

Selections From
The Lives of the Saints
Of The Holy Orthodox Church

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St. Raphael of Brooklyn

February 27

Our holy Father Raphael was born in Syria in 1860 to pious Orthodox parents, Michael Hawaweeny and his second wife Mariam, the daughter of a priest of Damascus. The exact date of Raphael's birth is not known, but he estimated it to be on or near his Name Day, the Synaxis of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel and all the Bodiless Powers of Heaven (November 8). Due to the violent persecution of Christians, at which time their parish priest, Saint Joseph of Damascus (July 10) and his companions were martyred, the Hawaweeny family was forced to flee to Beirut for their safety. It was here that the future saint first saw the light of day, and not in the city of his parents. Indeed, as the child's life unfolded, it was evident that he would have no continuing city in this world, but would seek the city which is to come (Heb 13:14).

On the Feast of Theophany in 1861, he was baptized with the name Rafla, and later that spring the family was able to return to Damascus. The child attended elementary school, where he did very well, but in 1874 it appeared that Michael Hawaweeny would no longer be able to afford his son's tuition. Fortunately, help came from Deacon Athanasius Atallah (later Metropolitan of Homs), who recommended to Patriarch Hierotheus of Antioch that Rafla be accepted as a student of the Patriarchate in preparation for the priesthood.

He was such a good student that he was selected to be a substitute teaching assistant in 1877. The following year he was appointed as a teacher of Arabic and Turkish. On March 28, 1879 he was tonsured as a monk by Patriarch Hierotheus, and served as His Beatitude's personal attendant.

Since the Balamand Seminary had been closed in 1840, Patriarch JOACHIM III of Constantinople invited the Patriarch of Antioch to send at least one deserving student to study on scholarship at the School of Theology at Halki, and Saint Raphael was the one who was selected to go.

On December 8, 1885, he was ordained to the diaconate at the school chapel. In July of 1886, the young deacon received his Certificate of Theology, and returned to his homeland in the hope of serving the Church there. Patriarch Gerasimus of Antioch was impressed with Deacon Raphael, and often took him along on his

pastoral visitations of his parishes. When His Beatitude could not be present, Deacon Raphael was asked to preach the Word of God to the people.

Deacon Raphael was not satisfied with the extent of his knowledge, and thirsted to learn even more. This did not stem from personal pride or ambition, but came from his fervent desire to benefit others. Truly, the words of King Solomon could be applied to Saint Raphael: “Give an opportunity to a wise man, and he will be wiser; instruct a just man, and he will receive more instruction” (Proverbs 9:9). Therefore, he asked Patriarch Gerasimus to permit him to do graduate studies at a school in Russia, promising to return and serve as the Patriarch’s Russian-language secretary. The Patriarch gave his blessing, and Deacon Raphael was accepted as a student at the Theological Academy of Kiev.

In 1889 Patriarch Gerasimus ordered the young deacon to take over as head of the Antiochian representation church in Moscow. He was ordained to the holy priesthood by Bishop SYLVESTER, the rector of the Academy, at the request of Patriarch Gerasimus. A month later, he was raised to the rank of archimandrite by Metropolitan IOANNIKII of Moscow, and was confirmed as head of the Antiochian representation church. After two years, Archimandrite Raphael was able to reduce the representation’s 65,000 ruble debt by 15,000 rubles. He also arranged for twenty-four Syrian students to come to Russia to further their education, hoping that they would return to Syria and teach others.

When Patriarch Gerasimus resigned in order to accept the See of Jerusalem, Archimandrite Raphael regarded this as an opportunity to free the Church of Antioch from its domination by foreign hierarchs. Burning with love for the Church of Antioch, and wishing to restore the administration of the church to its own native clergy and people, Archimandrite Raphael began a campaign of writing letters to some Antiochian bishops and influential laymen. He also wrote articles in the Russian press, drawing attention to the plight of Antioch. His courageous efforts did not meet with success, however, and there was a price to pay for his outspoken criticism.

In November of 1891 Metropolitan SPYRIDON, a Greek Cypriot, was elected as Patriarch of Antioch. Many Arabs believed that he had purchased the election by distributing 10,000 lira to several notable people in Damascus. Archimandrite Raphael refused to commemorate the new Patriarch during services at the representation church. As a result, he was suspended from his priestly functions by Patriarch SPYRIDON. Saint Raphael accepted his suspension, but continued to write

articles in Russian newspapers in defense of the Antiochian cause. The Patriarchs of Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Jerusalem successfully petitioned the Tsar to forbid Russian newspapers from publishing his articles. With this door closed to him, Saint Raphael began to publish his writings in book form.

Eventually, Patriarch SPYRIDON wrote to the Assistant Overprocurator of Russia, a friend of Saint Raphael's, asking him to persuade Father Raphael to ask for the Patriarch's forgiveness. He did so, and the suspension was lifted. Saint Raphael was allowed to transfer from the jurisdiction of Antioch to the Church of Russia, and to remain there. He went to Kazan, taking a position as instructor in Arabic studies at the theological academy. He remained there until 1895 when he was invited by the Syrian Orthodox Benevolent Society of New York to come to that city to be the pastor of the Arab Orthodox community.

When the holy Apostle Paul had a vision of a man entreating him to come to Macedonia to help them (Acts 16:10), he set off on a great missionary journey. When Saint Raphael heard of the needs of his countrymen who were scattered in a strange land, he crossed the ocean to labor in yet another foreign country.

Archimandrite Raphael arrived in New York on November 2, 1895, and was welcomed by a delegation of Arab Christians who were awaiting their leader from Russia. On November 5, his first Sunday in America, he assisted Bishop NICHOLAS in serving the Divine Liturgy at the Russian church in New York city. Less than two weeks after his arrival, Archimandrite Raphael found a suitable place in lower Manhattan to set up a chapel, and furnished it with ecclesiastical items that he had brought with him from Russia. Bishop NICHOLAS blessed the new chapel, which was dedicated to Saint Nicholas of Myra.

This zealous pastor remained in New York teaching, preaching, and celebrating the divine services for his parishioners. It was not long, however, before he heard of smaller communities of Arab Christians scattered throughout the length and breadth of North America. Since these Arab immigrants had no pastor to care for them, it was not surprising that some should turn to other Christian traditions, or completely neglect their religious duties. This was an ongoing concern for Saint Raphael throughout the course of his ministry. Although he was not opposed to dialogue with non-Orthodox Christians, nor to friendly relations based on shared beliefs, Saint Raphael never lost sight of the clear line of distinction that exists between the

Orthodox and the heterodox. He always insisted that any church unity must be based on the teachings of the seven Ecumenical Councils.

The Orthodoxy of Saint Raphael's life and teaching was demonstrated over and over again by his words and his actions. He always upheld and defended the spotless Faith which was "delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Although at first he did not understand the teachings of the heterodox, he later discovered how far removed they were from Orthodox doctrine. When he realized this, he took steps to protect his flock from harmful influences. He directed his people not to attend heterodox services lest they become confused by "divers and strange doctrines" (Heb 13:9). He believed it would be preferable for the head of the household to read the Hours at home from the Service Book when it was not possible to attend an Orthodox church.

In the summer of 1896, Saint Raphael undertook the first of several pastoral journeys across the continent. He visited thirty cities between New York and San Francisco, seeking out the Master's lost sheep in cities, towns, and on isolated farms. He fed the spiritually hungry people with the Word of God in each place where he stopped. He performed marriages, baptisms, heard confessions, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the homes of the faithful where there was no church building. In other words, he zealously fulfilled his ministry as a preacher of the Gospel, enduring many hardships and afflictions, and he was watchful in all things concerning the care of his flock (2 Tim 4:5).

In 1898, with the blessing of Bishop Nicholas, Saint Raphael produced his first book in the New World -- an Arabic language Service Book called *The Book of True Consolation in the Divine Prayers*. This book of liturgical services and prayers was very useful to priests in celebrating the divine services, and also to the people in their personal prayer life. The English version published by Archimandrite Seraphim Nassar is still being used today.

Between May-November 1898, Saint Raphael set off on his second pastoral tour. During this trip he became convinced of the need for Arabic-speaking priests to serve in the new churches he had established. When he returned to New York, he made a report to Bishop NICHOLAS expressing these concerns. With Bishop NICHOLAS's blessing Saint Raphael was able to bring qualified priests from Syria. He also sought out educated laymen whom he could recommend for ordination. Both as an archimandrite and later as bishop, Saint Raphael would appoint pastors only after obtaining the blessing of the Russian hierarch who headed the American Mission.

This was the normal state of affairs in America at the time. Archimandrite Raphael welcomed Bishop Tikhon when the latter replaced Bishop NICHOLAS as the ruling bishop in America. On December 15, Saint Tikhon came to serve the Liturgy at the Syrian church of Saint Nicholas. Raphael told his people that their new Archpastor was one who “has been sent here to tend the flock of Christ -- Russians, Slavs, Syro-Arabs, and Greeks -- which is scattered across the entire North American continent.” At that time, of course, there were no parallel jurisdictions based on nationality. The Church united those of diverse backgrounds under the omophorion of the Russian Archbishop. This was the norm until the Russian Revolution disrupted church life in Russia, and also in America.

In March of 1899, Saint Raphael received permission from Bishop Tikhon to start collecting funds for a cemetery, and for building a new church to replace the chapel which was located in an old building on a dirty street. In the spring he left on another pastoral tour of forty-three cities and towns. Traveling by land and sea, and undeterred by the obstacles and difficulties before him, he spent seven months in the northeastern, southern, and midwestern regions of the United States. Saint Raphael ministered to Greeks and Russians as well as Arabs, performing weddings and baptisms, and regularizing the weddings of Orthodox people who had been married by non-Orthodox clergy. He also chrismated some children who had been baptized by Catholic priests.

In Johnstown, PA he reconciled those whose personal enmity threatened to divide the Arabic community. Although civil courts had been unable to make peace, Saint Raphael restored calm and put an end to the bitter feud. While in Johnstown, he received a telegram informing him that Metropolitan Meletios (Doumani), had been elected Patriarch of Antioch. With great joy Saint Raphael told his people that for the first time in 168 years, a native Arab had been chosen as primate of the Antiochian Church.

After the new Patriarch had been installed, Archimandrite Raphael was proposed to succeed Meletios as Metropolitan of Latakia. The Patriarch, however, stated that the Holy Synod could not elect Father Raphael because of his important work in America. In 1901, Metropolitan GABRIEL of Beirut wrote to Archimandrite Raphael asking him to be his auxiliary bishop, but he declined, saying that he could not leave his American flock. First, he wanted to build a permanent church, and to

acquire a parish cemetery. The latter goal was achieved in August of 1901 when Father Raphael purchased a section of Mt Olivet cemetery on Long Island.

In December of 1901 Archimandrite Raphael was elected as Bishop of Zahleh. Patriarch Meletios sent a telegram congratulating him and asking him to return. Father Raphael thanked the Patriarch, but again declined higher office. He said that he wished to complete the project of building a temple for the Syrian community in New York. The following year, he bought an existing church building on Pacific Street in Brooklyn, and had it remodeled for Orthodox worship. Bishop Tikhon consecrated the church to the great joy of the faithful in attendance. Thus, Saint Raphael's second major project was finished.

Since the number of parishes within the Diocese of North America was growing, Bishop Tikhon found it impossible to visit all of them. The diocese had to be reorganized in order to administer it more efficiently. Therefore, Bishop Tikhon submitted a plan to the Russian Holy Synod which would transfer the See from San Francisco to New York because most parishes and individuals were concentrated in the east. Since various ethnic groups required special attention and pastoral leadership, Bishop Tikhon proposed that Archimandrite Raphael be made his second vicar bishop (the Bishop of Alaska would be his first).

In 1903, the Holy Synod of Russia unanimously elected Archimandrite Raphael to be the Bishop of Brooklyn while retaining him as head of the Syro-Arab Orthodox Mission in North America. The Holy Synod announced the election to Patriarch Meletios, who was pleased by their decision. Bishop Tikhon wrote to Saint Raphael to inform him of his election, and Father Raphael sent him a letter of acceptance. Meanwhile, Father Innocent Pustynsky was consecrated as Tikhon's first auxiliary bishop at Saint Petersburg's cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan.

On the third Sunday of Lent in 1904, Saint Raphael became the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated on American soil. Bishop Tikhon and Bishop Innocent performed the service at Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn. The new bishop's vestments were a gift from Tsar Nicholas II. Following his consecration, Bishop Raphael continued his pastoral labors, ordaining priests and assigning them to parishes, and helping Bishop Tikhon in the administration of the diocese.

At the end of 1904, Bishop Raphael announced his intention to publish a magazine called *Al-Kalimat* (The Word) as the official publication of the Syro-Arab

mission. This would help to link the people and parishes of his diocese more closely together. Bishop Raphael knew that he could not visit all Orthodox Christians across North America in person, but through the ministry of the printed word, he could preach the word of salvation even to people he would never meet. The content was to be spiritual, moral, and churchly so that the magazine could reinforce people in their Faith. The Word would focus on five primary topics: dogmatic truths, ethical teaching, historical and contemporary ecclesiastical subjects, a chronicle of baptisms, weddings, etc., and official pronouncements. The first issue was printed in January 1905, and Saint Raphael considered this milestone as one equal in importance to the acquisition of Saint Nicholas Cathedral and the parish cemetery.

In July of 1905 Bishop Raphael consecrated the grounds for Saint Tikhon's Monastery and blessed the orphanage at South Canaan, PA. Three days later, he presided at a conference of diocesan clergy at Old Forge, PA, because Archbishop Tikhon was in San Francisco. Among the clergy in attendance were three who would also be numbered among the saints: Father ALEXIS Toth, Father Alexander Hotovitzky, and Father John Kochurov (the last two would die as martyrs in Russia).

For the next ten years Bishop Raphael tended his growing flock. With the growth of his New York community came an increase in the number of children, and he was concerned about their future. He wanted to establish an evening school to educate them in a Christian atmosphere, because the future of the Church in this country depended upon the instruction of the youth. Children who did not speak Arabic were already going to non-Orthodox churches where Sunday school classes were conducted in English. Bishop Raphael saw the absolute necessity for using English in worship and in education for the future progress of the Syro-Arab Mission.

Taking heed of Saint Paul's words to pray in a language that people understood (1 Cor.14:15-19), Saint Raphael recommended the use of the Service Book of the Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church (translated by Isabel Hapgood) in all of his parishes.

In March of 1907 Saint Tikhon returned to Russia and was replaced by Archbishop PLATON. Once again Saint Raphael was considered for episcopal office in Syria, being nominated to succeed Patriarch GREGORY as Metropolitan of Tripoli in 1908. The Holy Synod of Antioch removed Bishop Raphael's name from the list of candidates, citing various canons which forbid a bishop being transferred from one city to another.

On the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 1911, Bishop Raphael was honored for his fifteen years of pastoral ministry in America. Archbishop PLATON presented him with a silver-covered icon of Christ and praised him for his work. In his humility, Bishop Raphael could not understand why he should be honored merely for doing his duty (Luke 17:10). He considered himself an “unworthy servant,” yet he did perfectly the work that fell to him (Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians).

Toward the end of 1912, Bishop Raphael became ill while working in his office. Doctors diagnosed him with a heart ailment that eventually caused his death. After two weeks he felt strong enough to celebrate the Liturgy in his cathedral.

In 1913-1914 this missionary bishop continued to make pastoral visitations to various cities. In 1915 he fell ill again and spent two months at home, bearing his illness with patience. At 12:40 AM on February 14/27 he rested from his labors. They called him, but he did not answer. They shook him, but he was gone.

From his youth, Saint Raphael’s greatest joy was to serve the Church. When he came to America, he found his people scattered abroad, and he called them to unity. He never neglected his flock, but traveled throughout America, Canada, and Mexico in search of them so that he might care for them. He kept them from straying into strange pastures, and he protected them from spiritual harm. During twenty years of faithful ministry he nurtured them and helped them to grow. At the time of his death, the Syro-Arab Mission had thirty parishes with 25,000 faithful.

He was also a scholar, and the author of several books. He wrote many, if not most, of the articles that appeared in *The Word*. He served his own Arabic community, and also reached out to Greeks and Russians, speaking to them in their own language. He became fluent in English, and encouraged its use in church services and educational programs.

Saint Raphael came into contact with all sorts of people, and was a gentle father to them. He gained their love and respect by first loving them, and also through his charming personality and excellent character. He was always kind and merciful to others, but was strict with himself. He accomplished many good things during his earthly life, and now he joins the holy angels in offering ceaseless prayer and praise to God.

Through the prayers of the holy Bishop Raphael, may we also be made worthy of the heavenly Kingdom. Amen.

Troparion – Tone 1

Your proclamation has gone forth throughout North America, / calling the scattered sheep into the unity of the church. / hearing your voice, they responded to your teaching, / and through your writings you instructed them in piety. / now guided by your example, O Father Raphael, / we sing hymns of praise unto Christ our God. / Glory to Him Who gave you strength! / Glory to Him Who granted you a crown! / Glory to Him Who, through you, grants healing to all!

Troparion – Tone 3

Rejoice, O Father Raphael, Adornment of the holy Church! Thou art Champion of the True Faith, Seeker of the lost, Consolation of the oppressed, Father to orphans, and Friend of the poor, Peacemaker and Good Shepherd, Joy of all the Orthodox, Son of Antioch, Boast of America; Intercede with Christ God for us and for all who honor thee.

Kontakion – Tone 8

You were a guardian and a defender of the Church's teaching; / you protected your flock from false doctrines and confirmed them in the true faith. / O holy father Raphael, son of Syria and glory of North America, / always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved.

St. John Climacus of Sinai, Author of “The Ladder”

March 30

Saint John of the Ladder is honored by Holy Church as a great ascetic and author of the renowned spiritual book called THE LADDER, from which he is also called “of the Ladder” (Climacus).

There is almost no information about Saint John’s origins. One tradition suggests that he was born in Constantinople around the year 570, and was the son of Saints Xenophon and Maria (January 26).

John went to Sinai when he was sixteen, submitting to Abba Martyrius as his instructor and guide. After four years, Saint John was tonsured as a monk. Abba Strategios, who was present at Saint John’s tonsure, predicted that he would become a great luminary in the Church of Christ.

For nineteen years Saint John progressed in monasticism in obedience to his spiritual Father. After the death of Abba Martyrius, Saint John embarked on a solitary life, settling in a wild place called Thola, where he spent forty years laboring in silence, fasting, prayer, and tears of penitence.

It is not by chance that in THE LADDER Saint John speaks about tears of repentance: “Just as fire burns and destroys the wood, so pure tears wash away every impurity, both external and internal.” His holy prayer was strong and efficacious, as may be seen from an example from the life of the God-pleasing saint.

Saint John had a disciple named Moses. Once, the saint ordered his disciple to bring dung to fertilize the vegetable garden. When he had fulfilled the obedience, Moses lay down to rest under the shade of a large rock, because of the scorching heat of summer. Saint John was in his cell in a light sleep. Suddenly, a man of remarkable appearance appeared to him and awakened the holy ascetic, reproaching him, “John, why do you sleep so heedlessly, when Moses is in danger?”

Saint John immediately woke up and began to pray for his disciple. When Moses returned in the evening, Saint John asked whether any sort of misfortune had befallen him.

The monk replied, “A large rock would have fallen on me as I slept beneath it at noon, but I left that place because I thought I heard you calling me.” Saint John did not tell his disciple of his vision, but gave thanks to God.

Saint John ate the food which is permitted by the monastic rule, but only in moderation. He did not sleep very much, only enough to keep up his strength, so that he would not ruin his mind by unceasing vigil. “I do not fast excessively,” he said of himself, “nor do I give myself over to intense all-night vigil, nor lay upon the ground, but I restrain myself..., and the Lord soon saved me.”

The following example of Saint John’s humility is noteworthy. Gifted with discernment, and attaining wisdom through spiritual experience, he lovingly received all who came to him and guided them to salvation. One day some envious monks reproached him for being too talkative, and so Saint John kept silence for a whole year. The monks realized their error, and they went to the ascetic and begged him not to deprive them of the spiritual profit of his conversation.

Concealing his ascetic deeds from others, Saint John sometimes withdrew into a cave, but reports of his holiness spread far beyond the vicinity. Visitors from all walks of life came to him, desiring to hear his words of edification and salvation. After forty years of solitary asceticism, he was chosen as igumen of Sinai when he was seventy-five. Saint John governed the holy monastery for four years. Toward the end of his life, the Lord granted him the gifts of clairvoyance and wonderworking.

At the request of Saint John, igumen of the Raithu monastery (Commemorated on Cheesefare Saturday), he wrote the incomparable **LADDER**, a book of instruction for monks who wished to attain spiritual perfection.

Knowing of the wisdom and spiritual gifts of Saint John of Sinai, the igumen of Raithu requested him to write down whatever was necessary for the salvation of those in the monastic life. Such a book would be “a ladder fixed on the earth” (Gen. 28:12), leading people to the gates of Heaven.

Saint John felt that such a task was beyond his ability, yet out of obedience he fulfilled the request. The saint called his work **THE LADDER**, for the book is “a fixed ladder leading from earthly things to the Holy of Holies....” The thirty steps of spiritual perfection correspond to the thirty years of the Lord’s age. When we have completed these thirty steps, we will find ourselves with the righteous and will not

stumble. **THE LADDER** begins with renunciation of the world, and ends with God, Who is love (1 John 4:8).

Although the book was written for monks, any Christian living in the world will find it an unerring guide for ascending to God, and a support in the spiritual life. Saints Theodore the Studite (November 11 and January 26), Sergius of Radonezh (September 25 and July 5), Joseph of Volokolamsk (September 9 and October 18), and others relied on **THE LADDER** as an important guide to salvation.

The twenty-second step of **THE LADDER** deals with various forms of vainglory. Saint John writes: “When I fast, I am vainglorious; and when I permit myself food in order to conceal my fasting from others I am again vainglorious about my prudence. When I dress in fine clothing, I am vanquished by vanity, and if I put on drab clothing, again I am overcome by vanity. If I speak, vainglory defeats me. If I wish to keep silence, I am again given over to it. Wherever this thorn comes up, it stands with its points upright.

A vain person seems to honor God, but strives to please men rather than God.

People of lofty spirit bear insult placidly and willingly, but only the holy and righteous may hear praise without harm.

When you hear that your neighbor or friend has slandered you behind your back, or even to your face, praise and love him.

It is not the one who reproaches himself who shows humility, for who will not put up with himself? It is the one who is slandered by another, yet continues to show love for him.

Whoever is proud of his natural gifts, intelligence, learning, skill in reading, clear enunciation, and other similar qualities, which are acquired without much labor, will never obtain supernatural gifts. Whoever is not faithful in small things (Luke 16:10), is also unfaithful in large things, and is vainglorious.

It often happens that God humbles the vainglorious, sending a sudden misfortune. If prayer does not destroy a proud thought, we bring to mind the departure of the soul from this life. And if this does not help, let us fear the shame which follows dishonor. “For whoever humbles himself shall be exalted, and whoever exalts himself shall be humbled” (Luke 14:11). When those who praise us, or rather

seduce us, start to praise us, let us recall our many sins, then we shall find that we are not worthy of what they say or do to honor us.”

In **THE LADDER** Saint John describes the ascent toward spiritual perfection, which is essential for anyone who wishes to save his soul. It is a written account of his thoughts, based on the collected wisdom of many wise ascetics, and on his own spiritual experience. The book is a great help on the path to truth and virtue.

The steps of **THE LADDER** proceed gradually from strength to strength on the path of perfection. The summit is not reached suddenly, but gradually, as the Savior says: “The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Mt.11:12).

Saint John is also commemorated on the fourth Sunday of Great Lent.

Troparion — Tone 8

By a flood of tears you made the desert fertile / and by your longing for God you brought forth fruits in abundance. / By the radiance of miracles you illuminated the whole universe. / O our holy Father John Climacus, pray to Christ our God to save our souls.

Kontakion — Tone 1

You offered us your teachings as fruits of everlasting freshness, / to sweeten the hearts of those who receive them with attention. / O blessed and wise John, they are the rungs of a ladder, / leading the souls of those who honor you from earth to Eternal glory in Heaven!

The Holy and Glorious Prophet Elijah

July 20

The Holy Prophet Elijah is one of the greatest of the prophets and the first dedicated to virginity in the Old Testament. He was born in Tishba of Gilead into the Levite tribe 900 years before the Incarnation of the Word of God.

Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus gives the following account about the birth of the Prophet Elijah: “When Elijah was born, his father Sobach saw in a vision angels of God around him. They swaddled him with fire and fed him with flames.” The name Elijah (the Lord’s strength) given to the infant defined his whole life. From the years of his youth he dedicated himself to the One God, settled in the wilderness and spent his whole life in strict fasting, meditation and prayer. Called to prophetic service, which put him in conflict with the Israelite king Ahab, the prophet became a fiery zealot of true faith and piety.

During this time the Israelite nation had fallen away from the faith of their Fathers, they abandoned the One God and worshipped pagan idols, the worship of which was introduced by the impious king Jereboam. Jezebel, the wife of king Ahab, was devoted to idol worship. She persuaded her husband to build a temple to the pagan god Baal, which led many Israelites away from the worship of the true God. Beholding the ruin of his nation, the Prophet Elijah began to denounce King Ahab for impiety, and exhorted him to repent and turn to the God of Israel. The king would not listen to him. The Prophet Elijah then declared to him, that as punishment there would be neither rain nor dew upon the ground, and the drought would cease only by his prayer. Indeed, the word of Elijah was a torch (Eccles. 48: 1). The heavens were closed for three and a half years, and there was drought and famine throughout all the land.

During this time of tribulation, the Lord sent him to a cave beyond the Jordan. There he was miraculously fed by ravens. When the stream Horath dried up, the Lord sent the Prophet Elijah to Sarepta to a poor widow, a Sidonian Gentile who suffered together with her children, awaiting death by starvation. At the request of the prophet, she prepared him a bread with the last measure of flour and the remainder of the oil. Through the prayer of the Prophet Elijah, flour and oil were not depleted in the home

of the widow for the duration of the famine. By the power of his prayer the prophet also performed another miracle: he raised the dead son of the widow.

After the end of three years of drought the Merciful Lord sent the prophet to appear before King Ahab, and promised to send rain upon the earth. The Prophet Elijah told the king to order all of Israel to gather upon Mount Carmel, and also the priests of Baal. When the nation had gathered, the Prophet Elijah proposed that two sacrificial altars be built: one for the priests of Baal, and the other for the Prophet Elijah who served the True God.

The Prophet Elijah told them to call on their gods to consume the sacrificial animals with fire, and he would call on his. Whichever was first to send fire on the sacrifice would be acknowledged as the true God. The prophets of Baal called out to their idol from morning till evening, but the heavens were silent. Towards evening the holy Prophet Elijah built his sacrificial altar from twelve stones, the number of the tribes of Israel. He placed the sacrifice upon the wood, gave orders to dig a ditch around the altar and commanded that the sacrifice and the wood be soaked with water. When the ditch had filled with water, the prophet turned to God in prayer. Through the prayer of the prophet fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, and even the water. The people fell down to the ground, crying out: "Truly, the Lord is God!" Then the Prophet Elijah had all the pagan-priests of Baal put to death, and he began to pray for rain. Through his prayer the heavens opened and an abundant rain fell, soaking the parched earth.

King Ahab acknowledged his error and repented of his sins, but his wife Jezebel threatened to kill the prophet of God. The Prophet Elijah fled into the Kingdom of Judea and, grieving over his failure to eradicate idol worship, he asked God to let him die. An angel of the Lord came before him, strengthened him with food and commanded him to go upon a long journey. The Prophet Elijah traveled for forty days and nights and, having arrived at Mount Horeb, he settled in a cave.

The Lord told him that the next day Elijah would stand in His presence. There was a strong wind that crushed the rocks of the mountain, then an earthquake, and a fire, but the Lord was not in them. The Lord was in "a gentle breeze" (3 Kings 19: 12). He revealed to the prophet, that He would preserve seven thousand faithful servants who had not worshipped Baal.

Later, the Lord commanded Elijah to anoint Elisha into prophetic service. Because of his fiery zeal for the Glory of God the Prophet Elijah was taken up alive into Heaven in a fiery chariot. The Prophet Elisha received Elijah's mantle, and a double portion of his prophetic spirit.

According to the Tradition of Holy Church, the Prophet Elijah will be the Forerunner of the Dread Second Coming of Christ. He will proclaim the truth of Christ, urge all to repentance, and will be slain by the Antichrist. This will be a sign of the end of the world.

The life of the holy Prophet Elijah is recorded in the Old Testament books (3 Kings; 4 Kings; Sirach/Ecclesiasticus 48: 1-15; 1 Maccabees 2: 58). At the time of the Transfiguration, the Prophet Elijah conversed with the Savior upon Mount Tabor (Mt. 17: 3; Mark 9: 4; Luke. 9: 30).

Orthodox Christians of all times, and in all places, have venerated the Prophet Elijah for centuries. The first church in Russia, built at Kiev under Prince Igor, was named for the Prophet Elijah. After her Baptism Saint Olga (July 11) built a temple of the holy Prophet Elijah in her native region, at the village of Vibuta.

In iconography the Prophet Elijah is depicted ascending to Heaven in a fiery chariot, surrounded with flames, and harnessed to four winged horses. We pray to him for deliverance from drought, and to ask for seasonable weather.

Troparion – Tone 4

An angel in the flesh and the cornerstone of the prophets, / the second forerunner of the coming of Christ, / glorious Elijah sent grace from on high to Elisha, / to dispel diseases and to cleanse lepers. / Therefore, he pours forth healings on those who honor him.

Kontakion – Tone 2

Prophet Elijah of great renown, / seer of the mighty mighty works of God, / by your command you held back the rain! / Pray for us to the only Lover of mankind!

The Protection of the Mother of God

October 1

This miraculous appearance of the Mother of God occurred in the mid-tenth century in Constantinople, in the Blachernae church where her robe, veil, and part of her belt were preserved after being transferred from Palestine in the fifth century.

On Sunday, October 1, during the All Night Vigil, when the church was overflowing with those at prayer, the Fool-for-Christ Saint Andrew (October 2), at the fourth hour, lifted up his eyes towards the heavens and beheld our most Holy Lady Theotokos coming through the air, resplendent with heavenly light and surrounded by an assembly of the Saints. Saint John the Baptist and the holy Apostle John the Theologian accompanied the Queen of Heaven. On bended knees the Most Holy Virgin tearfully prayed for Christians for a long time. Then, coming near the Bishop's Throne, she continued her prayer.

After completing her prayer she took her veil and spread it over the people praying in church, protecting them from enemies both visible and invisible. The Most Holy Lady Theotokos was resplendent with heavenly glory, and the protecting veil in her hands gleamed "more than the rays of the sun." Saint Andrew gazed trembling at the miraculous vision and he asked his disciple, the blessed Epiphanius standing beside him, "Do you see, brother, the Holy Theotokos, praying for all the world?" Epiphanius answered, "I do see, holy Father, and I am in awe."

The Ever-Blessed Mother of God implored the Lord Jesus Christ to accept the prayers of all the people calling on His Most Holy Name, and to respond speedily to her intercession, "O Heavenly King, accept all those who pray to You and call on my name for help. Do not let them go away from my icon unheard."

Saints Andrew and Epiphanius were worthy to see the Mother of God at prayer, and "for a long time observed the Protecting Veil spread over the people and shining with flashes of glory. As long as the Most Holy Theotokos was there, the Protecting Veil was also visible, but with her departure it also became invisible. After taking it with her, she left behind the grace of her visitation."

At the Blachernae church, the memory of the miraculous appearance of the Mother of God was remembered. In the fourteenth century, the Russian pilgrim and

clerk Alexander, saw in the church an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos praying for the world, depicting Saint Andrew in contemplation of her.

The Primary Chronicle of Saint Nestor reflects that the protective intercession of the Mother of God was needed because an attack of a large pagan Russian fleet under the leadership of Askole and Dir. The feast celebrates the divine destruction of the fleet which threatened Constantinople itself, sometime in the years 864-867 or according to the Russian historian Vasiliev, on June 18, 860. Ironically, this Feast is considered more important by the Slavs then by the Greeks.

The Primary Chronicle of Saint Nestor also notes the miraculous deliverance followed an all-night Vigil and the dipping of the garment of the Mother of God into the waters of the sea at the Blachernae church, but does not mention Saints Andrew and Epiphanius and their vision of the Mother of God at prayer. These latter elements, and the beginnings of the celebrating of the Feast of the Protection, seem to postdate Saint Nestor and the Chronicle. A further historical complication might be noted under (October 2) dating Saint Andrew's death to the year 936.

The year of death might not be quite reliable, or the assertion that he survived to a ripe old age after the vision of his youth, or that his vision involved some later pagan Russian raid which met with the same fate. The suggestion that Saint Andrew was a Slav (or a Scythian according to other sources, such as S. V. Bulgakov) is interesting, but not necessarily accurate. The extent of Slavic expansion and repopulation into Greece is the topic of scholarly disputes.

In the Prologue, a Russian book of the twelfth century, a description of the establishment of the special Feast marking this event states, "For when we heard, we realized how wondrous and merciful was the vision... and it transpired that Your holy Protection should not remain without festal celebration, O Ever-Blessed One!"

Therefore, in the festal celebration of the Protection of the Mother of God, the Russian Church sings, "With the choirs of the Angels, O Sovereign Lady, with the venerable and glorious prophets, with the First-Ranked Apostles and with the Hieromartyrs and Hierarchs, pray for us sinners, glorifying the Feast of your Protection in the Russian Land." Moreover, it would seem that Saint Andrew, contemplating the miraculous vision was a Slav, was taken captive, and became the slave of the local inhabitant of Constantinople named Theognostus.

Churches in honor of the Protection of the Mother of God began to appear in Russia in the twelfth century. Widely known for its architectural merit is the temple of the Protection at Nerl, which was built in the year 1165 by holy Prince Andrew Bogoliubsky. The efforts of this holy prince also established in the Russian Church the Feast of the Protection of the Mother of God, about the year 1164.

At Novgorod in the twelfth century there was a monastery of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos (the so-called Zverin monastery) In Moscow also under Tsar Ivan the Terrible the cathedral of the Protection of the Mother of God was built at the church of the Holy Trinity (known as the church of Saint Basil the Blessed).

On the Feast of the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos we implore the defense and assistance of the Queen of Heaven, “Remember us in your prayers, O Lady Virgin Mother of God, that we not perish by the increase of our sins. Protect us from every evil and from grievous woes, for in you do we hope, and venerating the Feast of your Protection, we magnify you.”

Troparion — Tone 4

On this day we, the Orthodox people, joyously keep festival, / illumined by your coming, O Mother of God; / and, beholding your most pure image, we cry out with compunction: / "Cover us with your Protecting Veil and deliver us from all evil, / entreating your Son, Christ our God, to save our souls."

Kontakion — Tone 3

Today the Virgin stands in the church, / and with hosts of Saints, and invisibly prays to God for us. / Angels worship with Hierarchs, / and Apostles rejoice with Prophets, / for the Theotokos prays to the Pre-eternal God for us.

The Apostle James, The Brother of the Lord

October 23

The Holy Apostle James, the Brother of God (Adelphótheos) was the son of the Righteous Joseph before he was betrothed to the Most Holy Theotokos. Tradition says that Joseph had other sons with his first wife. Thus, James was called the Lord's brother. Saint James had been a Nazirite, a man or woman consecrated to God for a limited time. During the period of consecration the Nazirites vowed to abstain from wine and other intoxicating beverages, they could not cut their hair, and all contact with a corpse was forbidden (Numbers 6:1-21).

When the Savior began to proclaim the Kingdom of God, Saint James believed in Christ and became His Apostle. Later, he was chosen as the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

Saint James presided over the Council of Jerusalem and his word was decisive (Acts 15). In his thirty years as bishop, Saint James converted many Jews to Christianity. Angered by this, the Pharisees and the Scribes plotted together to kill the holy bishop. They led him up on the pinnacle of the Jerusalem Temple and asked him what he thought of Jesus. The holy Apostle bore witness that Christ is the Messiah, which was not the response the Pharisees were expecting. Enraged, the Jewish leaders threw him off the roof. He did not die at once, but gathering his final strength, he prayed to the Lord for his enemies while they were stoning him. Saint James' martyrdom occurred about 63 A.D.

The holy Apostle James composed a Divine Liturgy, which formed the basis of the Liturgies of Saints Basil the Great and John Chrysostom. The Church has preserved an Epistle of Saint James, one of the books of the New Testament. In it Saint James advises: "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath" (James 1:19) and "Be doers of the word, and not just hearers, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22).

In 1853, Patriarch Hierótheos of Alexandria sent a portion of the relics of Saint James to Moscow.

The Church distinguishes between the Holy Apostle James the Brother of God, Saint James the son of Zebedee (April 30), and Saint James the son of Alphaeus (October 9).

Saint James the Apostle is also commemorated on the Sunday after the Nativity of Christ, with the Prophet-King David and Saint Joseph the Betrothed.

Troparion — Tone 4

As the Lord's disciple you received the Gospel, O Just one;1 / as a martyr you have unfailing courage; / as the Brother of the Lord, you have boldness; / as a hierarch, you are able to intercede. / Entreat Christ God that our souls may be saved.

Kontakion — Tone 4

(Podoben: "You were lifted up on the Cross...")

When God the Word, the Only-begotten of the Father, / came to dwell among us in these latter days, / He declared you, O glorious James, to be the first shepherd and teacher of Jerusalem / and a faithful steward of spiritual Mysteries. / Therefore, we all honor you, O Apostle.

St. Katherine of Alexandria

November 25

The Holy Great Martyr Katherine was the daughter of Konstos, the governor of Alexandria, Egypt during the reign of Emperor Maximian (305-313). Living in the capital, the center of Hellenistic knowledge, and possessed of a rare beauty and intellect, Katherine received an excellent education, studying the works of the greatest philosophers and teachers of antiquity. Young men from the most worthy families of the empire sought the hand of the beautiful Katherine, but she was not interested in any of them. She told her parents that she would enter into marriage only with someone who surpassed her in nobility, wealth, comeliness and wisdom.

Katherine's mother, a secret Christian, sent her to her own Spiritual Father, a saintly Elder living in a cave outside the city, for advice. After listening to Katherine, the Elder said that he knew of someone who surpassed her in everything. "His countenance is more radiant than the shining of the sun, and all of creation is governed by His wisdom. His riches are given to all the nations of the world, yet they never diminish. His compassion is unequalled."

This description of the Heavenly Bridegroom produced an ardent desire in the soul of the holy maiden to see Him. "If you do as I tell you," said the monk, "you will gaze upon the countenance of this illustrious man." In parting, the Elder gave Katherine an icon of the Theotokos with the Divine Child on Her arm and told her to pray with faith to the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the Heavenly Bridegroom, and she would hear Katherine and grant her heart's desire.

Katherine prayed all night and was permitted to see the Most Holy Virgin, Who said to her Divine Son, "Behold Thy handmaiden Katherine, how fair and virtuous she is." But the Child turned His face away from her saying, "No, she is ugly and unbelieving. She is a foolish pauper, and I cannot bear to look at her until she forsakes her impiety."

Katherine returned again to the Elder deeply saddened, and told him what she had seen in the dream. He received her, instructed her in the faith of Christ, admonished her to preserve her purity and integrity and to pray unceasingly. She then received the Mystery of Holy Baptism from him. Again Saint Katherine had a vision

of the Most Holy Theotokos with her Child. Now the Lord looked at her tenderly and gave her a beautiful ring, a wondrous token of her betrothal to the Heavenly Bridegroom (this ring is still on her hand).

At that time Emperor Maximian was in Alexandria for a pagan festival. Therefore, the celebration was especially splendid and crowded. The cries of the sacrificial animals, the smoke and the smell of the sacrifices, the endless blaze of fires, and the bustling crowds at the arenas defiled the city of Alexandria. Human victims also were brought, the confessors of Christ, who would not deny Him under torture. They were condemned to death in the fire. Katherine's love for the Christian martyrs, and her fervent desire to ease their sufferings, compelled her to speak to the pagan priest and to Emperor Maximian.

Introducing herself, the Saint confessed her faith in the One True God, and exposed the errors of the pagans. The beauty of the maiden captivated the Emperor. In order to convince her of the superiority of pagan wisdom, the Emperor ordered fifty of the most learned philosophers and rhetoricians of the Empire to dispute with her, but the Saint got the better of the wise men, so that they came to believe in Christ themselves. Saint Katherine made the Sign of the Cross over the martyrs, and they bravely accepted death for Christ and were burnt alive by order of the Emperor.

Unable to persuade the Saint, Maximian tried to entice her with the promise of riches and fame. Hearing her angry refusal, the Emperor ordered his men to subject the Saint to terrible tortures, and then throw her in prison. The Empress Augusta, who had heard much about the Saint, wanted to see her. She prevailed upon the military commander Porphyrios to accompany her to the prison with a detachment of soldiers. The Empress was impressed by Katherine's strong spirit, and her face was radiant with divine grace. The holy martyr explained the Christian Faith to them, and they were converted to Christ.

On the following day, they again brought the martyr to the judgment court where, under the threat of being broken on the wheel, she was urged to renounce the Christian Faith and to offer sacrifice to the "gods." The Saint steadfastly confessed Christ and she was taken to be tortured on four wheels with sharp iron spikes, but an Angel smashed the instruments of execution, which shattered into pieces with many pagans standing nearby.

After seeing this miracle, the Empress Augusta and the imperial courtier Porphyrios and 200 soldiers confessed their faith in Christ before everyone, and they were beheaded. Maximian tried again to entice the holy martyr, offering to marry her, and again he was refused. Saint Katherine remained faithful to her heavenly Bridegroom Christ, and after praying to Him, she laid her head on the block beneath the executioner's sword.

The relics of Saint Katherine were taken by the Angels to Mount Sinai. In the VI century, the venerable head and left hand of the holy martyr were found through a revelation and transferred with honor to the newly-constructed church of the Monastery on Mount Sinai, built by the holy Emperor Justinian (November 14).

Saint Katherine is called upon for relief and assistance during a difficult childbirth. Pilgrims to her monastery on Mount Sinai are given souvenir rings as a remembrance of their visit.

Saint Katherine is commemorated on November 25 in Greek usage.

Troparion – Tone 4

By your virtues, as with the rays of the sun, you enlightened the pagan sages; / and like the brightest moon for those who walk at night, / you drove away the darkness of unbelief, and led the Empress to faith; / you also rebuked the tyrant, and you were called by God as His bride, O blessed Katherine. / With love you ascended to the heavenly Bridal Chamber of the most comely Bridegroom Christ, / by Whom you were crowned with a royal crown. / Now standing before Him with the Angels, pray for us who honor your holy memory.

Troparion – Tone 5

(Podoben: "Come, let us worship the Word...")

Let us hymn the godly Katherine, the all-praised Bride of Christ, / the guardian of Sinai, our helper and defender, / for brilliantly has she muzzled the boasting of the impious with the sword of the Spirit,¹ / and now crowned as a Martyr, she entreats great mercy for all.

Kontakion -- Tone 2

Rouse up now a choir, / O ye that love the martyred Saints, / august and inspired, / acclaiming the supremely-wise / Martyr Katherine, who hath proclaimed and preached of Christ in the stadium / and hath trampled the serpent down / and spat on the knowledge of the eloquent.

Apolytikion -- Tone 5

Let us praise the all-lauded and noble bride of Christ, / the godly Katherine, the guardian of Sinai and its defense, / who is also our support and succor and our help; / for with the Holy Spirit's sword / she hath silenced brilliantly the clever among the godless; / and being crowned as a Martyr, she now doth ask great mercy for us all.

St. Mardarije of Libertyville and all America

December 12

Born in village of Kornet, Ljesani County, in Montenegro, on November 2, 1889, to pious parents Petar and Jela Uskokovic, he was baptized in his village church dedicated to St. George and received his baptismal name Ivan. His mother was from the well-known Bozovic family. Both of his parents were well respected in their community holding the office of leadership and particularly his father was a captain of their clan.

Considering his parents' status, young Ivan was sent to further his education, first in Rijeka Crnojevic, Cetinje, and then in Belgrade, Serbia. While in Belgrade, young Ivan advanced his childhood desire to serve God and the Church, and so from there he headed to monastery Studenica where after a short period of novice life he gets tonsured to monasticism having received the name Mardarije. With the decision of the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church, now young hierodeacon Mardarije is sent to Russia where he spent twelve years (1905-1917) furthering his theological education and growing in wisdom. From there, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church sent him to the United States of America to organize the Serbian Orthodox Church. On December 1, 1923, now archimandrite Mardarije is appointed as administrator of the Serbian American-Canadian diocese with the see in Chicago and that same year he purchased around ten acres of land in Libertyville, Illinois, where later St. Sava monastery was built. He was elected by the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church as the first bishop for the newly established diocese in America on December 7, 1925, and his consecration took place on Palm Sunday, the Feast of the Entrance of Our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, on April 25, 1926.

From then on His Grace Bishop Mardarije, the first bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America, labored tirelessly in building churches, St. Sava monastery in Libertyville, sowing Christian love, spread peace, preached and witnessed the Gospel of Christ throughout his diocese. In spite of inescapable worldly trends, he lived spontaneity of truth and a provision of grace, just because Life has dawned from the Tomb, and is dawning still. Having labored as

bishop for a little over nine years he died peacefully on December 12, 1935, hospitalized in Ann Arbor, Michigan, while writing his last Nativity Encyclical to his beloved flock. His earthly remains were laid to rest at St. Sava monastery in Libertyville. The Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church during its regular session held from May 14-29, 2015 brought forth a decision that his name be added to the Diptych of saints of the Holy Orthodox Church.

From the Holy Hierarch Mardarije, we see how the grace of God reaches the heart of our cities, bringing to the confusion of the world the breeze of the Spirit and the serenity of the Age to come.

Troparion — Tone 4

The truth of things revealed you to your flock as a rule of faith, / a model of meekness, and a teacher of temperance. / Therefore, through humility, you attained the heights; / and through poverty, riches. / O Hierarch Mardarije our Father, entreat Christ God that our souls may be saved.*

Kontakion — Tone 2

(Podoben: "You sought the heights...")

O Hierarch Mardarije, / divine thunder, spiritual trumpet, / planter of faith, and pruner of heresies, / great favorite of the Trinity, / as you stand before God with the Angels, / pray unceasingly for all of us.*

Kontakion — Tone 8

Tireless preacher of Christ the Lord, leader on the path of Saint Savva for your people in diaspora, / labor-loving practitioner and teacher of repentance, / Saint Mardarije of Libertyville and America, together with all the Enlighteners of the American lands, / entreat the only Lover of mankind, to grant peace and unity to all Orthodox Christians.*

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