

SAINT LUKE THE EVANGELIST

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH



MAY 27, 2012

THE FATHERS OF THE FIRST ECUMENICAL SYNOD

On the seventh Sunday of Pascha, we commemorate the holy God-bearing Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council.

The Commemoration of the First Ecumenical Council has been celebrated by the Church of Christ from ancient times. The Lord Jesus Christ left the Church a great promise, “I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18). Although the Church of Christ on earth will pass through difficult struggles with the Enemy of salvation, it will emerge victorious. The holy martyrs bore witness to the truth of the Savior’s words, enduring suffering and death for confessing Christ, but the persecutor’s sword is shattered by the Cross of Christ.

Persecution of Christians ceased during the fourth century, but heresies arose within the Church itself. One of the most pernicious of these heresies was Arianism. Arius, a priest of Alexandria, was a man of immense pride and ambition. In denying the divine nature of Jesus Christ and His equality with God the Father, Arius falsely taught that the Savior is not consubstantial with the Father, but is only a created being.

A local Council, convened with Patriarch Alexander of Alexandria presiding, condemned the false teachings of Arius. However, Arius would not submit to the authority of the Church. He wrote to many bishops, denouncing the decrees of the local Council. He spread his false teaching throughout the East, receiving support from certain Eastern bishops.

Investigating these dissensions, the holy emperor Constantine (May 21) consulted Bishop Hosius of Cordova (Aug. 27), who assured him that the heresy of Arius was directed against the most fundamental dogma of Christ’s Church, and so he decided to convene an Ecumenical Council. In 325, 318 bishops representing Christian Churches from various lands gathered together at Nicea.

Among the assembled bishops were many confessors who had suffered during the persecutions, and who bore the marks of torture upon their bodies. Also participating in the Council were several great luminaries of the Church: St Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia (December 6 and May 9), St Spyridon, Bishop of Tremithos (December 12), and others venerated by the Church as holy Fathers.

With Patriarch Alexander of Alexandria came his deacon, Athanasius (who later became Patriarch of Alexandria (May 2 and January 18). He is called “the Great,” for he was a zealous champion for the purity of Orthodoxy. In the Sixth Ode of the Canon for today’s Feast, he is referred to as “the thirteenth Apostle.”

AT THE SMALL ENTRANCE WE SING

ΑΠΟΛΥΤΙΚΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΟΡΤΗΣ. ΗΧΟΣ Δ'.

Aνελήφθης ἐν δόξῃ, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, χαροποιήσας τὸν Μαθητάς, τῇ ἐπαγγελίᾳ τοῦ ἀγίου Πνεύματος, βεβαιωθέντων αὐτῶν διὰ τῆς εὐλογίας, ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ λυτρωτὴς τοῦ κόσμου.

ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΜΟΝ. ΗΧΟΣ ΠΛ. Β.'

Aγγελικὰ Δυνάμεις ἐπὶ τὸ μνῆμά σου, καὶ οἱ φυλάσσοντες ἀπενεκρώθησαν· καὶ ἵστατο Μαρία ἐν τῷ τάφῳ, ζητοῦσα τὸ ἄχραντόν σου Σῶμα· ἐσκύλευσας τὸν Ἀδην, μὴ πειρασθεὶς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ· ὑπῆντησας τῇ Παρθένῳ, δωρούμενος τὴν ζωήν. Οἱ ἀναστὰς ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, Κύριε δόξα σοι.

ΑΠΟΛΥΤΙΚΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΕΟΡΤΗΣ. ΗΧΟΣ Δ'.

Ανελήφθης ἐν δόξῃ...

ΑΠΟΛΥΤΙΚΙΟΝ ΤΩΝ ΠΑΤΕΡΩΝ. ΗΧΟΣ ΠΛ. Δ'.

Τπερδεοξασμένος εἶ, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, ὁ φωστήρας ἐπὶ γῆς τοὺς Πατέρας ἡμῶν θεμελιώσας, καὶ δι' αὐτῶν πρὸς τὴν ἀληθινὴν πίστιν, πάντας ἡμᾶς ὀδηγήσας· πολυεύσπλαγχνε, δόξα σοι.

ΑΠΟΛΥΤΙΚΙΟΝ ΤΟΥ ΝΑΟΥ. ΗΧΟΣ ΠΛ. Α'.

Λουκάν τον πανύμνητον καὶ ἄγιον ἀπόστολον, τὸν Ἅγιον Ἐκκλησίας γνωστὸν συνθέτην τῶν Πράξεων τῶν Ἀποστόλων, τὸν τε σεμνὸν τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου Χριστοῦ ὑπομνηματιστήν, ἀξίως τιμήσωμεν ὅμνοις ὁσίοις, ὡς νοσημάτων ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ φυσικῶν ἀσθενειῶν θεραπευτήν, τὸν καθαίροντα πληγὰς τοῦ πνεύματος, καὶ ἀδιαλείπτως πρεσβεύοντα ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν ἡμῶν.

ΚΟΝΤΑΚΙΟΝ. ΗΧΟΣ ΠΛ. Δ'.

Tὴν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πληρώσας οἰκονομίαν, καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ γῆς ἐνώσας τοῖς οὐρανίοις, ἀνελήφθης ἐν δόξῃ, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, οὐδαμόθεν χωρὶς ζόμενος, ἀλλὰ μένων ἀδιάστατος, καὶ βιῶν τοῖς ἀγαπῶσι σε. Ἐγώ εἰμι μεθ' ὑμῶν, καὶ οὐδεὶς καθ' ὑμῶν.

ΑΠΟΛΥΤΙΚΙΟΝ ΟΦ ΤΗ FEAST. MODE 4.

You ascended in glory, O Christ our God, after You filled the Disciples with joy, by promising to send them the Holy Spirit, and You blessed them and established their faith, that You are the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.

RESURRECTIONAL. MODE 6.

When the angelic powers appeared at Your grave, the soldiers guarding it feared and became as dead. And standing by the sepulcher was Mary who was seeking Your immaculate body. You devastated Hades, not afflicted by it. You went to meet the virgin, and granted eternal life. You resurrected from the dead. O Lord, glory to You.

ΑΠΟΛΥΤΙΚΙΟΝ ΟΦ ΤΗ FEAST. MODE 4.

You ascended in glory...

ΑΠΟΛΥΤΙΚΙΟΝ ΟΦ ΤΗ FATHERS. MODE 8.

Supremely blessed are You, O Christ our God. You established the holy Fathers upon the earth as beacons, and through them You have guided us all to the true Faith, greatly merciful One, glory be to You.

ΑΠΟΛΥΤΙΚΙΟΝ ΟΦ ΤΗ CHURCH. MODE 5.

The holy Apostle, the All-hymned Luke, * who is acknowledged by the Church of Christ * as the recorder of the Acts of the Apostles, * and the splendid author of the Gospel of Christ. * Let us praise with sacred hymns as a physician, * who heals the infirmities of man, * and the ailments of nature, * who cleanses spiritual wounds, and prays unceasingly for our souls.

ΚΟΝΤΑΚΙΟΝ. MODE 8.

When you had fulfilled the dispensation for our sake, and united things on earth with the things in heaven, You were taken up thither in glory, O Christ our God, going not away from any place, but continuing inseparable, and to them that love You crying out, "I am with you, and there is, therefore, none against you."

THE READINGS OF THE DAY

EPISTLE READING

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 20:16-18, 28-36

IN THOSE DAYS, Paul had decided to sail past Ephesos, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost. And from Miletos he sent to Ephesos and called to him the elders of the church. And when they came to him, he said to them: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive.' " And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

GOSPEL READING

JOHN 17:1-13

At that time, Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do; and now, Father, you glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made. "I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you; for I have given them the words which you gave me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you did send me. I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are mine; all mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

UPCOMING CHURCH SERVICES:

Saturday, June 2, Saturday of the Souls, Orthros / Div. Liturgy, 8:30am

Saturday, June 2, Great Vespers for Pentecost, 5pm

THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who helped with the Golf Tournament fundraiser.

BOOKS FOR SALE

Prayer books are back in stock. Please see Presvytera if you would like to purchase a copy.

BUDDY PACKS

Philoptochos is organizing a food drive for the Buddy Pack Program during the month of May. Please bring to church items included in the wish list below by May 31. You can make a cash donation if you prefer so (place the money in an envelope in the box provided). Please place the items you bring in a bag and add a note with how much you spent for them. This will help us evaluate our programs. For more information about the Buddy Pack Program see the flyer on the door.

ITEMS NEEDED FOR BUDDY PACKS

- New or gently used backpacks
- Nutritious, shelf-stable food items such as:
Peanut butter crackers, Pop-top Canned fruits, Pop-top Canned soup, 100% fruit juice, Granola bars, Peanut butter (in plastic jar)
- Please avoid items such as:
- Food stored in glass containers
- Perishable food such as fresh fruits and vegetables

- Cookies or other items containing a lot of sugar.

Thank you very much for your generosity!

HOLY COMMUNION

In order to ensure proper order during the reception of Holy Communion, please remain in your seat until an usher releases your row. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. Also note that following Holy Communion, children should return to their seats with their parents.

“Abba Macarius the Great said to the brothers at Scetis when he dismissed the assembly, ‘Flee, my brothers.’ One of the old men asked him, ‘Where could we flee to beyond this desert?’ He put his finger on his lips and said, ‘Flee that,’ and he went into his cell, shut the door and sat down.

—THE SAYINGS OF THE
DESERT FATHERS

SYNAXARION

The emperor Constantine presided over the sessions of the Council. In his speech, responding to the welcome by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, he said, “God has helped me cast down the impious might of the persecutors, but more distressful for me than any blood spilled in battle is for a soldier, is the internal strife in the Church of God, for it is more ruinous.”

Arius, with seventeen bishops among his supporters, remained arrogant, but his teaching was repudiated and he was excommunicated from the Church. In his speech, the holy deacon Athanasius conclusively refuted the blasphemous opinions of Arius. The heresiarch Arius is depicted in iconography sitting on Satan’s knees, or in the mouth of the Beast of the Deep (Rev. 13).

The Fathers of the Council declined to accept a Symbol of Faith (Creed) proposed by the Arians. Instead, they affirmed the Orthodox Symbol of Faith. St Constantine asked the Council to insert into the text of the Symbol of Faith the word “consubstantial,” which he had heard in the speeches of the bishops. The Fathers of the Council unanimously accepted this suggestion.

In the Nicene Creed, the holy Fathers set forth and confirmed the Apostolic teachings about Christ’s divine nature. The heresy of Arius was exposed and repudiated as an error of haughty reason. After resolving this chief dogmatic question, the Council also issued Twelve Canons on questions of churchly administration and discipline. Also decided was the date for the celebration of Holy Pascha. By decision of the Council, Holy Pascha should not be celebrated by Christians on the same day with the Jewish Passover, but on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the vernal equinox (which occurred on March 22 in 325).

The Hieromartyr Therapon, Bishop of Sardis suffered for Christ during the third century (the city of Sardis was in Lydia, Asia Minor). In fulfilling his priestly service, St Therapon enlightened many of the pagan Greeks with the light of the Christian Faith and baptized them. For this, he was brought to trial before the governor Julian and fearlessly declared himself a Christian bishop.

They threw him into prison, where he languished with hunger and thirst, and then they gave him over to cruel tortures. These torments did not break the saint’s valiant confession of faith. They led the saint off in chains to the city of Sinaion in Phrygia, and then to Ancyra.

In these cities they tortured him again. They took him to the River Astala, where they stretched him naked upon the ground, fastened to four stakes, and fiercely beat him. After this torture, they took the passion-bearer to the outskirts of the Satalia diocese, part of the Sardis metropolitanate, and here after long beatings St Therapon ended his martyric contest.

The stakes to which the saint had been tied, and which were soaked with his blood, put forth green shoots and grew into large trees, whose leaves were found to have curative powers. Many people received healing through them.

The Holy Confessor John the Russian was born in Little Russia around 1690, and was raised in piety and love for the Church of God. Upon attaining the age of maturity he was called to military service, and he served as a simple soldier in the army of Peter I and took part in the Russo-Turkish War. During the Prutsk Campaign of 1711 he and other soldiers were captured by the Tatars, who handed him over to the commander of the Turkish cavalry. He took his Russian captive home with him to Asia Minor, to the village of Prokopion.

The Turks tried to convert the Christian soldiers to the Moslem faith with threats and flattery, but those who resisted were beaten and tortured. Some, alas, denied Christ and became Moslems, hoping to improve their lot. St John was not swayed by the promise of earthly delights, and he bravely endured the humiliation and beatings.

His master tortured him often in the hope that his slave would accept Islam. St John resolutely resisted the will of his master saying, "You cannot turn me from my holy Faith by threats, nor with promises of riches and pleasures. I will obey your orders willingly, if you will leave me free to follow my religion. I would rather surrender my head to you than to change my faith. I was born a Christian, and I shall die a Christian."

St John's bold words and firm faith, as well as his humility and meekness, finally softened the fierce heart of his master. He left John in peace, and no longer tried to make him renounce Christianity. The saint lived in the stable and took care of his master's animals, rejoicing because his bed was a manger such as the one in which the Savior was born.

From morning until late evening the saint served his Turkish master, fulfilling all his commands. He performed his duties in the winter cold and summer heat, half naked and barefoot. Other slaves frequently mocked him, seeing his zeal. St John never became angry with them, but on the contrary, he helped them when he could, and comforted them in their misfortune.

The saint's kindness and gentle nature had its effect on the souls of both the master and the slaves. The Agha and his wife came to love him, and offered him a small room near the hayloft. St John did not accept it, preferring to remain in the stable with the animals. Here he slept on the hay, covered only by an old coat. So the stable became his hermitage, where he prayed and chanted Psalms.

St John brought a blessing to his master simply by living in his household. The cavalry officer became rich, and was soon one of the most powerful men in Prokopion. He knew very well why his home had been blessed, and he did not hesitate to tell others.

Sometimes St John left the stable at night and went to the church of the Great Martyr George, where he kept vigil in the narthex. On Saturdays and Feast days, he received the Holy Mysteries of Christ.

During this time St John continued to serve his master as before, and despite his own poverty, he always helped the needy and the sick, and shared his meager food with them.

One day, the officer left Prokopion and went to Mecca on pilgrimage. A few days later, his wife gave a banquet and invited her husband's friends and relatives, asking them to pray for her husband's safe return. St John served at the table, and he put down a dish of pilaf, his master's favorite food. The hostess said, "How much pleasure your master would have if he could be here to eat this pilaf with us." St John asked for a dish of pilaf, saying that he would send it to his master in Mecca. The guests laughed when they heard his words. The mistress, however, ordered the cook to give him a dish of pilaf, thinking he would eat it himself, or give it to some poor family.

Taking the dish, St John went into the stable and prayed that God would send it to his master. He had no doubt that God would send the pilaf to his master in a supernatural manner. The plate disappeared before his eyes, and he went into the house to tell his mistress that he had sent the pilaf to his master.

After some time, the master returned home with the copper plate which had held the pilaf. He told his household that on a certain day (the very day of the banquet), he returned from the mosque to the home where he was staying. Although the room was locked, he found a plate of steaming pilaf on the

table. Unable to explain who had brought the food, or how anyone could enter the locked room, the officer examined the plate. To his amazement, he saw his own name engraved on the copper plate. In spite of his confusion, he ate the meal with great relish.

When the officer's family heard this story, they marveled. His wife told him of how John had asked for a plate of pilaf to send to his master in Mecca, and how they all laughed when John came back and said that it had been sent. Now they saw that what the saint had said was true (Compare the story of Habakkuk, who miraculously brought a dish of potage to Daniel in the lions' den [Dan. 14:33-39], in the Septuagint).

Toward the end of his difficult life St John fell ill, and sensed the nearness of his end. He summoned the priest so that he could receive Holy Communion. The priest, fearing to go to the residence of the Turkish commander openly with the Holy Gifts, enclosed the life-giving Mysteries in an apple and brought them to St John.

St John glorified the Lord, received the Body and Blood of Christ, and then reposed. The holy Confessor John the Russian went to the Lord Whom he loved on May 27, 1730. When they reported to the master that his servant John had died, he summoned the priests and gave them the body of St John for Christian burial. Almost all the Christian inhabitants of Prokopion came to the funeral, and they accompanied the body of the saint to the Christian cemetery.

Three and a half years later the priest was miraculously informed in a dream that the relics of St John had remained incorrupt. Soon the relics of the saint were transferred to the church of the holy Great Martyr George and placed in a special reliquary. The new saint of God began to be glorified by countless miracles of grace, accounts of which spread to the remote cities and villages. Christian believers from

various places came to Prokopion to venerate the holy relics of St John the Russian and they received healing through his prayers. The new saint came to be venerated not only by Orthodox Christians, but also by Armenians, and even Turks, who prayed to the Russian saint, "Servant of God, in your mercy, do not disdain us."

In the year 1881 a portion of the relics of St John were transferred to the Russian monastery of the holy Great Martyr Panteleimon by the monks of Mount Athos, after they were miraculously saved by the saint during a dangerous journey.

Construction of a new church was begun in 1886, through the contributions of the monastery and the inhabitants of Prokopion. This was necessary because the church of the holy Great Martyr George, where the relics of St John were enshrined, had fallen into disrepair.

On August 15, 1898 the new church dedicated to St John the Russian was consecrated by the Metropolitan John of Caesarea, with the blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarch Constantine V.

In 1924, an exchange of the populations of Greece and Turkey took place. Many Moslems moved out of Greece, and many Christians moved out of Turkey. The inhabitants of Prokopion, when they moved to the island of Euboia, took with them part of the relics of St John the Russian.

For several decades the relics were in the church of Sts Constantine and Helen at New Prokopion on Euboia, and in 1951 they were transferred into a new church dedicated to St John the Russian. Thousands of pilgrims flocked here from all the corners of Greece, particularly on his Feast, May 27. St John the Russian is widely venerated on Mount Athos, particularly in the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon.

St John's help is sought by travelers, and by those transporting things.

The Holy Martyrs Theodora the Virgin and Didymus the Soldier suffered for Christ during the persecution against Christians under the emperor Diocletian (284-305), in the city of Alexandria in either the year 303 or 304.

The Virgin Martyr Theodora, standing trial before the prefect Eustratius of Alexandria, bravely confessed herself a Christian. When the prefect asked why she had not married, the saint replied that she had dedicated herself to God, and had resolved to remain a virgin for the name of Christ.

Eustratius ordered the holy virgin to be taken to prison, giving her three days to make up her mind, and he threatened to have her taken to a brothel if she persisted in her disobedience. Brought again to trial three days later, St Theodora remained as resolute in her faith as before.

The saint was taken to the brothel, where dissolute youths began to argue which of them should be the first to have her. At this moment the Christian Didymus, dressed in soldier's garb, entered the brothel without hindrance. He chased the frightened profligates out and saved the holy virgin, giving her his clothes so she could escape.

Upon learning what had happened, Eustratius interrogated St Didymus. Brought before the angry judge, St Didymus told how he had set the holy virgin free, and for this he was sentenced to death. St Theodora appeared at the place of execution, and said that she wanted to die with St Didymus. The prefect gave orders to execute both of them. The first to bend the neck beneath the sword was the holy martyr Theodora, and then the holy Martyr Didymus. The bodies of the martyrs were then burned.

Saint Michael of Parekhi was a native of the village of Norgiali in the Shavsheti region of southern Georgia. He was tonsured a monk in the Midznadzori Wilderness.

Fr. Michael journeyed to Khandzta Monastery, and with the blessing of the brotherhood, he built a small chapel and dwelling for the monks nearby. Built in a cave on the side of a cliff, St. Michael's establishment was difficult to reach (the new monastery was called "Parekhi," or "Cave"). God was pleased with his good works, and He granted St. Michael the gift of working wonders. In a divine revelation, St. Michael was instructed to send his disciples Serapion and John to the region of Samtskhe. There they established a beautiful monastery in the village of Zarzma.

After some time Father Michael abandoned his cell and settled at the top of a large boulder. Once the devil caused him to stumble off the rock, but the Lord protected him and he remained unharmed.

Frightened by the incident, Michael sent his disciples to bring St. Gregory of Khandzta, and he related to him all that had happened. The blessed Gregory assuaged his brother's fears, erected a cross on either side of Michael's cell, and told him, "These two crosses of Christ will protect you, and the mercy of the Most Holy Trinity and the Precious Cross will be upon you."

St. Michael lived to an old age, and he was buried at Parekhi Monastery. Many faithful pilgrims who have visited his grave have been healed of their infirmities.

According to Basil of Zarzma, St. Michael's disciples wrote accounts of his labors, wisdom, and miracles after his repose, but these works have unfortunately not been preserved. What we know about the life of St. Michael of Parekhi was preserved in the hagiographical writings of the 10th and 11th centuries.