



My Beloved Ones,

On February 7th we commemorate St. Luke of Stirion, whose works show us the strength of asceticism.

St. Luke was born in the year 896 to pious parents, and from the earliest age showed a calling towards asceticism. Even as a young man, he fasted from all meat, eggs, and dairy, and on Wednesdays and Fridays, fasted totally. When assisting his family as a shepherd, he was known to return home after giving his food to the poor, and even his clothing. This charity displeased his father, but after his father's death, Luke devoted himself totally to a life of prayer—to the point that often his mother saw him raised up off the ground.

Clearly, St. Luke's calling was in his heart, but twice, he was returned to his home: the first time, two soldiers, waiting to recapture slaves, found him instead, and made him turn back. The second time, the fourteen-year-old Luke traveled with two monks on a pilgrimage and stopped at a monastery in Athens. Luke remained there long enough to become a *stavrophore*, but the Lord, hearing the cries of his mother, instructed the Abbot to tell Luke to return to his mother's house. Luke, of course, obeyed. After four months, Luke obtained his mother's blessing to seek the monastic life.

Travelling to a lonely mountain, St. Luke spent seven years in fasting and prayer, where he was granted the spiritual gift of foresight. Soon, however, there was an invasion by Bulgarian raiders, and so the Saint departed, first to Corinth, and then to Patras, where he obediently served a stylite for ten years. Having grown, he decided to return to the mountain of Ioannou, but this time, he found that his fame had grown among the people, who gave him no peace. Receiving the blessing of his Spiritual Father, St. Luke traveled further—this time fleeing the Turks.

Gathering a group of disciples, he dedicated a monastery to St. Barbara at Steiris, where he performed many miraculous healings of soul and body. A true ascetic to the end of his life, he remained alone in his cell, until the time came for his falling asleep. First, he asked his disciples to leave his body for the wild beasts, but he was so moved by their tears, he changed his instructions, so that they might build a church on the very spot in which surrendered his soul to the Lord.

To this very day, the tomb of St. Luke in *Hosios Loukas* grants many miracles, and it is testament to the faith of the great saint who forgot the world, and instead looked for God through, denial, prayer and fasting. St. Luke of Stirion, pray for us!

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta