

MIRACLES OF SAINT JOHN THE HONORABLE FORERUNNER

From the *Synaxarion* on January 7th

Tradition says that when Saint Luke the Evangelist was still alive, he went to this city of Sebasti where the sacred body of the honorable Forerunner was buried, and he took the right hand from the Forerunner's prophetic body with him back to his homeland, Antioch, where this hand subsequently performed numerous miracles, one of which is the following.

At Antioch's city boundaries there once dwelled a dragon.¹ Unfortunately, the Gentiles living in Antioch worshipped this reptile as a god, and each year they would honor it with a ritual when they would offer a human sacrifice to it. As time went on, one year a Christian man was chosen to offer his daughter to the dragon. When this unfortunate man was informed of this, he prayed to God and the honorable Forerunner with fervent sighs and tears, asking them to deliver his daughter and his homeland from the bitter and destructive beast. Having prayed, he decided to attempt the following. He went to the church wherein St. John the Baptist's holy relic was kept, and he asked to venerate the Forerunner's holy hand. As he kissed it, without anyone noticing, he quickly bit off the Forerunner's thumb with his teeth. He then exited the church holding on tightly to the newly-acquired treasure. When the day arrived to sacrifice his daughter, countless people were gathered to witness the event. The father took his daughter, and they slowly made their way to the area where the dragon dwelled. When the fearsome and dreadful beast noticed them approaching, it came out of its cave and slowly proceeded toward its prey. As it began to open its mouth in preparation to devour the young girl, her father threw the Forerunner's sacred thumb into the beast's pharynx, and—amazing but true!—the dragon instantly fell to the ground and died. The father then turned back with his daughter and made his way to their home with inexplicable joy, where he recounted the miracle to his family. Meanwhile, the multitude of eyewitnesses stood astounded by this extraordinary event. When the citizens of Antioch learned of this miracle, they

¹ Accounts of dragons found in historical writings should not be understood as mythological or imaginary, non-existent creatures. These were large reptiles that over time became extinct. Additionally, authors often used the term dragon when referring to snakes that had become extremely large after being consistently fed. Recently, fossils from northeastern Columbia revealed a snake that stretched 45 feet long and weighed more than 2,500 pounds. The largest amongst living snake species is a python measuring 30 feet long (<http://news.aol.com/article/fossil-of-massive-ancient-snake-found/329070>). Even today, there exists the Komodo dragon, with the largest verified wild specimen measuring 10 feet long and weighing 366 pounds (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komodo_dragon).

began praising God and thanking the honorable Forerunner exceedingly, and they proceeded to build an impressively large church dedicated to St. John the Baptist.

Furthermore, during the day of the elevation of the venerable Cross on the 14th of September each year, it was customary for this honorable hand of the Baptist to be raised by the archpriest, at which moment sometimes it would extend its fingers, while other times it would close its fist. Whenever the fingers would become extended, the Venerable Forerunner was revealing that there would be an abundance of crops in the upcoming season; conversely when its fingers were closed, he would indicate in this manner that a poor yield of crop was pending and deprivation was in store. On account of this, many kings developed a great love and desire to acquire this holy treasure—especially the emperors Konstantine and Romanos Porfirogenniti. During the time of their reign, a certain deacon named Job from the city of Antioch transferred this honorable hand to Constantinople on the vigil of Theophany, when Christians have the tradition of performing the service of “the blessing of the waters.” Upon its arrival, the Christ-loving King Constantine with much reverence venerated the Baptist’s hand and, in following, deposited it within the palace treasury.

Currently, the hand of St. John the Forerunner is found at the Monastery of Saint Dionysios on Mt. Athos.

From the life of Saint Konon

On February 19th, we commemorate our holy Father Konon. Saint Konon was from Kilikia. From a very young age, he became a monk at a monastery located near the Jordan River, named Penthoukla. Later he became a priest and lived with extreme asceticism. When the Archbishop of Jerusalem Peter (524-552 A.D.) learned of this saint’s extraordinary ascetic way of life, he appointed him to baptize pilgrims who would go to the Jordan River for this purpose. The saint would first anoint the catechumens with the holy oil and, in following, baptize them. Nonetheless, as a human being, he had difficulty anointing certain ladies, and, fearing this temptation, he repeatedly contemplated to abandon the monastery. However, every time he thought of leaving, St. John the Forerunner would appear to him and assure him, “Be patient, Elder, and I will lighten the battle you have.”

One day, a certain young lady from Persia came to be baptized. This lady was so beautiful that the Saint was unable to anoint her unclothed, and thus she remained in that desolate region waiting to be anointed and baptized. When word of this reached the Archbishop, he was astounded to hear how the elder had

dealt with this difficulty, and he decided to send a pious lady to help the saint with the anointing and baptism of women. However, due to various circumstances, including the harsh climatic conditions of the desert, it was not possible for the appointed helper to reach the monastery. Meanwhile, the elder took his cape and departed with the resolution, "I will no longer remain in this area." As he did so, the venerable Forerunner appeared to him outside the monastery and spoke to him in a gentle tone: "Return to your monastery, and I will lighten the warfare you are experiencing." But Elder Konon responded angrily, "Believe me, I will not go back again, because you have promised many times to lighten my burden, and you have done nothing." Then, the divine Forerunner took hold of the Elder, he lifted up his garment, and made the sign of the Venerable Cross over the area below his belly saying: "Believe me, Father Konon. I wanted you to continue acquiring rewards from this warfare. But now return to your monastery and have no more doubts concerning this issue." Hence, the elder returned to his monastery. On the following day when he proceeded to anoint and baptize the Persian lady, the fact that she was a woman did not even cross his mind. Thereafter, the saint attained such a degree of dispassion, that he was viewed by many as a super-natural man. Having lived another twenty years, he finally fell asleep in the Lord peacefully.

Through his holy prayers, and the intercessions of the venerable Forerunner, may Christ our God deliver us from the evil passions. Amen.

From the book *Narrations from Dionysiou Monastery*

St. John the Forerunner Appears to Monk Bisarion

Monk Bisarion of Dionysiou Monastery was appointed by the monastery in 1916 to work outside Mount Athos for a period of time, at one of the monastery's dependencies where he was in charge of the flour mill. This monk related the following account that took place during his time there:

One day two villagers went to the fair, and one of them bought a horse from the other. The villager who bought the horse came to the chapel and venerated the icons. He left a certain amount of money in front of the Honorable Forerunner's icon and asked me to light a candle for him. I lit a candle for him. I saw the money, which was a sizable amount, but I did not take it; I left it there in front of the icon. Later that evening, as I went to light the vigil lamps in the chapel, I noticed that the money was gone. You can't imagine how sad I became. The evil one took advantage of this opportunity and made me indignant. I walked

to the icon of St. John the Forerunner, and, as I stood before it, I said to the saint: "Holy Forerunner, aren't you here? Why do you allow people to steal money right in front of your icon? I'm not going to light your vigil lamp!" So I only lit the vigil lamp of the Mother of God, and I left somewhat nervous. I went to the mill, I walked up to the house, I ate a little, but I was still apprehensive. I was feeling guilty for having left the vigil lamp of the saint unlit; nonetheless, the evil demon incited me to remain stubborn. I was thinking to myself: "Let's see what will happen... I'm not lighting his vigil lamp tonight."

Hence, as I lay down to sleep with uneasiness, I still insisted on my course of action. As I was sleeping in the house all alone (because at that time I did not have any other helpers with me), around midnight, I felt someone nudging me. I woke up, and I saw standing before me a towering figure whose hair was falling freely over his shoulders. I started to shake fearfully, and I was just barely able to utter: "How did you come here?" The person responded in a serious tone: "Don't you worry how I came here, but tell me why don't you light my vigil lamp?" With utter fear, with a shaky voice, and with tears in my eyes, I said: "Please forgive me, Saint John. I am at fault." I then prostrated myself three times before his feet, crying and asking him to forgive me. I then heard the Honorable Forerunner address me with a calm and sweet voice: "My child, Bisarion, why did you say that I am not here? If I am not here present, then who has been guarding you all this time you are here in this wilderness from thieves and other harmful criminals?" "Please, my saint," I replied. "Please forgive me. I won't do it again." "Go, light the vigil lamp hanging before my icon, and preach to others as well that the icons perform miracles. Because many people in this area have started to say that the icons do not perform miracles." This is what the Honorable Forerunner said to me, and then he disappeared. That very same moment, I went to the chapel, where I witnessed another miracle! I saw that all the money had been returned to the exact same spot in front of the icon of St. John, where it had been originally placed before it disappeared. The thief must have experienced a good scare, enough to make him return the money that same evening to the icon.

St. John the Forerunner Saves Monk Chrysanthos From Despair

I heard the following account that took place in 1937 [says monk Lazaros] to my amazement and surprise from monk Chrysanthos:

"As you are aware, Father Lazarus, for many years now I have repeatedly attempted to become a director and member the monastery's Council of Elders.

After trying at length, pleading with various fathers, and oftentimes bringing this matter up with the Abbot without success, I became extremely distraught and upset. Through the synergy of the devil, I became despondent and my mind was darkened to such an extent that I decided to put an end to my life. "Can you believe it?" I would ask myself. "They appoint so many other younger monks to this position! But they disregard me, even though I have grown old in this monastery working at so many different assignments! I will not tolerate this any longer. I'll go down to the shore, and jump in the ocean—then it will be on their conscience."

I pondered on these thoughts for a several days, until I firmly decided to go through with it. However, our merciful Lord, through the intercessions of our holy patron Saint John the Honorable Forerunner, gave me the thought to fast for three days prior to executing my plan. I thus isolated myself in my room for three days. I shut my door and window shutters, and, within the darkness of my cell, I prayed continuously for two days and nights without eating or drinking anything, without even lying down on my bed. I prayed standing, then seated, and when I sensed sleep coming on, I would again arise to pray. On the third day, around 10 o'clock in the evening, suddenly a brilliant light appeared that lit up my entire room. Simultaneously, I heard a loud voice saying to me: "Why aren't you at peace? Why are you distraught and planning to go down to the shore to drown in the sea?" As soon as I saw the light and heard this voice, the sadness and dejection that had been plaguing me altogether disappeared, and I began crying, wailing, and shedding tears, asking for forgiveness, and confessing that I had sinned and been deceived by the evil one: "Forgive me, Saint John..." He then responded, "Why have you stopped chanting? Why haven't you approached the chanter's stand this past week, but instead you wander about here and there asking to become a director? Don't I know who should become a director? If I don't want you to become a director, how can you become one? Don't I know who should become a director?" In the meantime, I had fallen to the ground and was weeping ceaselessly, begging for forgiveness, and promising that henceforth I would be at peace, I would return to the chanter's stand, and never again seek to become a director.

After I said these things, the brilliant light vanished. I no longer felt uneasy, I immediately felt peace, and when the bell rang for the beginning of the service, I went to church and followed the entire service."

Monk Chrysanthos [notes monk Lazaros] was very guileless, and for twenty-five years he had chanted in the right choir with much zeal and reverence. This is why he received divine mercy and special intervention from the Honorable Forerunner.

St. John the Forerunner Corrects Monk Leontios

I have never told you, my brother Lazarus, [says monk Leontios] what happened to me several years ago, when I was young and had just been newly tonsured, which has to do with the subject of obedience.

I do not remember exactly, but it was either during 1916 or 1917 when my Elder of blessed memory advised me to make a prostration and to go serve at the mill located at Mariana as an attendant. Unfortunately, because I did not particularly like this dependency, I foolishly started to make excuses, arguing that I could not go because, supposedly, it was too cold, I did not have enough clothing, perhaps I would get sick, and other such reasons. Additionally, there were many thieves wandering in that region, and I was afraid. My Elder of blessed memory made the same recommendation to me again and again, assuring me that he would provide me with the all the necessary clothing and provisions. I distinctly remember him saying to me, "Go ahead, my child. May you have the blessing of the Honorable Forerunner. Do obedience and go, because the manager is there all alone and needs help. Go my child..." I, however, continued to retort with my usual obstinacy. Finally, my Elder got fed up and tired with me, and vexed he left the matter in St. John's hands. This is how I left from the Elder's quarters and went to my room to retire for the evening.

But alas! Every time I think about what followed, my brother, I am always overcome with trembling with fear. About 8 or 9 o'clock that same evening, I saw a fearsome, towering man appear in my bedroom with a whip in his hand. As I was lying down, I jumped out of bed horrified. No sooner had I stood on my feet when he started to lash me. "What type of a monk are you? Why don't you do obedience?" he remarked, and simultaneously he whacked from one direction ... he whacked me from the direction. I started to cry and begged him to stop hitting me, promising that I would henceforth be obedient. Immediately, he vanished from sight. I was a nervous wreck as I ran that very moment to the Abbot's quarters. I woke up the Elder, and with tears and lamentation I fell at his feet and asked him to read me a prayer of absolution, I related to him what had taken place, and promised to never again disobey any of his orders. Thus my Elder was appeased, he read me the prayer of absolution, I took courage, and I returned to my cell and rested peacefully. The next morning, as soon as I woke up, I packed my bags and set out for Mariana.

From the life of St. Paisios of Mount Athos

Saint Paisios lived for a period of time at the Hermitage of the Archangels, which belonged to the Iveron Monastery Skete. At some point, he had a desire to move a short distance away from his Hermitage, to a more remote area where he would have greater stillness. He was able to do so through the intervention of Saint John the Baptist. This is how Saint Paisios himself describes the miraculous appearance of the Honorable Forerunner:

Whenever I would gaze out on the ravine, I was filled with longing and a Divine love. My heart leapt at the thought of staying there so I could have even greater silence and prayer. I went to one of the directors of the monastery of Iveron to ask for a blessing to build a hut there. He started yelling, “What do you so-called ascetics think you are doing?” and so on ... But that night the Holy Forerunner [who is the protector of the Skete of Iveron] appeared to him and started to hit him (because of how he had reacted). When he awoke, he was frightened and went down to the church. He could not calm down. He kept asking the fathers to interrupt the service and hold a meeting so he could tell them what had happened. They said, “We cannot interrupt the service—be patient and wait until it is finished.” After the conclusion of the service, they gathered, and he told everyone what had happened to him. In following, the monk not only gave me a blessing to build a hut—he even sent building supplies to me with some mules.