

uttering this, she put into his hand one gold florin, which was taken after this incident and placed on the holy icon of the Theotokos in the Great Lavra. Later, the holy Gregory reposed in peace after leading a God-pleasing life.

**On the 1st of October, the holy Church commemorates
the HOLY PROTECTION of the our most holy Lady Theotokos and
Ever-virgin Mary, who covered the faithful with her veil
at the Church of Vlachernai,
as seen by Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ.¹⁵**

Rejoice with God, ranking second only to the Trinity!
[Saint Andrew of Crete]¹⁶

The sacred Feast of the Holy Protection of our most holy and glorious Lady and Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary is celebrated today, brethren, in remembrance of a vision beheld by our holy father among the saints, the venerable Andrew, the fool for Christ's sake, during the reign of Emperor Leo.¹⁷ Saint Andrew's struggles and labors for God, amid the most severe

¹⁵ Many of the details of the vision of Saint Andrew are taken from his Life, commemorated in the Greek Menologion on the 28th of May. In modern Greece, the Church of Greece, in 1960, transferred the commemoration to the 28th of October, making it both a civil and ecclesiastical holiday, to commemorate the protection of the Theotokos granted to the Greek forces on the Albanian front, resisting the Italian invasion in 1940, when the government of John Metaxas and the Greek people refused to surrender and issued the memorable response, "No," or "OXI" in Greek.

¹⁶ Prosimion after Canon for Sunday, Mode Plagal First, by Saint Andrew of Crete, taken from the *Theotokarion of Nikodemos the Hagiorite* [in Greek] (Volos, GR: Sot. Schoina, 1979), p. 107.

¹⁷ Regarding the times when Saint Andrew flourished, there exists two diverging opinions. The first group maintains that the vision took place during the reign of Leo I, the Makelles (r. 457-474). In a tenth century manuscript, Leo and his wife Verina are depicted as pious sovereigns devoted to the Virgin Mary. They are reputed to have ordered a gold reliquary casket (*soros*), with silver revetment, for a relic of the Virgin's veil (*maphorion*, a garment covering the head and shoulders), and to have placed about it an image of the Theotokos enthroned and venerated by members of their family. George Hamartolos says that the Virgin's robe was kept by an elderly Jewess, who was a Christian in belief, and deposited in the Vlachernai Church during the reign of Leo I, in 473. The deposition of the robe was celebrated annually in Constantinople on the 2nd of July. According to the text of the *Synaxarion of Constantinople*, the "pious Jewess, Anna of a village of Galilee near Nazareth and Capernaum," gave the Virgin's garment to two *patrikoi*, Galvios and Kandidos, who

(continued...)

deprivations, took him vouchsafed many vision a vigil he attended, serv the Holy Protection of t Vlachernai, at the Chur follows by an anonymou of all the churches and glorious and the most Andrew and his disciple hour of the night, behold the most holy Theotokos shone as the sun and wa being borne aloft by the honorable Forerunner Jo hand, the Queen of the a following, were chanting

¹⁷(...continued)

brought it back to Constanti Andrew's vision took place 912). Given the lack of a m this Leo chose his concubin led to a severe struggle ove

Our readers should Virgin's articles, and both o that of the Virgin's belt, on Church by Emperor Arkadi was installed in an architect the holy Church on the 31st of the Annunciation and Nativ

¹⁸ The name Vlachernai d northwestern corner of Con 450), was the most famous distance outside the walls. T of 626, after which the gen walls to enclose it. The cl destroyed it completely in flowed. The latter is now e complex, in ca. 500, an i constructed. Other interesti Virgin's relics, and the Vlaci Church and Palace of."

which was taken after this
Theotokos in the Great Lavra.
leading a God-pleasing life.

commemorates
of the Most Holy and
Glorious Lady Theotokos and
her Child Jesus Christ,
with her veil
drawn,
and Christ.¹⁵

to the Trinity!

our most holy and glorious
Theotokos, venerated today, brethren, in
her rank among the saints, the
Queen of the reign of Emperor
Constantine, amid the most severe

relics were taken from his Life,
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celebration on the 28th of October,
to commemorate the protection of
the Theotokos in front, resisting the Italian
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to give up the "OXI" in Greek.

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the text of the *Synaxarion of
the Holy Mother of Galilee near Nazareth and
the Holy Child Jesus Christ, Galvios and Kandidos, who*
(continued...)

deprivations, took him through the streets of Constantinople. He was
vouchsafed many visions, but the last recorded one, which took place during
a vigil he attended, served as the basis for the establishment of this Feast of
the Holy Protection of the Theotokos. It was Sunday, the 1st of October, in
Vlachernai, at the Church of the Theotokos.¹⁸ This church is described as
follows by an anonymous Byzantine hymnographer: "Throughout all the city,
of all the churches and chapels dedicated to the Theotokos, this is the most
glorious and the most honored." Now according to their custom, Saint
Andrew and his disciple, Epiphanius, were attending church. At the fourth
hour of the night, behold, the blessed Andrew, with his own eyes, observed
the most holy Theotokos coming from the beautiful door of the narthex. She
shone as the sun and was upraised very high, even as high as the heavens,
being borne aloft by the awe-inspiring orders of holy angels. The holy and
honorable Forerunner John and Saint John the Theologian escorted, by the
hand, the Queen of the angels. The angels, some going on ahead, and others
following, were chanting spiritual songs and hymns in a very delightful and

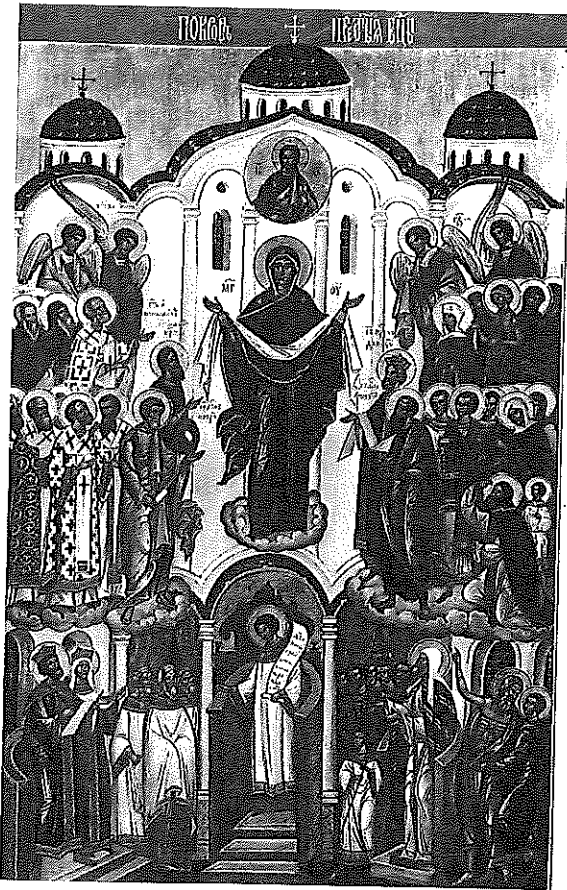
¹⁷(...continued)

brought it back to Constantinople. This second group maintains the opinion that Saint
Andrew's vision took place when Leo VI the Wise (or the Philosopher) reigned (870-
912). Given the lack of a male heir and the premature death of his first three wives,
this Leo chose his concubine Zoe, who gave birth to Constantine VII. This situation
led to a severe struggle over the tetragamy (four marriages).

Our readers should know that there were two caskets containing relics of the
Virgin's articles, and both of them were housed in Constantinople. The other relic was
that of the Virgin's belt, or girdle (*zonee*), which was placed in the Chalkoprateia
Church by Emperor Arkadios (r. 395-408). By the time of Justin II (r. 565-578), it
was installed in an architectural *soros* of its own. Its translation is commemorated by
the holy Church on the 31st of August. The emperors visited the *soros* on the feasts of
the Annunciation and Nativity.

¹⁸ The name Vlachernai designates an area possessing a spring of water in the
northwestern corner of Constantinople. The basilica, built by Empress Pulcheria (ca.
450), was the most famous shrine of the Virgin in the city. It was situated a short
distance outside the walls. The church was miraculously spared during the Avar siege
of 626, after which the general and Emperor Herakleios (r. 610-641) extended the
walls to enclose it. The church was burned down in 1070 and rebuilt, but fire
destroyed it completely in 1434. Next to it was a bathhouse in which the spring
flowed. The latter is now enclosed in a modern Greek church. South of the church
complex, in ca. 500, an imperial palace, called the Palace of Vlachernai, was
constructed. Other interesting historical data regarding the dating of the vision, the
Virgin's relics, and the Vlachernai Church may be found in *Oxford*, s.v. "Blachernai,
Church and Palace of."

pleasant manner. Only Andrew and Epiphanius were able to hear the mystical chanting.



The Holy Protection of the Mother of God

kept the sacred reliquary coffin (*soros*) containing her veil (*maphorion*). She took it up into her hands and exited. She then stood before the royal doors of the bema, and placed the veil on her all-immaculate head, wrapping it with

The Queen then entered the midst of the temple, where the ancient pulpit (ambo)¹⁹ was located, and then stood in the middle of the solea.²⁰ The Lady Theotokos then knelt down and was praying and entreating her only-begotten Son for a long while, for the salvation of the faithful, tears streaming down her countenance that bore the likeness of God. Andrew went to Epiphanius and said to him, "Dost thou see, child, the Lady of the cosmos?" Epiphanius said, "Yes, honorable father, I also see by thy holy prayers the Lady Theotokos, and I marvel."

After the Theotokos prayed a sufficient time in that place, then she rose up and entered the holy sanctuary (bema),²¹ wherein was

beautiful modesty. The and fearful veil and so covering all those there over the faithful, for a emitting immaterial air flashing like lightning. A protection of her veil and gifts of grace. When the by little, her divine pr appeared, but her grace protection of the faithful and grace-filled veil, w This then is the account who was vouchsafed th Andrew. Saint Andrew contemplation and visi imparted this grace also both fearful and extrao

Thus, the feast of Prophet Esaias prophesied be glorious, and the holy all nations shall come to tells us that "the Church (ca. 347-407) says that be."²³ "This is not any (378-444), "but rather t she is high and conspicuous is nothing in her which l we are told that our Mis prophecy, for the mourn churches of her feasts. glorious than Sinai, for

¹⁹ The ambo was usually in the middle of the church for the chanter or reader of the Gospel or Epistle.

²⁰ The solea (Lat. *soleas*) is the raised part of church between the nave and sanctuary.

²¹ The bema or sanctuary in this case was the raised platform whereon stood the altar, together with the seats of the bishop and other clergy. The word bema is also used elsewhere to describe the pulpit which was placed in the middle of the church or near the altar, from which Gospel and Epistle Readings and sermons were performed.

²² Saint Cyril of Jerusalem VII:150.

²³ Saint Chrysostom, *Apo* 73:213.

²⁴ Saint Cyril of Alexandria p. 455.

²⁵ October 1st, Great Vesp

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rch between the nave and sanctuary. ed platform whereon stood the altar, clergy. The word bema is also used d in the middle of the church or near gs and sermons were performed.

beautiful modesty. Then holding it by her undefiled hands, she took that great and fearful veil and solemnly spread it over the faithful that were present, covering all those there that were Christians. The two men observed that, over the faithful, for a considerable time, her omophorion was extended and emitting immaterial and radiant rays, with greater luster than electrum, flashing like lighting. As long as the Lady Theotokos stood there and the holy protection of her veil appeared spread over the faithful, she was distributing gifts of grace. When the Lady Theotokos began to mount to the heavens, little by little, her divine protection was becoming invisible, until it no longer appeared, but her grace continued, however, to abide there. Moreover, this protection of the faithful continued on account of the presence of her sacred and grace-filled veil, which was preserved in that very church at Vlachernai. This then is the account of the sacred Andrew and his initiate Epiphanius, who was vouchsafed this vision through the mediation of our divine Father Andrew. Saint Andrew was so filled with the grace of lofty and spiritual contemplation and visions of revelations that transcended nature, that he imparted this grace also to Epiphanius. This and many other similar visions, both fearful and extraordinary, were vouchsafed Saint Andrew.

Thus, the feast we celebrate today was inaugurated by this vision. The Prophet Esaias prophesied that "in the last days the mountain of the Lord shall be glorious, and the house of God shall be on the top of the mountains, and all nations shall come to it [Is. 2:2]." Saint Kyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315-386) tells us that "the Church is called a mountain,"²² and Saint John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407) says that "Esaias shows how indestructible the Church would be."²³ "This is not any earthly mountain," says Saint Kyril of Alexandria (378-444), "but rather the Church which Christ has rescued for Himself. For she is high and conspicuous to people everywhere, and, exalted, because there is nothing in her which brings men down to earth."²⁴ In a hymn for this Feast, we are told that our Mistress, the Theotokos, is the true fulfillment of Esaias' prophecy, for the mountains and hills have been adorned with the renowned churches of her feasts.²⁵ Yet the Virgin is a mountain [Dan. 2:34] more glorious than Sinai, for the latter burned with fire, and thunder and lightning

²² Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures: Lecture XXI*, Nicene, 2nd Ser., VII:150.

²³ Saint Chrysostom, *Apologist: Demonstration Against the Pagans*, Ch. VI, FC, 73:213.

²⁴ Saint Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke*, Homily 112, p. 455.

²⁵ October 1st, Great Vespers, Stichera, Mode One.

struck it, but she, without being consumed, bore, in her womb, the Logos, the divine Fire. We beseech her as one who has maternal boldness to help us.

Saint Gregory of Palamas (d. 1359) saw the Mother of God as "the source and root of the race of liberty.... The Virgin Mother alone dwells on the frontier between created and uncreated natures, and those who know God recognize also in her the habitation of the infinite."²⁶ Saint Theophanes (d. 1381), Bishop of Nicaea, also known as "the branded," sees the entire cosmos turning around the Theotokos, when he wrote: "It cannot happen that anyone, of angels or of men, can come otherwise, in any way whatsoever to participation in the divine gifts flowing from what has been divinely assumed, from the Son of God, save through His Mother."²⁷ Mary Theotokos, for this brilliant confessor and hymnographer, was the "dispenser and distributor of all the wondrous uncreated gifts of the divine Spirit."²⁸ As the fountain, the beginning of life, "She receives wholly the hidden grace of the Spirit and amply distributes it and shares it with others, thus manifesting it."²⁹ He then speaks of her spiritual motherhood over us, saying, "The Mother of Him—Who through His unspeakable goodness willed to be called our Brother—is the dispenser and distributor of all the wondrous uncreated gifts of the divine Spirit, which make us Christ's brothers and co-heirs, not only because she is granting the gifts of her natural Son to His brothers in grace, but also because she is bestowing them on these as her own true sons, though not by ties of nature but of grace."³⁰

Let us speak now of these last and terrible times, when sin has abounded and we are placed in multifarious dangers, even as the divine Paul once wrote about his battle with false apostles, Satan transforming himself into an angel of light, and his ministers who transform themselves as ministers of righteousness and enslave and devour the people. We hear that Saint Paul bears dishonor, weariness, concerns, fasts, and blows, and, as an example to us, he tells, "Yes, all those who wish to live piously in Christ Jesus shall be persecuted [2 Tim. 3:12]." He, too, was "in perils of robbers, in perils from mine own race, in perils from Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren [2 Cor. 11:26]." Our Savior tell his disciples what shall be the sign of His coming and

²⁶ Saint Gregory Palamas, *P.G.* 151:169C and 177A; cf. Hom. 53, cited in *Homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas*, comp. by S. Oikonomos (Athens, 1861), 156, 162.

²⁷ *Serm. in Deiparam*, cited in *Marianum* (Rome, 1964) 5, p. 55.

²⁸ *Ib.*, 4, 55; 15:205

²⁹ *Ib.*, 14, p. 195.

³⁰ *Ib.*, 15, p. 205.

the completion of the nation, and kingdom plagues, and earthquakes we are assailed by all no one be moved by them are appointed [1 Thes for us to enter into the the Mother of the Lord delivered from every Saint John of Kronstadt Lady! O thou, whose earthborn mother and constantly remember ever undoubtingly and

Even as once heaven, "A woman h Saint Andrew behold Bride garbed in purple great sign after they sounded a trumpet. "the ark of the Lord's lightnings and sounds 11:19]." After the day the lightnings, thunder appeared as our refuge

Our protectress in the Holy Spirit who built for an armory: mighty [Song 4:4]." P tower between Mount "the daughter of Zion between the head and weapons that guarded pure Virgin with the Prophet David, and the Head of the Church, and Saint Theophanes use

³¹ Saint John of Kronstadt

in her womb, the Logos, the paternal boldness to help us. With the Mother of God as "the virgin Mother alone dwells on earth, and those who know God unite."²⁶ Saint Theophanes (d. 1815) branded, "sees the entire Church wrote: "It cannot happen that the Virgin, in any way whatsoever to be called has been divinely assumed, for the Mother of God, for this reason, "dispenser and distributor of the Holy Spirit."²⁸ As the fountain, the hidden grace of the Spirit and His manifesting it."²⁹ He then says, "The Mother of Him—should be called our Brother—is the recipient of the uncreated gifts of the divine Spirit, not only because she is the Mother in grace, but also because she is the Mother of the sons, though not by ties of

terrible times, when sin has increased, even as the divine Paul says, Satan transforming himself to appear as ministers of justice. We hear that Saint Paul says, "I have been in perils of robbers, in perils from wild beasts, in perils in the city, in perils among false brethren [2 Cor. 11:26]. This shall be the sign of His coming and

See also: cf. Hom. 53, cited in *Homilies of Saint Theophanes* (Athens, 1861), 156, 162. *Orthodoxia* (1964) 5, p. 55.

the completion of the age, saying, "For nation shall be stirred up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there shall be famines, and plagues, and earthquakes, in place after place [Mt. 24:7]." In these last days, we are assailed by attacks from aliens, civil wars, and deadly plagues. "Let no one be moved by these afflictions; for ye yourselves know that for this we are appointed [1 Thess. 3:3]"; for "through many temptations it is necessary for us to enter into the kingdom of God [Acts 14:22]." The most holy Virgin, the Mother of the Lord, renders her protection over us, that we might be delivered from every peril, whether it be famine, sickness, or earthquake. Saint John of Kronstadt (1829-1908) writes in his memoirs: "Holy Virgin, our Lady! O thou, whose love toward Christians surpasses the love of every earthly mother and of every wife, hear our prayers and save us! May we constantly remember thee! May we always pray fervently to thee! May we ever undoubtingly and unfailingly take refuge beneath thy holy protection!"³¹

Even as once Saint John the Theologian beheld a great sign in the heaven, "A woman having been clothed with the sun [Rev. 12:1]," thus did Saint Andrew behold in the heavenly church in Vlachernai the unwedded Bride garbed in porphyry and radiant like the sun. Saint John received this great sign after there was much destruction and after the seventh angel sounded a trumpet. "And the temple of God was opened in the heaven, and the ark of the Lord's covenant was seen in His temple. And there occurred lightnings and sounds and thunderings and an earthquake and great hail [Rev. 11:19]." After the disturbance of the elements in heaven and the earth with the lightnings, thunderings, murders, earthquakes, hail, the most blessed one appeared as our refuge and defender in both physical and spiritual perils.

Our protectress has myriads of shields to guard us. She is spoken of in the Holy Spirit where it says, "Thy neck is as the tower of David, that was built for an armory: a thousand shields hang upon it, and all darts of the mighty [Song 4:4]." Prophet David had once constructed a beautiful and lofty tower between Mount Zion and Jerusalem which lay below and was called "the daughter of Zion." That tower stood between them, as a neck does between the head and body. Upon the tower were hung shields and all the weapons that guarded Jerusalem. Therefore, the Holy Spirit likens the most pure Virgin with the tower of Jerusalem, since she is a daughter of the Prophet David, and stands in the midst between the Christ, Who verily is the Head of the Church, and the faithful who consist of the body of the Church. Saint Theophanes used the metaphor of the neck to express her place in the

³¹ Saint John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, 90.

Mystical Body: "Since then the Head of every principality, power and of our Church is the only way which leads to the Father, so that the sacred neck is the only way leading to the Head of all."³²

Being higher than any member of the Church, the Theotokos is near to Him, as one having given Him flesh. She stands in the firmament, between heaven and earth, between God and man, between the Judge of the contest and Prize-giver Christ and the struggling Church, even as the tower of David between Sion and Jerusalem. She, too, has those shields which are her all-mighty intercessions. As a Mother to her Son and God, and her Fashioner, she fervently prays with words full of compassion and love, saying such things as these: "O heavenly King, do Thou accept every man who glorifies Thee and invokes Thy most holy name. Do Thou sanctify and glorify those that glorify Thee and honor me, Thy most beloved Mother. Receive their every entreaty and supplication, and deliver them from every necessity and affliction."

Saint Ambrose of Milan, in his commentary on Psalm 19, speaks of the purpose of David's tower, which was both to defend and adorn the city. Our protectress then is like unto this tower, for she both protects us as a pillar of strength from the face of the enemy, both visible and invisible, and is the adornment of our race. Saint Anastasios the Sinaite comments that "she makes apostles of sorcerers, evangelists of tax collectors, and causes harlots to become more pure than virgins." This was seen in the Life of Saint Mary of Egypt, who surpassed many virgins. The Virgin Mary adorns the whole of the spiritual Jerusalem, the Church of Christ; and thus we chant that "she is the most wondrous majesty and comeliness of the faithful, the fulfillment of the prophets, the glory of the apostles, the adornment of the martyrs, the boast of virgins, and the most marvellous protection of the entire cosmos."³³ Together, with the shields on the tower, there are hung "all the darts of the mighty [Song 4:4]," which are the intercessions of the praying saints. She did not appear alone in the air standing, but with the angelic hosts and multitudes of saints clad in white standing in a circle about her. She knows that our enemies are drawn up in battle-order against us, even as it is written: "For many dogs have encircled me, the congregation of evil doers hath surrounded me [Ps. 21:16]. They have opened their mouth against me, as might a lion ravenous and roaring [Ps. 21:13]." The Queen of the heaven, who stands at the right of Christ [Ps. 44:8], wishes to help us vanquish our enemies with all

³² *Serm. in Deiparam*, cited in Marianum (Rome, 1964) 10, p. 133.

³³ October 1st, Great Vespers, Sticheron, Mode One.

the hosts of heaven, St. martyrs and virgins, a and comes with them t

Let us look at t the ladder seen by Patr When Jacob departed i there, for the sun had g put it at his head, and behold, a ladder fixed angels of God ascended said, 'I am the God of Jacob awoke out of his it not.' And he was afr other than the house of the name of that place angels do not stop to intercessions, comman they ascend with the p God.

In the vision appeared with her: The Who said, "Verily, I s women a greater than Theologian, the beloved two, as ones who have g of the Apostle Iakovos, when it is energized [J

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Our sins are des us, saying, "Go, My pe for a little season, until But how is it possible to ones, have found no oth the cosmos, of whom it as a cloud [Wisdom of S

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vanquish our enemies with all

the hosts of heaven, She also summons prophets and apostles, and assembles martyrs and virgins, and gathers together both the venerable and righteous, and comes with them to our aid.

Let us look at the example of the angels ascending and descending on the ladder seen by Patriarch Jacob, which was a prefigurement of the Virgin. When Jacob departed into Charrhan, "and came to a certain place and slept there, for the sun had gone down, he took one of the stones of the place, and put it at his head, and lay down to sleep in that place, and dreamed. And behold, a ladder fixed on the earth, whose top reached to heaven, and the angels of God ascended and descended on it. And the Lord stood upon it, and said, 'I am the God of thy father Abraham, and the God of Isaac....' And Jacob awoke out of his sleep, and said, 'The Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.' And he was afraid, and said, 'How fearful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'... And he called the name of that place, the House of God [Gen. 28:10-19]." Indeed, the angels do not stop to rest, since the Theotokos, who is unsleeping in her intercessions, commands them to unceasingly help the race of man. Thus, they ascend with the prayers and descend to men with the grace and gift of God.

In the vision of Saint Andrew, two of the most splendid saints appeared with her: The Forerunner who was spoken of by the Lord Himself Who said, "Verily, I say to you, there hath not arisen among those born of women a greater than John the Baptist [Mt. 11:11]"; and, Saint John the Theologian, the beloved disciple. Our protectress was accompanied by these two, as ones who have great boldness before God; for keep in mind the words of the Apostle Iakovos, "The entreaty of a righteous man hath much strength when it is energized [Jas. 5:16]."

The most immaculate Virgin stands in the midst of these two virgins, even as the ark between the two cherubim, and the throne of the Lord of Sabaoth between the seraphim, even as Moses when his hands were supported by Aaron and Or, so that Jesus (the son of Navee) routed Amalek and all his people with the slaughter of the sword. For with a secret hand the Lord wages war upon Amalek to all generations [Ex. 17: 11-16].

Our sins are deserving of chastisement, so the Prophet Esaias exhorts us, saying, "Go, My people, enter into thy closets, shut thy door, hide thyself for a little season, until the anger of the Lord has passed away [Is. 26:20]." But how is it possible to flee from the wrath of the Lord? We, the miserable ones, have found no other place that we might hasten, other than the Lady of the cosmos, of whom it was spoken of in the Holy Spirit, "I covered the earth as a cloud [Wisdom of Seirach or Ecclesiasticus 24:3]." We then are sheltered

by her protection, as a cloud that covers the entire earth. She is also likened to the other elements, as spoken of by Solomon, "Who is this that looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, choice as the sun [Song 6:9]?"

Also, in accordance with the Prophet's words, "Behold, the Lord sits on a swift cloud, and shall come to Egypt [Is. 19:1]." We call the Virgin, in truth, a light cloud; for, sitting on thee, the Lord has come to overthrow the Egyptian hand-wrought images of deception, and to enlighten them that serve them.³⁴ Saint Ambrose (339-397) comments that "she was a light cloud because of her virginal integrity. She was light because she did not seek to please man, but God. She was light because she did not conceive in iniquity, but begot a Child under the overshadowing Spirit; nor did she bring forth in fault, but with grace."³⁵

The righteous anger of God has enacted vengeance for all our bad deeds which we have cultivated and refined; for "the Lord is the God of vengeance; the God of vengeance hath spoken openly [Ps. 93:1]." Our own lawlessness has caught up with us, so that we might say, "Evils without number have encompassed me; mine iniquities took hold of me, and I became unable to see [Ps. 39:16]." Thus, our invisible adversary has chased hard after us and outran us: "He has troubled me, as a she-bear lying in wait; he is to me as a lion in secret places [Lam. 3:10]." Our visible enemies also anticipate us, saying, "The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoils,...I will destroy with my sword, my hand shall have dominion [Ex. 15:9]." Nevertheless, let us take courage in the most holy Theotokos, for under the shelter of her protection not even a hair of our head is lost. Cover us, O Lady, with thy precious omophorion, and deliver us from all evil, entreating thy Son, that He save our souls.

All the days of our life our evil, just as the Patriarch Jacob admitted to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my life, wherein I sojourn, are a hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, they have not attained to the days of the life of my fathers, in which days they sojourned [Gen. 47:9]." We behold evil days and we ourselves even work much evil, storing up to ourselves "wrath in a day of wrath and revelation of a righteous judgment of God, Who will render to each according to his works: to those on the one hand who with patience in good work seek glory and honor and incorruptibility, eternal life; but to those on the other hand who are factious and disobey the truth, and suffer themselves to be

³⁴ Resurrection Canon to the Theotokos, Mode One, Ode Three.

³⁵ De Virg., II, 65, P.L. 16, 181C.

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persuaded to unrighteousness, anger and wrath [Rom. 2:5-8]." We ought not to despise the wealth of God's kindness and forbearance and long-suffering for our repentance. Therefore, we are in need, for all the days of our lives, and indeed especially on that dread day when our soul is separated from the body, of the Virgin Theotokos' power assistance. We pray that she overtakes us then with her help and protection, and not the evil spirits in the air; but we also beg her mediation during that fearful day of judgment that she might shelter us with her mystical protection.

Saint John of Kronstadt writes: "It was through the incarnation of the Logos that the all-holy Virgin has been given to us as an all-powerful intercessor, who protects us from sins, misfortunes, and disasters. Praying for us day and night, our Queen, whose power no enemy visible or invisible can withstand, truly is our mother by grace in accordance with the words uttered by Christ on the Cross to the beloved disciple, 'Behold thy Mother!' and to her, 'Behold thy son!'"³⁶

**On the 1st of October, the holy Church commemorates
 the synaxis of the wonderworking icon of our most holy Lady,
 the Theotokos, called QUICK-TO-HEAR
 at the Athonite Monastery of Docheiariou.³⁷**

The icon of the Theotokos called "She Who is Quick to Hear" (*Gorgoëpikoös*) is among the heirlooms of the Athonite Monastery of Docheiariou. The little Chapel of Gorgoëpikoös, opposite the entrance to the katholikon and to the right of the entrance of the refectory, houses one of the most revered icons on the Holy Mountain. Two priest-monks (*hieromonks*) are appointed yearly by the monastery, with the title of *prosmonarios*. They receive numerous pilgrims and, daily, in turn, chant entreaties before the icon called "She Who is Quick to Hear."³⁸

Many miracles have been attributed to this icon, honored as the protectress of the monastery. Though tradition states that it was painted during the abbacy of Saint Neophytos, commemorated the 9th of November, who lived during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the fresco icon is still beautiful. This is despite the fact that the monastery has suffered destruction

³⁶ Cf. Jn. 19:26, 27; Saint John of Kronstadt, *Spiritual Counsels of Father John of Kronstadt*, select passages from *My Life in Christ*, 59.

³⁷ Commemoration of this icon is celebrated on the 1st of October and the 9th of November.

³⁸ Provatakis, p. 63; Kadas, p. 92.

and rebuilding over the centuries. The icon was painted near the entrance to the monastery refectory. The monk on duty in the refectory, named Neilos, went through that passageway frequently, day and night, to carry out his obedience. When night fell, he would light a torch so that he could see.



She Who is Quick to Hear (Gorgoëpikoös)

Now, in the year 1664, he passed by the icon, as he was wont to do, bearing the torch. He then discerned a voice say unto him, "From henceforth, pass not through here another time with torches, thereby blackening my icon with smoke." Neilos was not aware that the voice was coming from the icon. He reckoned one of the brethren was teasing him, therefore, he gave it no heed, but continued according to his negligent habit. However, not many days passed when he heard the voice, a second time, utter, "O unmonastic monk, for how long shalt thou irreverently and dishonorably besmirch my form?" Then, together with that voice, Neilos lost the light of his eyes. The miserable one went blind. When he brought to mind that previous voice, he acknowledged that, justifiably, he now suffered, since he had not heeded the command of our Lady, the Theotokos, but, in ignorance, disregarded it.

In the morning, the brethren found him face downwards on the floor before the holy icon. When they observed his blindness and he informed them of the cause, they were filled with fear and trembling. Thereupon, henceforth, a vigil lamp was suspended before the icon. Every evening, the monk assigned to the refectory was to offer incense before the icon. Meanwhile, the blinded monk would in no wise return to his cell. Nay, he remained in a prayer-stall opposite the sacred icon, day and night, beseeching the most holy Theotokos, with tears and laments, to pardon him, as the most sympathetic Mother of God the Logos, the mediatrix of the human race. As a sign that she had forgiven his sin of heedlessness and inattention, he besought her to grant him the light of his eyes that he might gaze upon her holy icon, glorifying and hymning with thanksgiving her God-glorified archetype.

Indeed, his hope he prayed and shed a to Theotokos is the founta encouragement of all th ear and hearken favora Then, one day, she rev saying, "O monk, thin see as before. Announc Mother of God the Lo powerful guardian of th making provision for it recourse in me for all t those Orthodox Christi I am called 'She who is

Straightway, at joyous words, the eyes amazed. Monks from a the most holy Theot Meanwhile, Father Nei to hear, commanded.

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ainted near the entrance to the refectory, named Neilos, and night, to carry out his task so that he could see.

Now, in the year 1664, he saw the icon, as he was wont to carry the torch. He then heard a voice say unto him, "Henceforth, pass not through this time with torches, slackening my icon with thee." Neilos was not aware that the voice was coming from the icon.

One of the brethren was blind, therefore, he gave it no heed, and continued according to his habit. However, not many days passed when he heard the voice a second time, utter, "O blind monk, for how long thou irreverently and dishonourably smirch my form?" Then, with that voice, Neilos lost sight of his eyes. The miserable man became blind. When he brought to mind the previous voice, he realised he had not heeded the warning, and disregarded it.

He fell downwards on the floor in grief and he informed them of his blindness. Thereupon, henceforth, every evening, the monk would kneel before the icon. Meanwhile, the 11th of May, he remained in a state of prayer, beseeching the most holy Theotokos, as the most sympathetic Mother of the human race. As a sign that she heard his petition, he besought her to gaze upon her holy icon, and glorified archetype.

Indeed, his hopes were not proved false or shamed for all that time he prayed and shed a torrent of tears before her holy icon. Since our Lady the Theotokos is the fountain of compassion and mercy, the speedy support, and encouragement of all those in afflictions, she would incline her philanthropic ear and hearken favorably to the contrite heart and warm tears of her slave. Then, one day, she revealed the following: She bid him from her holy icon, saying, "O monk, thine entreaty has been heard; may thou be forgiven and see as before. Announce to the other ascetic fathers and brothers that I am the Mother of God the Logos and, after God, I am the protection, help, and powerful guardian of this sacred Monastery of the Archangels, providing and making provision for it as an invincible guide. Henceforth, let the monks take recourse in me for all their needs, and I shall be quick to hear them and all those Orthodox Christians who, with reverence, flee unto me for refuge; for, I am called 'She who is quick to hear.'"

Straightway, at her grace-filled and divine voice of delightful and joyous words, the eyes of the monk were opened. All were astonished and amazed. Monks from all over Mount Athos came to Docheiariou to venerate the most holy Theotokos and wonderworking "Quick-to-hear" Icon. Meanwhile, Father Neilos disclosed to the brotherhood all she, who is quick to hear, commanded.

The monks, desiring to make a shrine, sealed off the passageway next to the icon. Pilgrims may come and step into this little enclosed shrine which consists now of a small room. Countless miracles have been wrought by this wonderworking icon: the blind see, the lame walk, the barren conceive, and captives are delivered; many have been preserved from shipwreck, locusts have been driven away, and many other awesome wonders have taken place.

Rejoice, O all-good one, who art quick to hear, fulfilling our petitions for our good!

**On the 1st of October, the holy Church commemorates
our holy Father SAVVA,
Stylite of Vishera and Wonder-worker of Novgorod (1460).**

Through the intercessions of Thy Saints,
O Christ God, have mercy on us. Amen.