

## **THE MOTHER OF GOD APPEARS TO SAINT MAXIMUS THE HUT-BURNER**

St. Maximus the hut-burner, who is commemorated on January 13, was adorned with many divine gifts. During a conversation with St. Gregory of Sinai, he related the way in which he received the noetic prayer from the Mother of God as follows:

"I will not hide from you, my dear father, the miracle that the Theotokos performed for me. From a young age I had tremendous faith in my Lady the Theotokos, and I would beseech her with tears to grant me the gift of noetic prayer. One day when I had gone to her church, I begged her as usual for this favor with extreme fervor from the depth of my heart. As I venerated her holy icon with much desire, I suddenly felt a warmth in my chest and a flame light in heart, which came from her holy icon and which did not burn me but rather refreshed me, sweetened me, and induced overwhelming compunction within my soul. Henceforth, my heart started to say the prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me,' and my mind feels extreme sweetness from the recollection of my Jesus and my Theotokos. Ever since then, the prayer has never been absent from my heart."

Later, the Virgin Mary also gave to him the gift of discernment and teaching. When he was living at the Monastery of Great Lavra on Mount Athos and was under the obedience of the Abbot, the Theotokos appeared to him on the Sunday after the Ascension. She was holding the Lord in her arms and said to him, "Follow me, most-faithful Maximos, and ascend to the peak of Athos in order to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, as you desire." After seeing this divine revelation three times, he left Great Lavra Monastery, and seven days later he arrived at the summit. All night long on the Saturday before Pentecost he kept vigil along with other monks who had gathered there to celebrate the feast day. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, all the monks departed, whereas the divine Maximos continued there all alone for three more days and nights, praying

ceaselessly to the Lord and the Theotokos. During this time, the enemies (i.e. the demons) attempted with every means possible to make him leave. They staged various deceptive illusions: during the night, they made it seem as if thunder and lightning were striking the peak, and an earthquake was rocking the entire mountain; during the day, wild voices and cries would be heard nearby, as countless fearsome beings carrying slings and arrows supposedly made their way up the mountain from all directions, determined to attack the saint. All this took place through demonic imagination because the accursed demons could not stand to see him dwelling there. However, the divine Maximos was not scared in the least, nor did he pay any attention to them, as the grace of the Holy Spirit dwelled within him. Rather, he devoted himself completely to noetic prayer, beseeching the Lord and his protectress and advocate, the Theotokos, for help.

Things being as such, the Theotokos appeared to him with immense glory as a queen holding her Son in her arms, and accompanied by several young noblemen. The saint recognized her from the spectacular brilliance and divine light that was radiating from her and illuminating the entire surrounding area, and having been informed that this was not a demonic deception but a divine revelation and true appearance of the Theotokos, he praised her with inexplicable joy, saying, "Rejoice, thou who art full of grace. The Lord is with thee," in addition to other such hymns. Then he fell to the ground and worshipped the Lord along with the Lady Theotokos, at which time he received a blessing from Christ and heard the Panagia saying the following to him: "Receive grace against the demons, O venerable athlete, and take up residence at the base of this summit of Athos, because it is the will of my Son for you to ascend to the height of virtue and to become a teacher and guide for many, in order for you to save them." Next, he was handed heavenly bread to eat in order to gain strength because he had not eaten for several days. As soon as he placed the bread in his mouth, he was engulfed from above by a divine light and heard angelic hymns, and thus the Theotokos ascended back to the heavens, while the saint stood motionless and ecstatic on account of the celestial fragrance and heavenly brilliance that remained at the peak of the mountain. Thus he no longer wanted to come down from that spot, lest he be deprived of the heavenly fragrance and splendor. Nevertheless, after three days he came back down from the peak as

the Theotokos had instructed him, and he went to a nearby chapel dedicated to her. After spending a series of days there, he climbed back up to the peak and venerated the specific spot where the Theotokos had stood in divine glory and beseeched her with tears to appear once more. This time, however, he was limited to seeing the brilliant light and smelling the wondrous fragrance, which flooded his existence once more with indescribable joy and happiness.

Through his holy prayers and the intercessions of the Theotokos, may Christ our God have mercy on us. Amen.