, the naked he clothed, he ransomed captives out of bondage, and cared for the ill and for strangers. His generosity was like a river which flowed abundantly and without ceasing, and the thirst of all who drank from it was quenched.

At the beginning of his reign, John summoned the stewards of the patriarchate and gave them this command: "Go through the entire city, and make a list of all who are my lords." The stewards asked him, "And who, Master, are your lords?" The Patriarch answered: "those whom you call the poor are my lords, for it is they who can prepare a dwelling-place for me in eternity and assist me greatly to attain my salvation." The stewards wrote down the names of all the paupers they found on the streets, in the hospitals, and on the dunghills. The poor numbered 7,500, and Saint John ordered that each day be given what was necessary for their sustenance from the treasury of the Church. At that time, the Persians conquered Syria, burned the holy city of Jerusalem, took the sacred Wood of the Cross, and led away many

Christians into captivity. The blessed John sent ships loaded with wheat and gold to ransom the captives and to aid those beset by misfortune. In his compassion he freed many prisoners from captivity, thus delivering them from the woes of slavery. Since many who hoped to speak with the saint were disappointed (for his servants did not inform him) he set aside two days in each week, Wednesday and Friday, where he sat by the doors of his church with certain honorable men, admitting into his presence whoever wished to be heard. He received petitions, judges the disputes which arose between the brethren, and made peace among men. Concerning this the Patriarch said to his clergy: "If I always have unhindered access to my lord and God and can ask of Him whatsoever I wish, how can I not permit my brother to have ready access to me, allowing him to tell me when he has suffered offence or is in need and to ask me for that which he requires? We ought to fear Him Who said: With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again.

One day, while the saint was visiting the sick, which he did twice or thrice every week, he came upon a stranger who begged alms of him. The Patriarch commanded his servants to give the man six pieces of silver. After receiving the coins, the stranger departed. However, since he wished to test the Saint's generosity, he changed his garment, took another street, again met the blessed John, and begged him, "Have mercy on me, my lord, for I am a captive!" John once commanded that the man be given six pieces of silver, but one of the servants whispered in his ear, "Master, this is the poor man who took the other six coins." The Patriarch pretended not to hear the servant and again ordered that the supplicant be given money. After the stranger had received alms the second time, he changed his clothes once more, approached the Patriarch and again asked alms of him. The servant said to the Patriarch, "Master, this man has already taken six pieces of silver twice, and now asks for alms a third time!" The blessed one said to the servant: "Give him twelve pieces, for perhaps he is Christ and wished to test me."

St. John had great compassion for the ill, whom he frequently served with his own hands. He was accustomed to sit besides the dying and to ease their departure with prayers. He often served the Divine Liturgy for the reposed, saying that when the sacred Liturgy was celebrated for the dead, their souls received much succor.

It is fitting that we speak now of St. John's meekness, humility, and freedom from rancor. Two clergymen were punished for wrongdoing by excommunication from the Church for a time. One of them repented of his sin, but the other became embittered, grew angry at the Patriarch, and fell deeper into iniquity than before. Learning of this, the Patriarch wished to summon the man, to calm him with kind words, and to exhort him to lay

aside his anger, but he forgot his intention to do this, for it was God's will that John's humility be made manifest more clearly so that all might be edified.

Some time after this, while the saint was serving the Bloodless Sacrifice on a feast day, he remembered the clergyman who was angry with him, and also the words of Christ written in the Gospel: 'If thou bring thy gifts to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled with thy brother.' He stepped back from the altar, called for the clergyman, and when he arrived, fell at his feet, asking forgiveness. Seeing the Patriarch humble himself, the cleric was filled with remorse and fell at the saint's feet, likewise asking forgiveness. After he had thus reconciled then clergyman, John returned to the altar, boldly completing the sacrifice, and was able with a clear conscience to repeat the words: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Moreover, the cleric corrected himself and began to live in a manner pleasing to God. Later, he was again deemed worthy of the priestly rank.

As the good pastor was thus guiding the Church of Christ and instructing His rational sheep, the Persians attacked the city of Alexandria, and the Patriarch was compelled to sail to Constantinople, in accordance with the words of the Scriptures: "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another." While on the journey, he fell ill, and a man holding a golden scepter appeared to him and said: "The King of Kings summons you." From this the saint understood that his end was near. He reached Cyprus, his homeland, but could continue no further. He remained in Amathus, the city where he was born, and there reposed in peace. As he lay dying he prayed thus: "I thank Thee, O Lord my God, because Thou has permitted me to return to Thee what is Thyne and because I am left with no early possessions, except for a single piece of silver; and even this will be given to the poor. When I was made Bishop of Alexandria, I found eight thousand pounds of gold in the Patriarchate treasury. I collected many more thousands, which were brought in offering by those who love God. All this I have given to Thee, O Christ, unto Whom I now commit my spirit."

The saint was buried in Amathus in the church of Saint Tychon, between the bodies of two bishops. When Saint John was about to be laid besides them, their corpses moved apart from one another, as though they were alive, thus leaving a place between themselves for John's remains. The mourners beheld this marvel with their own eyes, and overcome with amazement, glorified God. ■

St. John is commemorated on November 12.

[From: The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, Chrysostom Press, House Spring MO, 1997, vol III, pgs.225-252.]

THE MIRACLES OF THE GREAT MARTYR MENAS, **Written by Timothy, Archbishop of Alexandria**

After the death of the impious Roman emperors Diocletian and Maximian, who hated Christ, the pious Emperor Constantine came to the throne, and the faith which is in our Lord Jesus Christ spread throughout every land. At that time, certain men, citizens of Alexandria and lovers of Christ, found the place where the relics of the holy and glorious martyr of Christ Menas were laid, and built a church dedicated to him.

It happened that a merchant from the land of Isauria came to Alexandria to purchase wares. Hearing of the numerous miracles and healings which took place at the Church of Saint Menas, he said to himself, "I will go to venerate the honorable relics of the holy martyr and will give a gift to his church, that through the prayers of His holy sufferer, God may have mercy on me. So the man took a bag full of gold and left for the church. Reaching Lake Mareotis, which lies near the sea, he crossed on a ferryboat to Loxonetus where he looked about for a place to sleep that night. He entered one of the houses there and said to the master, "Friend, be so kind as to accept me as a guest in your house tonight, for the sun has already set. I am afraid to continue alone."

The man replied, "Enter, brother; you may sleep here until morning."

The traveller entered the house, lay down, and fell asleep. The master of the house saw that the merchant was carrying a bag of gold, and was filled with desire for it. Urged on by the devil, he resolved to murder his guest and to take the gold. Arising at midnight, he strangled the merchant with his hands, cut his body in pieces, placed them in a basket, and hid them in the innermost room of the house. Soon, however, the man's spirit became greatly troubled, and he began to look about everywhere to find a place where he could bury his victim.

While the man was fretting thus, Christ's martyr Menas appeared riding on a steed, like a soldier sent to do his king's bidding. The holy martyr came to the door of the murderer's house and asked for the guest who had been slain. The murderer pretended to know nothing and said to the saint, "I do not know what to say to you, my lord. No one has been here."

The saint dismounted, entered the innermost room, and found the basket. Bringing it out, he asked the murderer, "What is this?"

The man was terrified and fell at the saint's feet as though dead. Meanwhile, the saint joined the dead man's severed limbs together and prayed, and the merchant arose. Menas said to him, "Give glory to God," and the dead one awoke as if from sleep. He understood that he had been killed by the master of the house, and he glorified God, falling down before

Menas and thanking him. The saint took the gold from the murderer and returned it to the man whom he had resurrected, saying, “Continue on your way in peace!”

Then the martyr turned to the murderer and beat him severely until the latter begged forgiveness. The saint forgave him his offense, and after praying for the man, Menas mounted his horse and became invisible.

There was a man living in Alexandria named Eutropius who vowed to give a silver platter to the Church of Saint Menas. He summoned a smith and asked him to make two silver dishes and to inscribe on one, “the platter of the holy great martyr Menas,” and on the other, “the platter of Eutropius, a citizen of Alexandria.” The silversmith did as he was told, and when he finished the work it could be seen that Saint Menas’ platter was the more handsome and brilliant of the two. After inscribing the dishes, the smith gave them to Eutropius.

One day, while Eutropius was at sea, he took out both the new plates, wishing to eat. Seeing that the plate on which the name of Saint Menas was inscribed was more beautiful than his, he did not wish to give it away. Instead, he ordered his servant to serve his food on the martyr’s plate, and he decided to send his own plate to the Church of Saint Menas. After he had eaten, the servant took the martyr’s dish, went to the side of the boat, and began to wash it in the sea. As he was doing so, he saw a man emerge from the water, take the platter from his hand, and then disappear. The servant began to shake with fear and threw himself into the sea, hoping to retrieve the plate. The master saw him sink beneath the waves, and became terrified. He cried out, weeping, “Woe is me, the wretch! I desired the saint’s platter, and now I have lost both the platter and my servant! Be not wroth with me until the end, O Lord my God, and have mercy upon my servant. I vow unto Thee that if I find the corpse of my slave, I shall have another dish made as a gift for Thy favourite Menas, or else I shall give the price of the dish to the saint’s church!”

When the ship reached harbor, Eutropius began to look about for the servant’s body, hoping that the waves had carried it to land, for he wished to give it burial. He searched carefully, and lo, he beheld his servant emerging from the sea, holding the platter! Overcome by fear, he cried out, “Glory to God! Truly great is the holy martyr Menas!”

The people on the boat, now disembarking, also saw the servant holding the platter, and were amazed and glorified God. They asked the servant how he had remained alive in the sea and emerged unharmed, and he replied, “As soon as I cast myself into the sea, a man of commanding appearance, accompanied by two others, rescued me, and brought me here.”

The man took the platter and his servant and went to the Church of Saint Menas. He worshipped there, and, in parting, donated the plate he had

promised the saint, giving thanks unto God and glory to His favourite, Menas.

There was a woman named Sophia who came from the region of Thecozelita to venerate Saint Menas. While she was travelling, a soldier passed by. He saw that she was alone, and filled with lust, fell upon her and tried to ravish her, but she withstood him bravely, calling upon the help of the holy martyr Menas. The saint did not disdain her cry, and both punished the assailant and preserved the woman undefiled. As the soldier prepared to have his way with her, he tied his horse to his right leg. The horse began to buck and not only prevented his master from accomplishing the vile deed; it also began to drag him along the ground and did not stop until it reached the Church of Saint Menas. There it continued to neigh and buck so that a crowd of people gathered around it, for it was a feast day and many people were in the church. The soldier was very frightened because his horse could not cease to buck. No one could help him, and he feared that the horse might seriously hurt or kill him. He laid shame aside and openly confessed his iniquity before all, and straightway the horse became calm. The soldier entered the church and fell down before the saint, praying and asking forgiveness for his transgression.

There was a lame man and mute woman, who, together with many others, sat by the church of the saint awaiting healing. At midnight, while all the others were asleep, the saint appeared to the lame man and said to him, "Go quietly to the dumb woman and take her by the leg."

The lame man said, O saint of God, I am not a dissolute man. I would never do such a thing!"

The saint told him a second and a third time, "If you refuse to do as I tell you, you will not be healed!" The cripple obeyed the saint and seized the mute woman by the leg. She began to cry out angrily at the lame man, who fled in fear. Then both of them perceived that they had been healed: the dumb woman had spoken, and the cripple had run like a deer. Both gave thanks to God and to the holy martyr Menas.

A certain Jew had a friend who was a Christian. Once, as he was about to travel to a far country, the Jew entrusted to his friend a chest in which he kept a thousand pieces of gold. He tarried in the land to which he had travelled, and the Christian began contemplating keeping the money for himself. He had already decided to do this when the Jew returned and asked him for his gold. To this the Christian replied, "You gave me nothing, and I took nothing from you."

Hearing this, the Jew despaired of ever seeing his gold again. He said to the Christian, "Brother, no one other than God knows of this matter, and if you will not return the gold I left with you, and deny that you took it, let

us go to the Church of Saint Menas. Swear there that you did not take the chest with a thousand pieces of gold from me.”

Both men went to the church, and the Christian swore to the Jew before God that he did not take the gold for safekeeping. Both men then left the church and mounted their horses. Immediately the Christian’s horse began to buck so violently that it could not be restrained. Breaking its reins, it began to gallop, and tossed its master to the ground. As the Christian fell from the horse, his ring slid from his hand and a key from his pouch.

He got up, pursued his horse, calmed it, and then rode off again with the Jew. When they had gone a way, the Christian said to the Jew, “Friend, this is a convenient place to dismount and eat.”

They dismounted their horses and let them graze, and themselves began to eat. Presently, the Christian looked up and saw his servant standing before him, holding the Jew’s chest in one hand and the ring and the key in the other. He was overcome by terror and asked his servant, “What is the meaning of this?”

The servant replied, “A fearsome soldier went to my lady, and giving her this key and ring, said to her, ‘Return the chest to the Jew without delay, lest your husband fall into misfortune.’ Therefore, she sent me to you with these things as the soldier commanded.”

When the Jew saw this, he rejoiced, and together with the Christian, returned to the Church of Saint Menas. There he fell to the ground and asked for Holy Baptism, confessing that because he had witnessed this great miracle, he had come to believe. The Christian begged the saint to forgive him, acknowledging that he had transgressed God’s commandment. Both received what they desired: one Holy Baptism and the other forgiveness of his sins, and they returned to their homes, rejoicing and glorifying God and exalting His favorite, Saint Menas. ■

St. Menas is commemorated on November 11.

[From: The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, Chrysostom Press, House Spring MO, 1997, vol III, pgs. 176-181.]

**FEAST OF THE NATIVITY & THEOPHANY
2018 - 2019**

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Monday, December 24 Eve of Nativity	Royal Hours & Typica Vesp. Liturgy of St. Basil Vigil Service	8:00 am 10:00 am 6:00 pm
Tuesday, December 25 Nativity of the Lord	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. John Vigil Service	9:00 am 10:00 am 6:00 pm
Wednesday, December 26 Synax of the Theotokos	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. John Lunch & Caroling Vigil Service	9:00 am 10:00 am 12:30 pm 6:00 pm
Thursday, December 27 Protomartyr Stephen	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. John	8:00 am 9:00 am
Saturday, December 29	Matins, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy	6:30 am 9:00 am
Sunday, December 30	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy Vigil Service	9:00 am 10:00 am 6:00 pm
Monday, December 31	Thanksgiving Service	11:30 pm
Tuesday, Jan. 1, 2017 Circ. of our Lord St. Basil the Great	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. Basil	9:00 am 10:00 am
Saturday, Jan. 5, 2017 Eve of Theophany	Matins Royal Hours, Typica Vesperal Liturgy of St. John Blessing of Water follows. Vigil Service	6:00 am 9:00 am 6:00 pm
Sunday, Jan. 6, 2017 Feast of Theophany	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. Basil Blessing of Water Vigil Service	9:00 am 10:00 am 11:30 am 6:00 pm
Monday, Jan. 7, 2017 Feast of St. John	Akathist, 3rd & 6th Hours Divine Liturgy of St. John	8:00 am 9:00 am

