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ST. BARBARA MONASTERY

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2020



Dear Friends of St. Barbara Monastery,

The end of October is when we normally begin making plans for our monastery's annual Feast of St. Barbara on December 4th. This year, we don't quite know how to plan anything! Will the pandemic abate sufficiently to allow us to invite our Archbishop BENJAMIN, the clergy from our area, and all of our Friends just as we do every year? Or, by then, will the measures to prevent the spread of the virus in our County (Ventura) be even more stringent than they are now? If the current news headlines concerning the virus are anywhere near accurate, it looks like the latter will be the case and we will be having only a very small celebration. Whatever the final decision is, we will let you know around Thanksgiving.

Meanwhile, belatedly (some eight or nine months following the onset of the pandemic), it has just come to our attention that not every Orthodox Christian has heard of St. Nicephorus of Chios. This saint, glorified in 2012, recently has visited a number of persons and offered help and healing to those afflicted by Covid-19. Indeed, he counsels all of us not to fear and instead to ask for his intercessions, protection and help in coping during this trying time.

We encourage you to read the "Life of St. Nicephorus" and pray the Akathist to him (both published by the nuns of the Monastery of the Life-Giving Spring in Dunlap, CA), but offer here a short summary of his biography and a line from the Akathist Hymn:

Suffering from leprosy, St. Nicephorus entered an institution for lepers on the Greek island of Chios as a young man. In just a few years, he was professed as a monk right there and, as his condition slowly deteriorated, faithfully fulfilled his monastic vows over the course of some fifty years. Following his death in 1964, his relics were discovered to be incorrupt and fragrant.

"Rejoice, for you sowed bountifully in the house of the Lord;

Rejoice, for you reaped plentifully the spiritual harvest,

Rejoice, true namesake of victory".

Abbess Victoria
and the sisters
of St. Barbara Monastery

ICON OF THE PROTECTION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD



On October 19th, our good friend Eugene Solonin brought a beautiful icon of “The Protection of the Mother of God” as a gift to St. Barbara Monastery. The icon, which Eugene “ransomed” from an auction in Florida, is covered by a bronze “riza” of excellent and sharply detailed workmanship. It is the gift of four donors: Eugene himself and Helena Solomaho (both pictured at left), Larissa Streltsova and Lyubov Ganchenko.

Eugene often is able to procure fine icons put up for auction in the U.S. and abroad. Living in Los Angeles, he has access to skilled iconographers who are ready to work on old, damaged icons, should they require restoration, and a woodworker who constructs the kiots (glass-fronted cases) in which they are usually housed. Visitors to St. Barbara Monastery are able to venerate five such icons

which Eugene has likewise “ransomed,” had restored, and then given to the monastery over the years.

The feast of this icon is a favorite among the Slavs. But, ironically, the event it commemorates is the repulse of Slav attackers on Constantinople (before they had received the Christian Faith) through the prayers of the Theotokos. On June 18, 860, the Rus (tribes living to the north of the Black Sea) laid siege to Constantinople. The city was vulnerable, as both the imperial army and navy were away fighting the Arab-Byzantine wars. Patriarch Photius likened the attack to “a swarm of wasps” and “a thunderbolt from heaven.” The siege lasted until August 4th of that year. On that day, the Patriarch in his sermon thanked heaven for saving the city.

How did this happen? During the attack, the city being so vulnerable, Patriarch Photius called on his people to implore the Theotokos for help. Many faithful gathered at the Blachernae Palace Church, where the veil of the Theotokos lay, to reach out to her for deliverance. During the all-night vigil, the Mother of God came to their rescue. St. Andrew, fool-for-Christ, saw her enter through the church doors, escorted by St. John the Forerunner and St. John the Theologian. Angels preceded them. The Theotokos came to the center of the church, where she knelt and prayed, with fervor and tears. Moving on from there, she entered the altar and prayed again. Finally, she removed her veil and held it out over the faithful as she ascended from them. St. Andrew, pointing to her, asked his disciple, Epiphanius, if he saw her. Epiphanius replied, “I do see her, holy Father, and

am stricken with fear.” St. Demetrius of Rostov, in speaking of this deliverance of Constantinople, likens St. Andrew’s vision to that of St. John the Theologian’s in the Book of Revelation, the Woman Clothed with the Sun. He asks why the Theotokos as depicted in Revelation comes when there are lightnings, voices, an earthquake and great hail, and not when the elements are calm. Answering his question, he says it is to show “how our most good Mediatrix hastens to our aid in the hour of evil, when we are nigh unto perdition, and shelters us.” He speaks of her sheltering us from the glitter of the vanity of this world, the voices of the pride of life and vainglory, and from the chastisement that hails down on us on account of our sins. “That we not be mortally wounded by all these darts, we have been granted...the protection of the most pure and most blessed Virgin.” St. Demetrius comments, “In these last, grievous times, when our sins have multiplied, the woes that beset us have likewise increased....At this time, when we suffer the attacks of aliens, civil war, and plague, the most pure and most blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Lord, offers us as a defense her protection, that we might be freed from every misfortune.”



The vision of St. John reassures us that our heavenly Mother loves and cares for us and speeds to our rescue as we call on her. The earnest presence of the Theotokos in the church of Blachernae, seen so vividly by St. Andrew and his disciple, shows even more clearly how the Mother of God is quick to hear and respond when we call out to her in our distress. Thank God for His reassurance in these times of increasing uncertainty.