

DECEMBER 4, 2022
VENERABLE JOHN OF DAMASCUS
GREAT MARTYR BARBARA AND MARTYR JULIANA

Saint John of Damascus

Saint John of Damascus was born about the year 680 at Damascus, Syria into a Christian family. His father, Sergius Mansur, was a treasurer at the court of the caliph. John had also a foster brother, the orphaned child Cosmas (October 14), whom Sergius had taken into his own home. When the children were growing up, Sergius saw that they received a good education. At the Damascus slave market he ransomed the learned monk Cosmas of Calabria from captivity and entrusted to him the teaching of his children. The boys displayed uncommon ability and readily mastered their courses of the secular and spiritual sciences. After the death of his father, John occupied ministerial posts at court and became the city prefect.

In Constantinople at that time, the heresy of Iconoclasm had arisen and quickly spread, supported by the emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717-741). Rising up in defense of the Orthodox veneration of icons [Iconodoulia], St. John wrote three treatises entitled, "Against Those who Revile the Holy Icons." The wise and God-inspired writings of St. John enraged the emperor. But since the author was not a Byzantine subject, the emperor was unable to lock him up in prison, or to execute him. The emperor then resorted to slander. A forged letter to the emperor was produced, supposedly from John, in which the Damascus official was supposed to have offered his help to Leo in conquering the Syrian capital.

This letter and another hypocritically flattering note were sent to the Saracen caliph by Leo the Isaurian. The caliph immediately ordered that St. John be removed from his post, and that his right hand be cut off, and that he be led through the city in chains. That same evening, they returned the severed hand to St. John. The saint pressed the severed hand to his wrist and began to pray to the Most Holy Theotokos to help him so that he could defend the Orthodox Faith and write once again in praise of the Most Pure Virgin and Her Son. After a time, he fell asleep before the icon of the Mother of God, then heard Her voice telling him that he had been healed. She then commanded him to toil unceasingly with his restored hand. Awakening, he found that his hand had been restored.

When he learned of the miracle, which demonstrated John's innocence, the caliph asked his forgiveness and wanted to restore him to his former office, but the saint refused. He gave away his riches to the poor, and went to Jerusalem with his stepbrother and fellow-student, Cosmas. There he entered the monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified as a simple novice.

It was not easy for him to find a spiritual guide, because all the monks were daunted by his great learning and by his former rank. Only one very experienced Elder, who had the skill to foster the spirit of obedience and humility in a student, would consent to do this. The Elder forbade John to do anything at all according to his own will. He also instructed him to offer to God all his labors and supplications as a perfect sacrifice, and to shed tears which would wash away the sins of his former life.

Once, he sent the novice to Damascus to sell baskets made at the monastery, and commanded him to sell them at a certain inflated price, far above their actual value. He undertook the long journey under the searing sun, dressed in rags. No one in the city recognized the former official of Damascus, for his appearance had been changed by prolonged fasting and ascetic labors. However, St. John was recognized by his former house steward, who bought all the baskets at the asking price, showing compassion on him for his apparent poverty.

One of the monks happened to die, and his brother begged St. John to compose something consoling for the burial service. St. John refused for a long time, but out of pity he yielded to the petition of the grief-stricken monk, and wrote his reknowned funeral troparia ("What earthly delight," "All human vanity," and others). For this disobedience the Elder banished him from his cell. John fell at his feet and asked to be forgiven, but the Elder remained unyielding. All the monks began to plead for him to allow John to return, but he refused. Then one of the monks asked the Elder to impose a penance on John, and to forgive him if he fulfilled it. The Elder said, "If John wishes to be forgiven, let him wash out all the chamber pots in the lavra, and clean the monastery latrines with his bare hands."

John rejoiced and eagerly ran to accomplish his shameful task. After a certain while, the Elder was commanded in a vision by the All-Pure and Most Holy Theotokos to allow St. John to write again. When the Patriarch of Jerusalem heard of St. John, he ordained him priest and

made him a preacher at his cathedral. But St. John soon returned to the Lavra of St. Sava, where he spent the rest of his life writing spiritual books and church hymns. He left the monastery only to denounce the iconoclasts at the Constantinople Council of 754. They subjected him to imprisonment and torture, but he endured everything, and through the mercy of God he remained alive. He died in about the year 780, more than 100 years old.

St. John of Damascus was a theologian and a zealous defender of Orthodoxy. His most important book is the Fount of Knowledge. The third section of this work, "On the Orthodox Faith," is a summary of Orthodox doctrine and a refutation of heresy. Since he was known as a hymnographer, we pray to St. John for help in the study of church singing.

GREAT VESPERS

LORD I CALL: *Four stikhera of the resurrection in tone 8 (spiral bound vespers book), followed by three for St. John and three for St. Barbara*

Saint John, tone 8:

What shall we call you, O holy theologian John?
Another David, for your hymns are as the Psalms for us?
You are the temple of the Spirit and the pipe of the Good Shepherd.
You sweeten our ears and gladden our minds.
You cause the ranks of the Church to rejoice.
Your teachings are a river of honey, flowing to the ends of the earth.//
Pray that our souls may be saved!

What shall we call you, O Father John, the messenger of God?
Shining star of the Holy Trinity?
You enlighten our eyes with delightful teaching.
You have entered into the cloud of divine knowledge.
Like Moses you behold mysteries beyond words or speech.
You proclaim the music of His wisdom.//
Pray that our souls may be saved!

What shall we call you, O blessed one?
A shining lampstand? A faithful minister of divine mysteries?

A joyful star for the Church, enlightening those who dwelt in darkness?

A well-tuned organ and sweet-sounding harp?//
Pray that our souls may be saved!

Saint Barbara, tone 2:

When Julianna saw the blessed martyr Barbara during her terrible trial suffering from her many wounds, her body painfully torn in many places, she cried out with tears of compassion:
"O Word of God and Lover of mankind//
grant this day that I may be her companion in martyrdom!"

Saints Barbara and Juliana,
you are of those who alone have a true vocation for righteous living,
for you attacked the Enemy and gravely wounded him.
Thus you are worthy of glorification by Christ God,
for you trampled underfoot the destroying passions and their evil,//
giving the means of healing to all the faithful.

Most pure Martyr Barbara, when you were sentenced to die,
you faced sweet death with joy.
You swiftly fulfilled the act of martyrdom,
slain by the hand of your most evil parent.
You were offered up as fruit to God.
Therefore with the wise virgins you truly rejoice,//
as you behold the light of Christ, your Bridegroom.

GLORY...Saint Barbara, tone 6:

You abandoned your home, your people and earthly riches.
You fled the hatred of an evil father, O Barbara;
you were wedded to God in a bond of love;
therefore He took you to Himself rejoicing.//
Pray that He may save our souls!

NOW AND EVER... the Dogmatikon in tone 8 (spiral bound vespers book)

OLD TESTAMENT READINGS

The reading from the Wisdom of Solomon. But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be an affliction, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them. In the time of their visitation they will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble. They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them for ever. Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his elect, and he watches over his holy ones. **(3:1-9)**

The Reading from the Wisdom of Solomon. But the righteous live for ever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them. Therefore they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord, because with his right hand he will cover them, and with his arm he will shield them. The Lord will take his zeal as his whole armor, and will arm all creation to repel his enemies; he will put on righteousness as a breastplate, and wear impartial justice as a helmet; he will take holiness as an invincible shield, and sharpen stern wrath for a sword, and creation will join with him to fight against the madmen. Shafts of lightning will fly with true aim, and will leap to the target as from a well-drawn bow of clouds, and hailstones full of wrath will be hurled as from a catapult; the water of the sea will rage against them, and rivers will relentlessly overwhelm them; a mighty wind will rise against them, and like a tempest it will winnow them away. Lawlessness will lay waste the whole earth, and evil-doing will overturn the thrones of rulers. Listen therefore, O kings, and understand; learn, O judges of the ends of the earth. Give ear, you that rule over multitudes, and boast of many nations. For your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High, who will search out your works and inquire into your plans. **(5:15-23, 6:1-3)**

The reading from the Wisdom of Solomon. But the righteous man, though he die early, will be at rest. For old age is not honored for length of time, nor measured by number of years; but understanding is gray hair for men, and a blameless life is ripe old age. There was one who pleased God and was loved by him, and while living among sinners he was taken up. He was caught up lest evil change his understanding or guile deceive his soul. For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind. Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore he took him quickly from the midst of wickedness. Yet the peoples saw and did not understand, nor take such a thing to heart, that God's grace and mercy are with his elect, and he watches over his holy ones. **(4:7-15)**

LITYA

tone 5:

O holy father,

You did not give sleep to Your eyes

or slumber to Your eyelids

until You freed both Your mind and body of passions

and had prepared of Yourself a habitation unto the Spirit;

for Christ having come unto You with His Father

has made an abode in You.

Having received the grace of the Consubstantial Trinity,

O great preacher and ascetic,//

supplicate for our souls.

tone 8

We honor you, John our father,

the instructor of a multitude of monks!

We have indeed learned to walk rightly in your footsteps!

You are blest, for having labored for Christ,

you denounced the power of the enemy!

Conversor with the angels,

companion of the venerable and righteous ones!//

Together with them, entreat the Lord that He may grant mercy to our
souls!

APOSTIKHA: *all stikhera of the resurrection in tone 8 (spiral bound vespers book)*

GLORY...Saint John, tone 6:

The sound of your teachings has gone out into all the earth,
O venerable Father John!
Therefore you have found the reward of your labors in the heavens.
You destroyed the hosts of demons
and reached the ranks of angels whose life you blamelessly followed!
Since you have boldness before Christ our God, //
entreat peace for our souls!

NOW AND EVER... Theotokion, tone 6:

My Maker and Redeemer, Christ the Lord,
was born of you, O most pure Virgin.
By accepting my nature, He freed Adam from his ancient curse.
Unceasingly we magnify you as the Mother of God!
Rejoice, O celestial Joy!
Rejoice, O Lady://
the Protection, Intercession and Salvation of our souls!

TROPARIA

Resurrection, tone 8

You descended from on high, O Merciful One!
You accepted the three day burial to free us from our sufferings!//
O Lord, our Life and Resurrection, glory to You!

St. John of Damascus

Teacher of Orthodoxy, piety, and purity!
Enlightener of the universe!
And divine inspiration to monastics
by your teachings we are all enlightened,
and by your spiritual music, O all-wise John of Damascus,
pray to Christ our God for the salvation of our souls!

Saint John of Damascus Orthodox Church

Rector: Father Michael Anderson

16903 Espola Rd

Poway, CA 92064

Email: powaypadre@stjohnofdamascus.org

Office: 858-674-1931