



THE HOLY GREAT MARTYR OF CHRIST SAINT DEMETRIOS OF THESSALONICA

THE FEAST DAY of St. Demetrios is a great feast for all of Orthodoxy, but especially Thessalonica, which is his birthplace. His church is a building dating from the ancient Christian era, built one hundred years after his martyrdom which was in 296 A.D. But after 300 years it burned, and was rebuilt in the days of Leo the Wise.

St. Demetrios along with St. George are the two brave lads of Christianity. These two are below on earth, and the two Archangels Michael and Gabriel are above in heaven.

In ancient times they were painted without armor, but in later years they were depicted armored with swords and spears and dressed in metal breastplates. On one shoulder they have their helmet hanging, and on the other their shield. At the waist they are girded with the straps which hold the sheath of the sword and the quiver which has in it the arrows and the bow. In recent years, after the conquest of Constantinople, these two saints, and many times other soldier saints also, are painted as riding horses, St. George on a white horse, St. Demetrios on a red one.

This armor which these Saints wear, depicts spiritual weapons, like those of which the Apostle Paul speaks saying, "Put on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and the Powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high. Therefore take up the armor of God that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and stand in all things perfect. Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of justice and having your feet shod with the

readiness of the Gospel of peace, in all things taking up the shield of faith, with which you may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, that is, the word of God“(Eph.6:11-17). This heroic and persevering character, which the warriors have who were martyred for Christ like harmless and innocent sheep, has reference to spiritual things.

St. Demetrios, the Great Martyr and Myrovletes (myrrh-emitting), was born in Thessalonica in 260 A.D His parents were illustrious people and along with the transitory glory which Demetrios had from his family, he was adorned with imperishable virtues, with prudence, with sweetness, with humility, with justice, and with every noble comeliness of the soul. All these were like precious stones which shone on the crown which he wore, and this crown was the faith in Christ.

In those days, there reigned in Rome Diocletian, and he had appointed as caesar in the parts of Macedonia and the East a hard-hearted and bloodthirsty general who was called Maximian, a beast in human form as were all those military rulers (polemarchs) who then ruled the world with the sword: Diocletian, Maxentius, Maximian, Galerius, Licinius — hard headed, fierce-faced, strong-jawed, grim-mouthed, with short thick necks like barrels, ruthless, and terrifying. He in turn appointed Demetrios ruler of Thessalonica and all Thessalia. When Maximian returned from a certain war, he gathered the officers at Thessalonica in order to offer sacrifice to the idols. Then Demetrios revealed that he was a Christian, and did not accept hewn stones as gods.

Maximian went into a rage and ordered that he be tried and imprisoned in a bath. And all the while he was imprisoned, the populace ran with mourning to hear Demetrios teach the people of Christ. A young lad, Nestor, also went every day and heard his teaching.

During those days, many brave men fought in the stadium and Maximian rejoiced at these spectacles. He even had in great honor a certain henchman Lyaeus, a beastly man, brass-knuckled, an idolator and blasphemer, brought from some barbarous nation. Nestor, seeing that this Lyaeus had defeated all and boasted that he had the strength of Ares, the pagan god of war, and that no native dared wrestle with him, went to the prison and besought St. Demetrios to bless him to defeat and put to shame Lyaeus and Maximian and their religion.

St. Demetrios prayed and made the sign of the Cross over him, and immediately Nestor ran to the stadium and wrestled with that fierce giant, and he threw him down, and slew him. Then Maximian became beside himself with rage and learning that Nestor was a Christian and that St. Demetrios had blessed him, he ordered the soldiers to have them put to death.

And they going to the bath lanced St. Demetrios with their spears, and thus he received the eternal crown on the 26th of October, 296 A.D., at the age of thirty-six. It is written that when he saw the soldiers thrusting their spears at him, he raised high his arm and they lanced him in the side, so that he might be deemed worthy to receive the lancing which Christ received in His side, and there ran blood and water from the wound. Nestor was beheaded the next day outside the wall at the place of the Golden Gate with his own sword.

The Christians took the holy remains and buried them side by side, and from the grave of St. Demetrios there came forth holy myrrh which cured many diseases. For this reason he is called Myrovletes. Over his grave and the place of his martyrdom there was built a church in the days of St. Constantine the Great. Later, a great church was built in the form of a basilica which stands to this day. In 1143 the Emperor Manuel Comnenos sent from Constantinople and brought the holy icon of the Saint which was at his tomb and put it in the Monastery of Pantocrator, whose church was built by the Comneni and is called today Zeirek.

This then is the martyrdom of St. Demetrios the Great Martyr and Myrrh-bearer, who loved our Saviour above all things of this life— pleasures, wealth, honors -- and longed to be dissolved that he might be found with Him in the celestial Kingdom, through whose prayers may we also be deemed worthy of like fate. Amen.

SOME MIRACLES OF SAINT DEMETRIOS

During the years of the Christian kings, there was a certain bishop in a city of Africa who one day boarded a ship to go to Alexandria. On the way, pirates boarded the ship and took the people captive. They carried off the bishop and sold him in the East to a Hagarene prince who, being an evil and wild man, commanded him to carry dung to his vineyards and gardens. Many times as the bishop was carrying the basket of dung upon his head, he would say with tears, "Woe unto me! Where is the time when I held upon my head the Immaculate Mysteries — and to what have I now been brought down? Day and night, therefore, he besought God to free him from that captivity.

One-night, St. Demetrios appeared to him sitting upon a white horse. The Saint said to him, "What is your sorrow, that you weep?" The bishop answered, "What is my sorrow, you ask? Do you not see how many evils have come upon me, the miserable one? During the day I am in labor, and in the night I am in chains. What good do I, the wretched one, have that I should not weep?" The Saint then said, "Come, mount up on the back of my horse." The bishop answered, "Sir, I cannot get up, because I am bound." Again, the Saint said to him, "Get up, since I tell you so." The bishop therefore got up and mounted the horse. And most wondrously they were both immediately on horseback outside of Thessalonica.

When they found themselves there, the Saint said unto the bishop, "I have houses here, and I am lord of this city; therefore I will go before and you inquire and come after me." The bishop replied, "And how shall I inquire, sir?" The Saint said to him, "Ask where are the houses of Demetrios, the lord of Thessalonica, and by inquiring in this manner you will find me and I shall make preparations for you to return to your own home." These things the Saint said to him, and then appeared to enter the city. When the bishop came to the gates of the city walls, he inquired as the Saint told him, but the gatekeepers mocked him, saying to him, "We have no Demetrios as lord." But others who were wise understood upon hearing the question of the bishop that the great Demetrios had worked some miracle for him (because the Saint would daily work miracles for captives). Therefore, they asked him, "What manner of man are you?" And he told them the whole account — that he had been a prisoner in the East, but a certain soldier had appeared to him and had freed him and brought him to that place. Then the men said to him, "Come, so we can take you to the Church that you may meet him." And as they went into the Church and he saw the Saint's icon, he recognized him, and embracing the icon with tears, he said, "This is the soldier who freed me." When the Archbishop of Thessalonica learned of these events, he supplied the bishop with money to return to Africa.

A certain farmer in Cappadocia was cleaning a place for a barn and uncovered in the ground an ancient stone foundation. While he was thus digging, a young horseman rode up to him and cried: "Why are you destroying my house, making it into a barn for yourself? Know, that if you do this, you will suffer much and bitterly. I who speak to you am Demetrios from Thessalonica, whom everyone here venerates." The farmer, frightened by the Saint's words, left his work and hurried home. His relatives, finding out the reason for his great agitation and fear, went immediately to that place, cleared it off, and found there the foundation of an ancient church which had been dedicated to St. Demetrios. And so, on the very same foundation, there was subsequently erected a magnificent church, in which was placed an icon depicting a large cross with the crucified Lord upon it, and the face of the Great Martyr; for St. Demetrios vanquished the delusion of idol-worship by means of the Cross, and by his suffering he was co-crucified with Christ.

But just as no one could possibly count the number of drops in the rain, so is it impossible to describe all the miracles worked by St. Demetrios. Innumerable times he saved his native city from every kind of enemy, visible and invisible, doing this sometimes openly, and sometimes in hidden fashion. Most miraculous of all was his holy myrrh, in which all found free healing from every disease. The grave of St. Demetrios was a second Pool of Bethesda, and was even more miraculous than it; for the latter healed only one in a year, and the former healed every day a multitude of sick people.

The mercy of God, however, so abundantly manifest in the miracles of St. Demetrios, is sometimes withdrawn due to our persistence in sins. So it was that God delivered Thessalonica and the Church of St. Demetrios to the Hagarenes; and since that time his fragrant myrrh has not been seen, and the holy relics themselves have vanished.

During the time when Thessalonica was about to be taken by the Hagarencs, some pious Christians were travelling to Thessalonica for the feast of the Saint. They reached the royal highway which was at Bardarion, and there they saw a soldier coming from Thessalonica and a bishop coming on the road from Larisa. When the soldier and bishop met, the soldier spoke first, saying to the bishop, "Rejoice, Hierarch of God, Achilleios." And the bishop said in return, "Rejoice also, soldier of Christ, Demetrios." When those Christians heard these names, they stood to one side in fear to see what would happen. Again the soldier spoke to the bishop, "From where are you coming. Hierarch of God, and where are you going?" Then St. Achilleios wept and said to him, "Because of the sins and iniquities of the people, God has commanded that I depart from Larisa which I guarded, because it shall be surrendered into the hands of the Hagarenes. And behold, I have departed and I am going wherever He commands me. And you, therefore, from where are you coming? Tell me, I beseech you!" Then St. Demetrios wept also and said to him, "I, too, have suffered the same thing, O Bishop Achilleios.

Many times I aided the Thessalonians and redeemed them out of captivity and plague and all manner of illness, yet now because of their many sins and iniquities God has departed from them and has commanded me to abandon them that they might be surrendered into the hands of the Hagarenes. For this reason I submitted to His order, and I, also, have departed and go wherever He commands me." When both of them had said these things, they bowed their heads upon the earth and wept. After much time they kissed and greeted one another and immediately disappeared. When those Christians saw this wonder, they did not dare go on to Thessalonica, but returned to their homes and told what they had seen. A month did not pass before both Larisa and Thessalonica were taken and plundered by the Turks.

St. Simeon the Translator wrote the martyrdom of the holy Great Martyr Demetrios in Greek; it is kept in the Monasteries of Great Lavra, Iviron, and others. Moreover, St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain composed six new canons -- in six tones -- to St Demetrios, which, numbered together with two other ancient canons (one in first tone, the other in second tone), comprise a beautiful Octoechos to St. Demetrios. They were published in the end of the book Gate of Repentance. The divine Gregory Palamas of Thessalonica has written an elegant eulogy to his martyric majesty. Also, the praises (of Matins) of St. Demetrios were written by St. Theophan the Branded (see his Life on October 11). Macarios the Deaf has written a eulogy to the great Demetrios as also has Leo the Wise, whose eulogy to him, written in Greek, is preserved in the Monastery of Pantocrator. A homily to his myrrh has been written by John the Archivist of Thessalonica, and is found in the Monasteries of Great Lavra, Vatopedi, and Dionysiou. In the Monastery of Iviron is found a homily written by the Patriarch Philotheos.

CONTEMPORARY MIRACLES IN RUSSIA

by Archimandrite Haralambos Basilopoulos

In this book is presented the true religious state which exists in Russia, and there are set forth several miracles which took place lately among the Russian people. Even the unbelievers are compelled to believe.

As an example, we (quote a miracle which took place last October, which an eyewitness describes and with which the Russian press was compelled to deal. The translation of the letter from Russia:

Beloved,

We read with emotion all the details of how there were found on Lesbos, the Aegean island, the holy relics of the Greeks who were martyred for Christ. If it is possible, send us the icon of the Saint and wonderworking Greek

Martyr, Raphael.¹ This which you write, that almost the whole Greek village frequently saw- the Saint appearing in their sleep and commanding them to dig to find his relics and the relics of those who were martyred with him, made a great impression upon us. We said: "But it is possible for the Saint himself to appear, and especially to sinners?"

But believe me, before seven days had passed, we were punished for our little faith! From our sister who lives near Pskov we received a letter together with clippings from local newspapers. And now I copy her letter for you word-for-word:

"...On the 26th of October, we began preparations for the celebration of the anniversary of the October Revolution, because many officials would come here from various places in order to visit the graves of those who had fallen during the war. We all worked voluntarily and cleared out the dry grass and laid the paths with small gravel. At night we slept in the community hall of the village, some forty-five women from the surrounding villages. We fell asleep like dead people from fatigue.

"At night, one of us woke up and cried, 'Help, comrades. I see phantoms!' 'What did you see? What did you see?' we all asked. 'I saw a shining young man upon a horse, holding in his hands a golden cup. The horseman told me, "Look at this holy chalice which is full of the Blood of Christ which shall enlighten all of you and shall bring love and peace." I wanted to ask him, "Who are you?" but I could not. But he understood, and told me, "Dig there at this certain place and you shall learn who I am." The dream was most vivid.' Afterward, we lay down again to sleep. This time seventeen women and girls saw the same dream (of these, eleven are Party members). Again the horseman! Again the golden cup which shone in his hand! And again he commanded, "Dig there so you may learn who I am.'

1. In 1959 there began a series of apparitions seen by a multitude of people on the island of Mitylene (Lesbos), revealing the graves and martyrdoms of numerous New Martyrs who lived five hundred years ago. The most outstanding of the group were the priestmonk Raphael, his deacon Nicholas, and the child virgin martyr Irene. This most amazing account is recorded in Greek in a book by Fotios Kontoglou called *A Great Sign*:

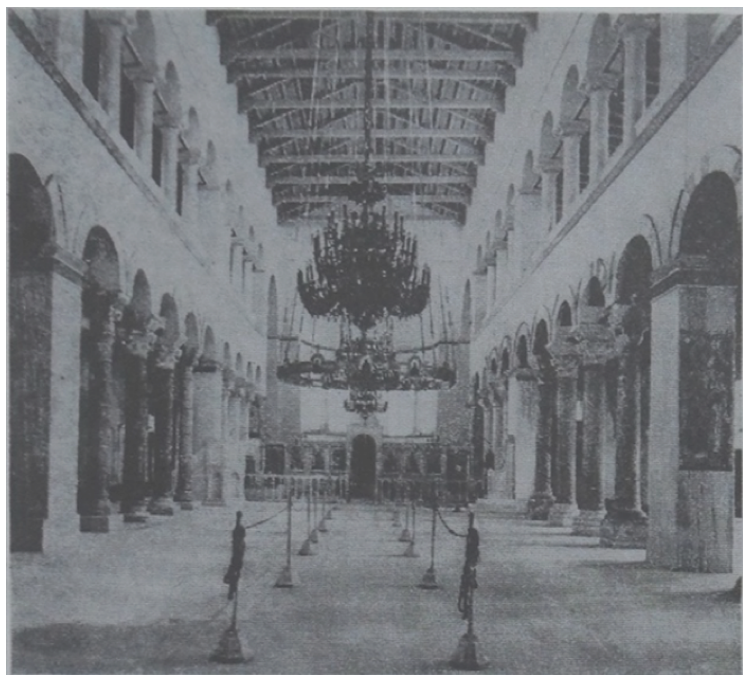
"We discussed among ourselves what we should do. In our area there is not even one priest. We thought of going to Leningrad. We went. But everywhere they closed the doors and mocked us as being insane and backwards. Finally, someone told us to go to the archeologists. We went. They told us that until now no one has made excavations on the basis of dreams, and that the funds of the public were not for being thrown away. We returned in discouragement to our hotel. At four in the morning, the telephone rang. The archeologists were seeking us! With voices that trembled, they told us to go and find them again by the first bus. We went again. They were upset. They had seen the same dream! Upon the golden cup was the form of Christ. The thing was made widely known. Comments in the press. Derision. Mockery. We succeeded, however.

"A party of workers and volunteers, together with archeologists, departed. After three days the first ruins were found. There was a whole grouping of churches. Every day in their sleep they saw the Saint on horseback, commanding them, 'Dig! Dig!' On the fourth night, all of them, after having agreed among themselves, asked him, 'Who are you?' The Saint became angered and shouted loudly, 'But don't you know me? I am Demetrios of Thessalonica and Christ has sent me to you to bring you once more love and peace!!' On the thirteenth day, while digging, we finally found his majestic temple and his icon, as well as the holy chalice which he had held in his hands... Uproar! Great commotion! Even the press wrote concerning it, sketchily, however — distorted. But all of us now know the truth..."

P.S. We regret that we cannot write more details. But let the deficiency be filled by a clipping from a Soviet newspaper of January 15, 1966, which we quote:

A UNIQUE DISCOVERY According to ancient manuscripts, it is known that in the area of the town

Dovmontov, near Pskov, there existed more than twenty stone churches, a whole Pompeii. Just recently, an archeological party succeeded in discovering one of the churches, the Church of Demetrios of Thessalonica, which was built, according to ancient manuscripts, in 1144. During the time of excavation, the archeologists discovered an earthen vessel of unique value. Upon it was preserved the form of a man which, however, had no relation to the abstract (iconographic) form of the saint. This unique relief gives us the first acquaintance with the art of the area of Pskov which was dedicated to religion.



The Basilica of St Demetrios in Thessalonica

THE CHURCH OF ST. DEMETRIOS

The Church of St. Demetrios in Thessalonica was built over the site of his martyrdom -- the Roman bath in which he was imprisoned. This bath is preserved to this day in a crypt under the sanctuary of the Church. During the Moslem rule of the city, which lasted almost 500 years, the Church had been turned into a mosque and Christians were forbidden to enter. Thus, the existence of the bath in a crypt under the floor of the sanctuary was totally unknown when Thessalonica was taken again by the Christians in 1912. In 1917 a great fire broke out which destroyed most of the city, and this was the cause for the discovery of the bath — the floor of the sanctuary having fallen through.



The basin into which myrrh once flowed from the relics of St. Demetrios. Ducts led to it from the Saint's tomb in the church above.

Among other things there was discovered the first chapel built over the place of his martyrdom (martyrium) with an earthen vessel planted in the Holy Table, containing earth with human blood — evidently of the holy Martyr. A great marble basin was also discovered which was used to gather the holy myrrh from the grave of the Saint.

There were two attempts to recover the relics of St. Demetrios — once in the days of St. Constantine when the Saint appeared and said, “Do not dismember me, but rather leave me whole in my own country,” and another time in the days of St. Justinian when fire came forth and scorched those that were digging when they reached the marble tomb of the Saint. A voice was also heard saying, “Dig no more.” To this day the holy relics have not been recovered. There is even a question as to where the tomb of the Saint is located within the Church, every trace of it having been removed by the Moslems when they were occupying the Church. At the Holy Mountain and at other places there is preserved blood of the Saint with earth which was taken by the Christians at the time of his martyrdom.

THE MYRRH-BEARER

St Demetrios is one of the very few saints from whose relics, by the grace of God, there has flowed a fragrant and healing myrrh. Among other great myrrh-bearers are St Nicholas, St. Symeon of Serbia, and St. Nil of Mount Athos, whose relics, unlike St. Demetrios', are preserved to this day.

About St Demetrios we have this account: There lived once an ascetic on the Mount of Solomon who, hearing of the reports of the holy myrrh, had doubts saying in his mind that there were many other great martyrs who suffered more than St. Demetrios, yet they were not honored by God in such a manner. And one night after he had finished his prayers he saw, as if in a dream, that he was in the Church of St. Demetrios and he met the man who had the keys to the tomb of the Saint, and he asked him to open it that he might venerate the basin into which myrrh once flowed from it. When he was kissing the shrine, he observed that it was wet with the fragrant myrrh, and he said to the keeper, "Come, help me dig that we might set from whence comes this myrrh." They dug, therefore, and came to a large marble slab which they removed with great difficulty, and immediately there appeared the body of the Saint, shining and fragrant, from which welled up abundant myrrh coming from the openings in his body made by the piercings of the lances. There flowed so much myrrh that both the keeper and the ascetic were drenched, and fearing to be drowned, the monk cried out, "Saint Demetrios, help!" It hereupon, he awoke from this vision and found himself to be drenched with the holy myrrh.

There has been no record of myrrh from the relics of St. Demetrios since the 12th century, and the relics themselves were never found after the Turkish occupation of the Church - for God, Who is merciful, also withdraws His mercies from sinners. (In due time an article in The Orthodox Word will be devoted to the very phenomenon of myrrh-bearing saints.)