

The Life of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker

Archbishop Of Myra in Lycia



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The holy hierarch of Christ, Nicholas, the great wonderworker, a speedy helper and an extraordinary mediator before God, grew up in the land of Lycia. He was born in the town of Patara. [1] His parents, Theophanes and Nonna, were pious people, prominent and wealthy. This blessed couple, for their God-pleasing life, many alms and great virtues, were worthy to raise a branch holy and like the tree which is planted by the streams of the waters, which shall bring forth its fruit in its season. [2]



When this blessed youth was born, he was given the name Nicholas, which means conqueror of nations. And he, by the blessing of God, truly appeared as a conqueror of evil, for the good of the whole world. After his birth, his mother Nonna was immediately free of pain and from that time until her death remained barren. By this nature itself bore witness that this woman could not have another son, similar to St. Nicholas: he alone should be the first and the last. Sanctified already while in his mother's womb by the grace of God, he showed himself to be a reverent venerator of God before he saw the light of day; he began to perform miracles earlier than he began to feed on his mother's milk, and was a taster before he was accustomed to eat food.



After his birth, while still in the baptismal font, he stood on his feet for three hours, supported by no one, by this rendering honor to the Holy Trinity, of Whom he later would show himself to be a great servitor and intercessor. In him it was possible to recognize the future wonderworker even by the way in which he drew near to his mother's breast, because he led on the milk only of the right breast, signifying by this his future standing on the right hand of the Lord together with the righteous. He gave signs of his extraordinary abstinence in that on Wednesdays and Fridays he took his mother's milk only once, and this in the evening, after the parents' completion of the customary prayers.

His father and mother were much astonished and foresaw what a strict faster their son would be in his life. Being accustomed to such temperance from his swaddling clothes, St. Nicholas during his whole life until his death spent Wednesday and Friday in strict fasting. Growing with the years, the youth grew also in knowledge, perfecting himself in the virtues, in which he was taught by his pious parents. And he was like a fruitful field, receiving in itself and putting forth the good seed of instruction and bringing forth every day new fruits of good behavior. When the time came to learn the divine Scriptures, St. Nicholas, by the force and acuteness of his mind and the help of the Holy Spirit, in a little

time attained much wisdom and succeeded in book-learning such as befits a good pilot of Christ's ship and a skillful shepherd of rational sheep. Having reached perfection in word and learning, he showed himself to be perfect in his very life. He by all means avoided vain friends and idle conversations, shunning conversation with women and didn't even look at them. St. Nicholas preserved a true chastity, with a pure mind always contemplating on the Lord and assiduously visiting the temple of God, following the Psalmist, who said: I have chosen rather to be an outcast in the house of my God. [3] In the temple of God he passed entire days and nights in lifting up his mind to God in prayer and in the reading of divine books, meditating on spiritual knowledge, enriching himself in the divine grace of the Holy Spirit and creating in himself a worthy dwelling for Him, in accordance with the words of the Scripture: Ye are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. [4] The Spirit of God indeed dwelt in this virtuous and pure youth and, serving the Lord, he glowed with the Spirit. In him were noticed no habits natural to youth: in his moral disposition he was like an old man, because all esteemed him and marveled at him. An old man, if he shows youthful inclinations is a laughing-stock to everyone; on the other hand, if a youth has the disposition of an old man, he is esteemed by all with wonder. Inappropriate is youth in old age, but excellent and worthy of esteem is old age in youth.

St. Nicholas had an uncle, bishop of the town of Patara, having the same name as his nephew who was called Nicholas in his honor. This bishop, seeing that his nephew was successful in the virtuous life and by all means evaded the world, began to advise his parents that they should give their son to the service of God. These heeded this advice and consecrated to the Lord their child whom they themselves had received from Him as a gift. For in ancient books it is told concerning them that they were childless and already had no hope of bearing children, but by many prayers, tears, and deeds of mercy they begged of God a son for themselves, and now had no regret in bringing him as a gift to Him Who had given him. The bishop, receiving this old man in youth, who had gray hairs of wisdom and youth in old age, an undefiled life, [5] raised him to the rank of priest. When he ordained St. Nicholas a priest, then, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, addressing the people who were in the church, he pronounced a prophecy:

"I see, brethren, a new sun rising above the earth and manifesting in himself a gracious consolation for the afflicted. Blessed is the flock that will be worthy to have him as its pastor, because this one will shepherd well the souls of those who have gone astray, will nourish them on the pasturage of piety, and will be a merciful helper in misfortune and tribulation."

This prophecy was indeed later fulfilled, as will be evident from later narrative.

Having accepted the priestly rank, St. Nicholas added labors to labors; keeping vigil and remaining in unceasing prayer and fasting, he, being mortal, strove to imitate the bodiless ones. Leading a life equal to the angels and flowering from day to day all the more in beauty of soul, he was entirely worthy to rule in the church. At this time, Bishop Nicholas, desiring to go to Palestine for the veneration of the holy places, handed over the rule of the church to his nephew. This priest of God, St. Nicholas, having taken over the place of his uncle, took care of the affairs of the church in the same way as the bishop

himself. At this time his parents passed on to eternal life. Having obtained their estate in inheritance, St. Nicholas distributed it to the needy. For he paid no attention to temporal riches and did not concern himself with its increase, but, renouncing all earthly desires, with all his heart he strove to devote himself to the One God, crying: Unto Thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul. Teach me to do Thy will for Thou art my God. On Thee was I cast from the womb; from my mother's womb, Thou art my God. [6]

And his hand was outstretched to the needy, on whom it poured alms richly, as a water-filled river abounds in streams. Here is one of his many deeds of mercy.

There lived in the town of Patara a certain man, prominent and rich. Falling into extreme poverty, he lost his former prominence, because of the uncertain life of this age. This man had three daughters who were very beautiful in appearance. When he was already deprived of all necessities, so that there was nothing to eat and nothing to wear because of his great poverty, he planned to give his daughters to prostitution and turn his house into a brothel so that by this means he might obtain a livelihood for himself and acquire also food and clothing for himself and his daughters. O woe! To such unworthy thoughts does extreme misery lead! Having this unclean thought this man wanted already to fulfill his evil design. But the All-good Lord, not desiring to see a man in perdition and, in His love for mankind, helping in our misfortunes, placed a good thought in the mind of His servant, the holy priest Nicholas, and by inspiration sent him secretly to the man who was perishing in soul, for consolation in poverty and forewarning from sin. St. Nicholas, having heard of the extreme poverty of this man and knowing through revelation from God of his evil intention, felt great pity for him and decided to draw him out, together with his daughters, from poverty and sin, as from fire. However, he did not wish to show his good deed to this man openly, but intended to give generous alms secretly. St. Nicholas did thus for two reasons. On the one hand, he wanted to escape vain, human glory, following the words of the Gospel: Take heed that ye do not your alms before men; [7] on the other hand, he did not want to offend the man who once was rich and now had fallen into extreme poverty. For he knew how painful and insulting alms are to him who has fallen into pauperism, because it reminds him of his former prosperity. Therefore St. Nicholas considered it better to act according to the teaching of Christ: Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth. [8] He so much shunned the praise of men that he tried to hide himself even from him whom he benefited. He took a large sack of gold, came at midnight to the house of that man and, throwing this sack in the window, hastened to return home. In the morning this man arose and, finding the sack, untied it. At the sight of gold, he fell into great consternation and did not believe his eyes, because from nowhere could he expect such a favor. However, in examining the money with his fingers, he was convinced that it was in fact gold before him. Having rejoiced in spirit and wondering at it, he wept for joy, for a long time he pondered over who could show him such a favor, and could think of nothing. Attributing this to the action of divine providence, he continually thanked his benefactor in his soul, rendering praise to the Lord Who cares for all. After this he gave his oldest daughter in marriage, giving her as dowry the gold miraculously given to him. St. Nicholas, knowing that this man acted according to his wishes, loved him and decided to do a like mercy also to the second daughter, intending by a lawful wedding to protect her also from sin. Preparing another sack of gold like the first one, he by night, hidden from all, by the same window threw it into the

house of man. Arising in the morning, the poor man again found gold in his house. Again he was astonished and, falling to the earth and drenching himself with tears, he said:

"O merciful God, Author of our salvation, Who hast redeemed me by Thine Own Blood and now redeemest by gold my home and my daughters from the nets of the enemy, do Thou Thyself show me the minister of Thy mercy and Thy philanthropic goodness. Show me this earthly angel who preserves us from sinful perdition, so that I might know who hath snatched us from the poverty which oppresses us and delivers us from evil thoughts and intentions. O Lord, by Thy mercy secretly done for me by the generous hand of Thy servant unknown to me, I can give my second daughter lawfully in marriage and with this escape the snares of the devil, who desired by a tainted gain, or even without it, to increase my great ruin."

Having prayed thus to the Lord and having thanked Him for His goodness, this man celebrated the wedding of his second daughter. Hoping in God, the father nourished undoubting hope that He would also grant a lawful husband to the third daughter, again secretly giving by a beneficent hand the gold necessary for it. In order to learn who brought gold to him, and whence, the father did not sleep for many nights, watching/or his benefactor and desiring to see him. Not much time passed when the awaited benefactor appeared. The servant of Christ, Nicholas, quietly came also a third time and, having stopped at the usual place, threw in the same window a similar sack of gold, and immediately hurried to his home. Hearing the clink of the gold thrown in the window, the man ran after the servant of God as rapidly as possible. Having caught up with him and recognizing him, because it was impossible not to know the saint by his virtues and illustrious origin, the man fell at his feet, kissing them and calling the saint a deliverer, a helper, and a savior of souls which came to the edge of ruin.

"If," said he, "the Lord great in mercy had not raised me up through thy generosity, then I, an unfortunate father, already long ago would he lost together with my daughters in the fire of Sodom. Now we are saved through thee and delivered from a horrible fall into sin."

And yet many similar words he tearfully said to the saint. Just after raising him from the earth, the holy servant of God took from him an oath that during his life he would tell no one about what had happened to him. Telling him yet many things to his profit, the saint dismissed him to his home.

Out of the many deeds of mercy of the servant of God we have related only one, so that it be known how merciful he was to the poor. Because there would not be enough time for us to tell about this in detail, how generous he was to the destitute, how many hungry he led, how many naked he clothed, and how many he ransomed from moneylenders.

After this, the holy father Nicholas desired to go to Palestine, to see and venerate those holy places where our Lord God, Jesus Christ, walked with His most pure feet. When the ship sailed near Egypt and the travelers knew not what awaited them, St. Nicholas, who was among them, foresaw that soon a storm would arise and informed his fellow travelers of it, telling them that he had seen the devil himself entering the ship with the intent to

drown all of them in the depths of the sea. And in this very hour unexpectedly the heavens were covered with clouds, and a powerful storm raised a terrible turbulence on the sea. The travelers fell into great terror, and having despaired of their salvation and expecting death, entreated holy father Nicholas to help them who were perishing in the deep sea.

"If thou, O servant of God," they said, "do not help us by thy prayers to the Lord, then we shall immediately perish."

Commanding them to have courage, to place their hope in God and without any doubts to expect a speedy deliverance, the saint began to pray fervently to the Lord. Immediately the sea became peaceful, and a great calm set in, and the common sorrow turned into joy. The joyful travelers rendered thanksgiving to God and His servant, holy Father Nicholas, and were doubly astonished -- both at his foretelling of the storm and the cessation of distress. After this, one of the sailors had to climb to the top of the mast. In descending from there he slipped and fell from the very heights to the middle of the ship, killing himself and lying breathless. St. Nicholas, ready to help before it was needed, at once resurrected him by his prayer, and the man rose as if awaking from sleep. After this, hoisting all sails, the travelers happily continued their voyage, under favorable winds, and peacefully put in to shore at Alexandria. Healing here many ill and demon-possessed people and consoling the afflicted, the servant of God St. Nicholas again set out for Palestine according to his original plan.

Reaching the holy city of Jerusalem, St. Nicholas came to Golgotha, where Christ our God stretched out His immaculate hands and wrought salvation for the race of mankind. Here God's servant poured out prayers from a heart burning with love, sending up thanksgiving to our Savior. He went round all the holy places, making fervent veneration everywhere. And when at night he wanted to enter a holy church^[9] for prayer, the closed doors of the church swung open by themselves, disclosing an unhindered entry to him for whom were opened also the heavenly gates. Having spent a long enough time in Jerusalem, St. Nicholas intended to seclude himself in the desert, but was restrained by a Divine voice from on high, which admonished him to return to his homeland. The Lord God Who orders everything to our profit, did not will that that luminary, who by the will of God needs must illuminate the metropolis of Lycia, should remain hidden under a bushel in the desert. Having arrived aboard ship, the servant of God made an agreement with the crew so that they would deliver him to his native land. But they schemed to deceive him and directed their ship not to Lycia, but to another land. When they sailed from the harbor, St. Nicholas, noticing that the ship sailed another way, fell at the feet of the seamen, beseeching them to direct the ship to Lycia. But they paid not the slightest attention to his entreaties and continued to sail along the charted route: they didn't know that God would not forsake His servant. And suddenly a storm swooped down, turned the ship in the other direction, and quickly carried it in the direction of Lycia, threatening the crew with complete destruction. Thus carried by Divine power over the sea, St. Nicholas finally arrived in his fatherland. In his good nature he did no evil to his perfidious enemies. He not only was not angry, but also did not accuse them by a single word, but dismissed them with a blessing to their own country. He himself came to the monastery founded by his uncle and called Holy Sion, and here he proved to be a welcome guest to the entire

brotherhood. Receiving him with great love as an angel of God, they were delighted by his divinely-inspired speech and, imitating the good nature with which God had adorned His servant, learned from his angel-like life. Finding in this monastery a silent life and a peaceful haven for contemplation, St. Nicholas hoped also to spend the remaining time of his life here without going out. But God showed him a different way, because He did not desire so rich a treasure of virtue, which ought to enrich the world, to remain cloistered in a monastery, like a treasure buried in the earth, but that it should be open to all and by him accomplish a spiritual purchase, acquiring many souls. And so, once, the saint, standing at prayer, heard a voice from on high:

"Nicholas, if you desire to be vouchsafed a crown from Me, go and struggle for the good of the world."

Hearing this, St. Nicholas was terrified and began to ponder over what this voice desired and required of him. And again he heard:

"Nicholas, here is not the field on which you must bring forth the fruit I expect; but turn back and go into the world and let My name be glorified in you.

Then St. Nicholas realized that the Lord needed him to forsake the podvig of silence and go into the service of people for their salvation.

He began to consider where he should go, either to his fatherland, the town of Patara, or to another place. Fleeing vainglory among his fellow citizens and tearing it, he thought of removing himself to another town where no one would know him. In this same Lycian land was the renowned city of Myra, which was the metropolis of all Lycia. [10] To this city came St. Nicholas, led by divine providence. Here he was known to no one; and he remained in this city as a pauper, having nowhere to lay his head. Only in the house of the Lord did he find shelter, having his only refuge in God. At that time the bishop of this city, John, the archbishop and foremost hierarch of the entire land of Lycia, died. Consequently all the bishops of Lycia gathered in Myra in order to choose a worthy one for the vacant throne. Many respected and prudent men were nominated as successors to John. Among those who were doing the choosing there was a great discord, and certain among them, led by Divine zeal, said:

"The election of a bishop to this throne is not up to the decision of people, but is a matter of God's direction. It is proper for us to say prayers so that the Lord Himself will disclose who is worthy to receive such rank and be the shepherd of the whole land of Lycia."

This good counsel reel with general approval and all devoted themselves to fervent prayer and fasting. The Lord Who fulfills the desires of those that fear Him, attending to the prayer of the bishops then revealed to the oldest of them His good will. When this bishop stood at prayer, before him appeared a man in an image of light and commanded him to go to the doors of the church during the night and observe who will enter before everyone else.

"This," said He, "is My choice; receive him with honor and install him as archbishop; the name of this man is Nicholas."

The bishop informed the rest of the bishops about such a divine vision, and these, hearing this, increased their prayers. The bishop who had been considered worthy of the revelation stood in that place where it was ordered in the vision, and awaited the coming of the desired man. When the time came for the morning service, St. Nicholas, urged by the spirit, came to the church before all, for he was accustomed to rise at midnight for prayer and come earlier than the others for the morning service. As soon as he entered the narthex, the bishop who had been vouchsafed the revelation stopped him and asked him to tell his name. St. Nicholas remained silent. The bishop again asked him about his name. The saint meekly and softly answered him:

"My name is Nicholas, I am the servant of thy holiness, Master." The pious bishop, hearing such a brief and humble speech, understood by the very name -- Nicholas -- foretold him in vision, as well as by the humble and meek answer, that before him was the very man whom God was pleased to have as foremost bishop of the church of Myra. For he knew from Holy Scripture that the Lord takes care of the meek, the silent, and those who tremble before the word of God. With great joy he rejoiced, as if he had received some secret treasure. Immediately taking St. Nicholas by the hand, he told him: "Follow me, child."

When with honor he led the saint to the bishops, they were filled with divine delight, and being relieved in spirit that they had found the man indicated by God Himself, they conducted him to the church. Rumor about this spread everywhere and innumerable multitudes of people flocked swifter than birds to the church. The bishop who had been deemed worthy of the vision addressed the people and exclaimed:

"Brethren, receive your shepherd whom the Holy Spirit Himself anointed and to whom He entrusted the care of your souls. He was not appointed by an assembly of men, but by God Himself. Now we have the one that we desired, and have found and accepted the one we sought. Under his rule and instruction we will not lack the hope that we will stand before God in the day of His appearing and revelation."

All the people gave thanks to God and rejoiced with ineffable joy. Not being able to endure the praise of men, for a long time St. Nicholas refused to accept the sacred office; but yielding to the ardent requests of the council of bishops and all the people, he ascended the episcopal throne against his will. To this he was impelled by a Divine vision which he had yet before the death of Archbishop John. Concerning this vision St. Methodius, patriarch of Constantinople, relates. Once -- he said -- St. Nicholas saw at night that before him stood the Savior in all His glory and gave him a Gospel ornamented with gold and pearls. On the other side of himself St. Nicholas saw the most holy Theotokos who placed on his shoulders the episcopal omophorion. After this vision a few days passed, and Archbishop John of Myra died.

Recalling this vision and seeing in it the clear will of God, and not wishing to refuse the fervent entreaties of the council, St. Nicholas accepted the flock. The council of bishops

with all the church clergy performed over him the ordination and joyously celebrated, made glad by the shepherd given of God, Nicholas, the hierarch of Christ. By this means the Church of God received a bright lamp which did not remain under a bushel, but was set on the episcopal and pastoral place proper to him. Having been honored with this great office, St. Nicholas rightly divided the word of truth and wisely guided his flock in the teaching of faith.

In the beginning of his pastorship the servant of God said to himself thus:

"Nicholas! The rank received by you requires different habits, so that you live not for yourself but for others."

Desiring to instruct his rational sheep in the virtues, he did not hide his virtuous life as before. For formerly, he passed his life secretly serving God Who Alone knew his ascetic feats. But now, after receiving the episcopal office, his life was open to all, not by vainglory before the people, but for their benefit and the increase of God's glory, so that the word of the Gospel be fulfilled: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in heaven. [11] By his good deeds St. Nicholas was like a mirror for his flock and, according to the word of the apostle, "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity. [12] In character he was meek and forgiving, humble of spirit, and shunned all vainglory. His clothing was simple, his food - fasting fare, which he always ate only once a day, and that in the evening. All the day long he spent in labor proper to his office, listening to the requests and needs of those who came to him. The doors of his house were open to all. He was kind and affable to all, to orphans he was a father, to the poor a merciful giver, to the weeping a comforter, to the wronged a helper, and to all a great benefactor. To assist in him in the ruling of the church he chose two virtuous and prudent counselors who were invested with priestly rank. These were men well-known in all of Greece -- Paul of Rhodes and Theodore of Ascalon.

So St. Nicholas tended the flock entrusted to him, the rational sheep of Christ. But the envious evil serpent, never ceasing to incite war against the servants of God and not enduring the flourishing of piety among the people, raised persecution against the Church of Christ through the impious emperors Diocletian and Maximian. [13] At this same time, from these emperors an order was sent all over the empire that Christians must renounce Christ and worship idols. Those who did not submit to this order were compelled to it by confinement in prison and severe tortures and, finally, given over to execution. This storm breathing evil, by the fervor of the zealots of darkness and ungodliness, soon reached also the city of Myra. The blessed Nicholas, who was the leader of all Christians in this city, freely and boldly preached the piety of Christ and was ready to suffer for Christ. For this he was seized by impious torturers and confined in prison together with many Christians. He remained not a little time, bearing severe suffering, enduring hunger and thirst and an overcrowded dungeon. He led his fellow prisoners on the word of God and quenched their thirst with the water of piety; confirming in them faith in Christ God, strengthening them on an indestructible foundation, he persuaded them to be firm in the confession of Christ and to suffer eagerly for the truth. By this time Christians again were given freedom, and piety shone forth, like the sun after dark storm clouds, and like some

calm coolness after a storm. For Christ the Lover of mankind, looking upon His inheritance, annihilated the ungodly, casting down Diocletian and Maximian from the imperial throne and destroying the power of the adherents of Hellenic impiety. By the appearance of His Cross to Constantine the Great, to whom He was pleased to entrust the kingdom of Rome, the Lord God "raised up a horn of salvation"[14] for His people. The Emperor Constantine, recognizing the One God and placing all his hope in Him, conquered all his enemies by the power of the precious Cross and ordered all temples of idols to be destroyed and Christian temples to be restored, and dispelled the vain hopes of his predecessors. He liberated all confined in prisons for Christ, and honoring them with great praises as courageous warriors, returned these confessors of Christ each to his fatherland. At this time also the city of Myra again received its shepherd, the great bishop Nicholas, who had been deemed worthy of the crown of martyrdom. Bearing in himself the Divine grace, he, as before, healed the passions and ailments of people, and not only of the faithful, but also the unbelievers. Because of the great grace of God that dwelt in him, many glorified him and were astonished at him and all loved him. For he shone with purity of heart and was endowed with all the gifts of God, serving his Lord in holiness and righteousness. At that time there remained still many Hellenic temples, to which impious people were attracted by devilish suggestion and many inhabitants of Myra remained in perdition. The archbishop of the Most High God, animated by Divine zeal, visited all these places, destroying and turning into dust the temples of the idols and purifying his flock from diabolical defilement. Thus fighting with evil spirits, St. Nicholas came to the temple of Diana,[15] which was very large and richly adorned. presenting an agreeable dwelling for demons. St. Nicholas destroyed this polluted temple, leveled its high edifice to the ground and the very foundation of the temple, which was in the earth, he scattered in the air, taking up arms more against the demons than against the temple itself. The evil spirits, not enduring the arrival of the servant of God, uttered doleful cries, but, vanquished by the weapon of prayer of the unconquerable warrior of Christ, St. Nicholas, they were forced to flee from their habitation.

The right-believing Emperor Constantine, desiring to firmly establish the Christian Faith, commanded an ecumenical council to be convened in the city Nicea. The holy fathers of the council laid down the correct teaching, anathematized the Arian heresy, and together with it Arius[16] himself, confessing the Son of God of equal honor and essence co-everlasting with the Father, re-established peace in the holy Divine, Apostolic Church. St. Nicholas was also among the 318 fathers of the council. He stood courageously against the impious teachings of Arius, and together with the holy fathers of the council affirmed and taught all the dogmas of the Orthodox Faith. A monk, John, of the Studite Monastery relates concerning St. Nicholas that, animated like the Prophet Elias by zeal for God, he put the heretic Arius to shame at the council not only by word but also by deed, smiting him on the cheek. The fathers of the council were indignant at the saint and for his daring action decided to deprive him of his episcopal rank. But our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and His most-blessed Mother, beholding from on high the deed of St. Nicholas, approved His courageous action and praised his divine zeal. For some of the holy fathers of the council had a vision similar to the one the saint himself was vouchsafed even before his ordination to the episcopate. They saw that on one side of the saint stands Christ the Lord Himself with the Gospel, and on the other, the most pure Virgin Theotokos with an omophorion, and they give the hierarch the emblems of his rank, of which he was deprived. Understanding from this that the boldness of the saint was pleasing to God, the

fathers of the council ceased to reprove the saint and rendered him honor as a great servant of God.[17] Returning from the council to his flock, St. Nicholas brought it peace and blessing. With his mellifluous mouth he taught the entire people sound instruction, cut off at the very root erroneous ideas and reasonings and, having exposed the embittered, senseless heretics deep-rooted in wickedness, expelled them from Christ's flock. As a wise farmer purifies all that is found on the threshingfloor or on a grindstone, selects the best grain, and plucks out the tares, so the prudent laborer on the threshingfloor of Christ, St. Nicholas, filled the spiritual granary with good fruit, scattered and swept away the tares of heretical deception from the wheat of the Lord. That is why the Holy Church calls him a fan blowing away the weedy teachings of Arius. And indeed he was a light for the world and salt of the earth, because his life was light and his words were salted with wisdom. This good shepherd took great care for his flock, in all of its needs, not only nourishing it on spiritual pasturage, but also providing for its bodily needs.

Once in the land of Lycia there was a great famine, and in the city of Myra there was an extreme shortage of food. Feeling pity for the unfortunate people who were perishing from hunger, God's bishop appeared at night in a dream to a certain merchant who happened to be in Italy, who loaded his entire ship with grain and intended to sail to another land. Giving him a pledge of three gold coins, the saint commanded him to sail to Myra and sell the grain there. Awaking and finding the gold in his hand, the merchant was frightened, amazed by such a dream which was accompanied by the miraculous appearance of money. The merchant did not dare to disobey the command of the saint, went to the city of Myra and sold out his bread to its inhabitants. At the same time he did not hide from them the appearance of St. Nicholas to him in a dream. Having acquired such consolation in hunger and listening to the tale of the merchant, the citizens gave glory and thanks to God and extolled their miraculous nourisher, the great Bishop Nicholas.

At that time in great Phrygia there arose a revolt. Having learned of it, the Emperor Constantine sent three commanders with their soldiers to pacify the rebellious region. These were the commanders Nepotian, Ursus, and Herpylion. With great haste they set sail from Constantinople and remained at one port of the diocese of Lycia which was called the Adriatic shore. Here there was a town. Since strong rough seas prevented their sailing farther, they remained in this harbor to wait for calm weather. During their stay certain soldiers, going ashore to purchase necessities, took a great deal by force. Since this happened often, the inhabitants of this town were embittered; as a consequence, at a place called Plakomata, there arose argument, strife, and abuse between them and the soldiers. Learning of this, the holy Bishop Nicholas himself decided to travel to that town in order to quell the civil strife. Hearing of his arrival, all the citizens, together with the soldiers, went out to meet him and bowed down. The saint asked the commanders whence and whither they guarded the way. They told him that they were sent by the emperor to Phrygia to put down the revolt which had arisen there. The saint admonished them to hold their soldiers in submission and not to allow them to oppress the people. After this he invited the commanders into the city and cordially entertained them. The commanders, having disciplined the offending soldiers, stilled the revolt, and were honored with a blessing from St. Nicholas. When this happened, there arrived from Myra certain citizens lamenting and weeping. Falling at the feet of the saint, they asked him to

defend the wronged, relating to him with tears that in his absence the ruler Eustathius, bribed by envious and evil people, condemned to death three men from their town, who were guilty of no crime.

"Our whole town," they said, "laments and weeps, and awaits your return, Master. For if you had been with us, then the ruler would not have dared to make such an unjust judgment."

Having heard about this, God's bishop began to grieve in soul, and in company with the commanders immediately set out on his way. Upon reaching the place, called "Leo," the saint met certain travelers and asked them whether they knew of those men condemned to death. They answered:

"We fell them on the field of Castor and Pollux, being dragged away to execution."

St. Nicholas went faster, rushing to prevent the death of those innocent men. Having reached the place of execution, he saw that a multitude of people was gathered there. The condemned men, with their afros bound crosswise and with faces covered, had already knelt on the ground, stretched out their bare necks and awaited the blow of the sword. The saint saw that the executioner, harsh and violent, had already drawn his sword. Such a spectacle threw all into horror and distress. Combining anger with meekness, Christ's saint passed freely among the people, without any fear snatched the sword from the hands of the executioner, threw it upon the ground and then set the condemned men free of their bonds. All this he did with great boldness, and no one dared to stop him, because his word was powerful and Divine power was apparent in his actions: he was great before God and all the people. The men, delivered from the death sentence, seeing themselves unexpectedly restored from near death to life, shed warm tears and uttered joyful cries, and the all the people assembled there gave thanks to their bishop. The ruler Eustathius arrived there and wanted to approach the bishop. But the servant of God turned away from him with disdain and when the ruler fell at his leer, he thrust him aside. Calling down upon him the vengeance of God, St. Nicholas threatened him with torment for his unjust rule and promised to tell the emperor of his deeds. Being denounced by his own conscience and frightened by the threats of the bishop, the ruler with tears begged for mercy. Repenting of his injustice and desiring reconciliation with the great Father Nicholas, he laid his guilt before the elders of the city, Simonides and Eudocius. But the lie could not be hid, because the bishop knew well that the ruler, being bribed with gold, condemned the innocent to death. For a long time the ruler begged him to forgive him, and only then, when, with great humility and tears he acknowledged his sin, did the servant of Christ grant him forgiveness.

At the sight of all that happened, the commanders who had remained together with the hierarch were amazed at the zeal and goodness of the great bishop of God. Having been vouchsafed of his prayers, and having received from him a blessing for their journey, they set out for Phrygia in order to fulfill the royal command given to them. Arriving at the place of the revolt, they quickly suppressed it, and having fulfilled the royal commission, they returned with joy to Byzantium. The emperors and all the grandees gave them great praise and honor, and they were deemed worthy to take part in the royal council. But evil

people envying such fame of the commanders, conceived enmity against them. Having meditated evil against them, they came to Eulavius, the ruler of the city, and slandered those men, saying:

"The commanders counsel ill, because, as we have heard, they introduce innovations and mediate evil against the emperor."

In order to win over the ruler to their side, they gave him much gold. The ruler informed the emperor. Having heard about this, the emperor, without any investigation, ordered those commanders to be confined in prison, learning that they might run away secretly and fulfill their evil design. Languishing in jail, and conscious of their innocence, the commanders were perplexed as to why they were thrown in prison. After a short time, the slanderers began to fear that their slander and evil would come to light and they themselves might suffer. Therefore, they came to the ruler and fervently begged him that he not allow those men to live so long and hasten to condemn them to death. Ensnared in the nets of avarice, the ruler was obliged to carry out what was promised to the end. He immediately departed to the emperor and, like a messenger of evil, appeared before him with a sad face and a sorrowful look. Along with this, he wished to show that he was very much concerned about the life of the emperor and truly devoted to him. Striving to incite the emperor's anger against the innocent, he began to hold forth with lying and cunning speech, saying:

"O Emperor, not one of those shut in prison wishes to repent. All of them persist in their evil design, not ceasing to plot intrigues against you. Therefore, command without delay to hand them over to torture, so that they may not anticipate us and accomplish their evil deed, which they planned against the military commanders and you."

Alarmed by these words the emperor immediately condemned the commanders to death. But because it was evening, their punishment was delayed until morning. The prison guard learned of this. Having privately shed many tears over such a disaster threatening the innocent, he went to the commanders and said to them:

"For me it would have been better if I had not known you and had not enjoyed pleasant conversation and repast with you. Then I would easily bear separation from you and would not lament in soul over the disaster coming upon you. Morning will come, and the final and horrible separation will overtake us. I already do not see your faces dear to me, and do not hear your voice, because the emperor ordered to execute you. Instruct me how to deal with your possessions while there is yet time, and death has not yet prevented you from expressing your will."

He interrupted his speech with sobs. Learning of their horrible sentence, the generals rent their clothing and tore their hair, saying:

"What enemy has begrudged us our lives? For the sake of what are we, like malefactors, condemned to execution? What have we done, for what is it necessary to hand us over to death?"

And they called upon their relatives and friends by name, setting God Himself' as their witness, that they had done no evil, and wept bitterly. One of them by the name of Nepotian recalled, regarding St. Nicholas, how he, having appeared in Myra as a glorious helper and good defender, delivered three men from death. And the commanders began to pray:

"O God of Nicholas, having delivered the three men from an unjust death, look now also upon us, for there can be no help from men. There hath come upon us a great disaster, and there is none who might deliver us from disaster. Our voice is cut off' before the departure of our soul from the body, and our tongue is parched, burnt up by the fire of our heartfelt distress, so that we are not able to offer prayer unto Thee. "Let Thy compassions quickly go before us, O Lord. [18] Rescue us out the hand of them that seek after our souls." Tomorrow they wish to kill us, but do Thou hasten to our aid and deliver us innocent ones from death."

Attending to the prayers of those who fear Him and, like a father, pouring out compassion on His children, the Lord God sent His saint and servant, the great Bishop Nicholas, as help to the condemned men. That night the saint of Christ appeared to the emperor in a dream and said:

"Arise quickly and release those commanders languishing in prison. They were slandered to you and they suffer guiltlessly."

The saint explained in detail every deed and added:

"If you do not obey me and do not let them go, then I will raise a revolt against you similar to the one that occurred in Phrygia and you will perish by an evil death."

Astounded at such boldness, the emperor began to wonder how this man dared to enter into the inner chamber at night, and said to him:

"Who are you that you dare to threaten us and our power?"

He replied: "My name is Nicholas, I am the bishop of the metropolis of Myra."

The emperor became confused and, arising, began to ponder upon what this vision meant. Meanwhile, on that night the saint appeared to the ruler Eulavius and informed him about the condemned men also. Awakening from sleep, Eulavius became frightened. While he thought on this vision, there came a messenger from the emperor and told him about what the emperor had seen in a dream. Hastening to the emperor, the ruler disclosed his vision to him, and both of them were amazed that they had seen one and the same thing. At once the emperor ordered the commanders brought to him from prison, and said to them:

"By what sorcery did you bring these dreams upon us? A very angry man appeared to us and threatened us, boasting to soon bring war upon us."

The commanders turned one to another in perplexity and, knowing nothing, looked at one another with distressed glances. Noticing this, the emperor was mollified and said: "Fear no evil, tell the truth."

With tears and sobs they replied: "O Emperor, we know nothing of sorcery and have designed no evil against your power, may the All-seeing Lord be a witness in this. If we are deceiving you, and you learn anything ill of us, then allow no favor or clemency either to us or to our relatives. From our fathers we learned to honor the emperor and be faithful to him before all things. Thus also now we faithfully defend your life and, as is proper to our rank, unswervingly fulfill your commands to us. Serving you with zeal, we subdued the revolt in Phrygia, stopped the civil strife, and demonstrated our courage sufficiently by this deed itself, as those witness to whom this is well-known. Your power heaped honors upon us before, and now you with anger set yourself against us and pitilessly condemned us to an agonizing death. And so, O Emperor, we think that we suffer only for our zeal toward you alone, for which we have been condemned and, instead of glory and honors which we had hoped to receive, the fear of death has overtaken us."

At this address the emperor became compassionate and repented of his rash behavior. For he began to tremble before the judgment of God and left embarrassment for his royal purple, seeing that he, being a lawgiver for others, was ready to make a lawless judgment. He looked compassionately upon the condemned men and conversed with them briefly. Listening to his speech with compunction, the commanders suddenly saw St. Nicholas sitting next to the emperor and, by signs, promising him forgiveness. The emperor interrupted their discourse and asked:

"Who is this Nicholas, and which men did he save? Tell me about it."

Nepotian related to him everything in the order of its occurrence.

Then the emperor, learning that St. Nicholas was a great servant of God, marveled at his boldness and his great zeal in defense of the wronged, freed those commanders and said to them:

"It is not I that grant you life, but the great servant of the Lord, Nicholas, whom you called upon for help. Go to him and offer him thanksgiving. Say to him also from me that 'I fulfilled your command that the servant of Christ be not angry with me.'"

With these words he handed them a golden Gospel, a golden censer ornamented with stones, and two lamps and ordered all this to be given to the church of Myra. Having received a miraculous escape, the commanders set out on their way at once. Arriving in Myra, they rejoiced and were glad that they were vouchsafed to see the saint again. They expressed great gratitude to St. Nicholas for his wonderful help and chanted:

"Lord, O Lord, who is like unto Thee? Delivering the beggar from the hand of them that are stronger than he." [19]

They gave generous alms to the needy and the paupers and returned home safely. Such are the works of God with which the Lord magnified His servant. The fame of them spread everywhere, as on wings, it reached across the sea and spread throughout the world, so that there was no place where people did not know of the great and wonderful miracles of the great bishop Nicholas, which he wrought by the grace given him by the Almighty Lord.

Once, travelers sailing by ship from Egypt to the land of Lycia encountered strong turbulent seas and storm. The sails were already torn by the hurricane, the ship was lashed by the blows of the waves, and all despaired of their deliverance. At this time they remembered the great bishop Nicholas, whom they had never seen but only heard of, that he is a speedy helper to all that call upon him in misfortune. They turned to him in prayer and began call upon him for aid. The saint immediately appeared to them, walked on to the ship, and said:

"You called upon me, and I have come to help you; be not afraid!" All saw that he took the helm and began to pilot the ship. As on that occasion when our Lord bade the winds and the sea, [20] the saint at once commanded the storm to cease, keeping in mind the words of the Lord:

"He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also." [21] Thus the true servant of the Lord commanded both the wind and the sea, and they were obedient to him. Afterwards, under favorable winds the travelers reached the city of Myra. Going ashore they went to the city, desiring to see him who had saved them from disaster. They met the saint on the way to church and, recognizing in him their benefactor, they fell at his feet, giving thanks to him. The wondrous Nicholas not only delivered them from danger and death, but also showed concern for their spiritual salvation. By his clairvoyance he saw in them with his spiritual eyes the sin of fornication, which separates man from God and leads him away from keeping the commandments of God, and said to them:

"Children, I beseech you, consider within yourselves and correct your hearts and thoughts for the pleasing of the Lord. For even if we have hidden things from many people and have reckoned ourselves righteous, yet nothing can be hidden from God. Therefore, hasten with all diligence to preserve sanctity of soul and purity of body. For thus saith the divine Apostle Paul: "Ye are the temple of God... if any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." [22]

Having instructed those men with edifying words, the saint dismissed them in peace. For the character of the saint was as a childloving father, and his countenance shone with Divine grace like an angel of God. From his face, as from the lace of Moses, emanated a bright ray, and to him who only looked at him there was great benefit. For him who was burdened with some kind of passion or affliction of soul, it was enough to fix his gaze on

the saint in order to receive consolation in his sorrow; and he who conversed with him already improved in good. And not only Christians, but also non-believers, any of them came to hear the sweet and mellifluous discourses of the saint, came to compunction and, noting the evil of unbelief which was implanted in them since infancy and accepting in their heart the right word of truth, entered upon the way to salvation.

The great servant of God lived for many years in Myra, shining with Divine goodness, in the words of the Scripture: "He was as the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full; as the sun shining upon the temple of the Most High God... and as lilies by the rivers of waters... and as precious myrrh making all fragrant." [23] Having reached a ripe old age, the saint paid his debt to human nature and, after a short bodily illness, ended his temporal life well. With joy and psalmody he passed on to eternal blessed life, escorted by holy angels and met by choirs of saints. At his burial the bishops of Lycia gathered with all the clergy and monastics and a countless multitude of people from all cities. The precious body of the saint was laid with honor in the cathedral church of the diocese of Myra on the sixth day of the month of December. [24] Many miracles were performed by the holy relics of the servant of God. For his relics gushed forth a fragrant and healing myrrh with which the sick were anointed and received healing. For this reason people from all corners of the earth came to his tomb seeking healing for their diseases and receiving it. Because not only ailments of the body, but also of the soul, were healed, and evil spirits were expelled by this holy myrrh. For the saint warred against demons and conquered them not only during his life, but also after his repose, as he conquers also now'.

Several God-fearing men who lived at the mouth of the River Tanais, hearing of the myrrh-streaming and healing relics of the saint of Christ, Nicholas, which lay in Myra of Lycia, planned to sail there by sea for veneration of the relics. But the evil demon which was once cast out of the temple of Diana by St. Nicholas, seeing that the ship was being readied to sail to this great father, and being furious at the saint for the destruction of the temple and for his expulsion, plotted to prevent these men from accomplishing their planned journey and thus deprive them of holy things. He transformed himself into a woman carrying a vessel of oil, and said to them:

"I wanted to carry this container to the tomb of the saint, but I am very afraid of a sea journey because it is dangerous for a woman who is weak and suffering from a sickness of the stomach to sail on the sea. Therefore, I beg you, take this vessel, carry it to the tomb of the saint and pour oil into the lamp."

With these words the demon handed the vessel to the God-lovers. It is not known what demonic enchantments were mixed with that oil, but it was meant for the harm and destruction of the travelers. Not knowing the destructive effects of this oil, they fulfilled the request and, having taken the container, they put out to sea and sailed safely for a whole day. But in the morning a northerly wind arose and sailing became difficult for them. Being in distress during many days of unfavorable sailing, they lost patience from the continual rough seas and decided to turn back. They had already turned the ship in that direction when St. Nicholas appeared before them in a small boat and said:

"Where are you sailing to, men, and why, having abandoned your former course, are you turning back? You can calm the storm and make the journey easy for sailing. The devil's nets are hindering your voyage because the vessel of oil was given to you not by a woman, but by a demon. Throw the vessel into the sea, and immediately your voyage will begin to be successful."

Hearing this, the men threw the demonic vessel into the depths of the sea. Immediately black smoke and flames came out of it, the air was filled with a great stench, the sea opened up, the water boiled and began to bubble from the very depths, and the watery spray was like sparks of fire. Those people that stood on the ship were greatly frightened and screamed with terror, but the helper who had appeared to them commanded them to have courage and not be afraid, calmed the turbulent storm and, delivering the travelers from fear, made safe their voyage to Lycia. For at once a cool and fragrant wind blew upon them, and with gladness they successfully reached the desired city. Having venerated the myrrh-streaming relics of their speedy helper and intercessor, they offered thanks to Almighty God and celebrated a supplicatory hymn to the great Father Nicholas. After this they returned to their own country and told everyone everywhere of that which had happened to them on their journey.

Many great and marvelous wonders were performed on land and sea by this great servant. He helped those in distress, saved from drowning and brought out those in the depths of the sea, released from captivity and brought home those who were freed, delivered from bonds and prison, defended from being wounded by the sword, freed from death and gave many healings to many, sight to the blind, power to walk to the cripple, hearing to the deaf, the gift of speech to the dumb. He enriched many suffering in infirmity and extreme poverty, gave food to the hungry, and to all those in need he appeared as a ready helper, a warm intercessor and speedy mediator and defender. And even now he helps those that call upon him and delivers them from misfortune. His miracles it is impossible to count, as it is likewise impossible to describe all of them in detail. The East and the West know this great wonderworker, and his miracles are known to all the ends of the earth. May the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be glorified in him and may his holy name be extolled by the lips of all unto the ages. Amen.

FOOTNOTES

1 Patara was a maritime trading city in the province of Lycia (now Anatolia) in Asia Minor. It was founded by the Phoenicians and is now in ruins.

2 Psalm 1:3.

3 Psalm 83:11.

4 1 Corinthians 3:16.

5 Wisdom 4:9.

6 Psalms 24:1; 142:11; 21:10.

7 Matthew 6:1.

8 Matthew 6:3.

9 It was a small church on Mt. Sion, the only one at that time in all Jerusalem, populated with heathens and bearing the name Aelia Capitolina. This church, according to tradition, was built in the house where the Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Mystery of Communion and where the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles later occurred.

10 Myra (now Mira, in Turkish Dembre) was the main city of ancient Lycia and was located near the sea on the River Andracus, at the mouth of which was the port of Andriaca.

11 Matthew 5:16.

12 1 Timothy 4:12.

13 Emperors Diocletian and Maximian (284 to 305 AD) were co-rulers, the first ruled in the East and the second in the West. The persecution raised by Diocletian was distinguished for its special cruelty. It began in the city of Nicomedia where, on the very day of Pascha, upwards of 20,000 Christians were burned in the church.

14 Luke 1:69.

15 Artemis, otherwise Diana, a famous Greek goddess personifying the moon and considered to be the protectress of forests and the hunt.

16 Arius denied the Divinity of Jesus Christ and did not recognize His consubstantiality with the Father. Called by the Equal-of-the-Apostles Emperor Constantine, the First Ecumenical Council was convened in the year 325 under the chairmanship of the emperor himself and it introduced into Church use the Symbol of Faith, later supplemented and completed in the Second Ecumenical Council, which was held in Constantinople in 381 AD

17 According to the testimony of A.N. Muraviev, there is preserved in Nicea until now, even among the Turks, a tradition concerning this. In one of the forts of this city they point out the prison of St. Nicholas. Here, according to tradition, he was imprisoned because he struck Arius at the council, and was held in bonds until he was justified by heavenly judgment, which was marked by the appearance of a Gospel and an omophorion, as they are portrayed on icons of the saint (Letters from the East, St.

Petersburg, 1851, part 1, pp. 106,107).

18 Psalm 78:8.

19 Psalm 34: 11,12.

20 Matthew 8:26.

21 John 14:12.

22 1 Corinthians 3:16,17.

23 Ecclesiasticus 50:6-8.

24 The year of the death of St. Nicholas is not known precisely; according to some, the servant of God died in the year 341, but according to others, the year of his demise occurred between the years 345- 352 AD