

APPEARANCES
AND
MIRACLES

OF THE VIRGIN MARY



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of the Virgin Mary

Compiled by
Holy Monastery of the Paraclete
Oropos, Attica, Greece



Uncut Mountain Press

APPEARANCES AND MIRACLES OF THE VIRGIN MARY

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“There is nothing in life like the Theotokos Mary. Traverse, O man, all creation with your thought and see if there is anything equal to or greater than the holy Theotokos Virgin. Roam the earth, survey the sea, investigate the air, search the heavens with your mind, consider all the invisible Powers, and see if there is another such wonder in all creation.”

— **ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM**
(as quoted in the Prologue)



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Father Ermolaos Iatrou

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The publication of this book is largely due to the work and encouragement of a dear friend and outstanding modern Orthodox missionary to Africa, the ever-memorable Fr. Ermolaos Iatrou. Father Ermolaos worked absolutely tirelessly to bring the Gospel and the Faith to the far reaches of the African continent, including arranging for the first translation and edition of this book, which he asked us to perfect and publish for English speakers in North America.

Father Ermolaos was exceptional in many ways, not least of all as one of a very few married clergymen who has his family in the missionary field. He was largely responsible for the establishment and tremendous growth of the Orthodox Church in Malawi, where he built the Church of Saint Nektarios, and many other churches, with the help of many young men whom he had catechized and guided to the priesthood. He was their father, their inspiration, and he nurtured a generation of African clergymen who now serve the Orthodox Church with zeal.

Father Ermolaos was a rare clergyman for another reason. He strove to follow with exactitude the Holy Fathers, eschewing every innovation and heresy of our day with great boldness. His principled stand on matters of Faith led him to other missionary outposts. Having overcome grave illness during the time of the so-called pandemic, he

continued his mission undeterred, moving to the yet-to-be touched missionary field of Liberia, to extend the Light of Orthodoxy to new souls.

It was there, in the midst of his holy work, that the Lord called him suddenly to the heavenly realm on the first of April 2022. All who knew him mourned his loss even as they remember his zeal and love for the Incarnate Truth with gratitude and reverence. He offered not only his last bit of strength for the Gospel but also his learning, generously entrusting to us translations of spiritual classics such as this, that the treasures of the Faith might enrich many others.

May the sacrifice, love, zeal and missionary spirit of the ever-memorable Fr. Ermolaos continue to inspire all who encounter his work and the fruit of his labors. Memory Eternal, dear Father Ermolaos!





Father Ermolaos Iatrou



Praise of the Mother of God (17th century icon), Crete



PROLOGUE

Mary the Theotokos, first among the saints, was the person “foretold by the Prophets” and “chosen from all generations” to cooperate in the mystery of the Incarnation of God the Word.

The name Mary, which was given to the Theotokos “according to the foreknowledge and will of God,” is interpreted as “Lady.” Saint Nicodemus gives the name a triple interpretation: lady, illumination, and sea, which denote respectively the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Theotokos. From the Father, she received power, so that as a Mother on earth she might fulfill what God fulfills as a Father in heaven. From the Son, she received wisdom as His Mother, so that she might be able to reconcile God with man. From the Holy Spirit, finally, she received goodness as His Bride so that she might transmit spiritual gifts to all creation.

From her very birth, the holy life of the Theotokos is interwoven with wondrous events and filled with exceptional blessings. She alone, of all women, was born of a promise—that is, after an angelic prophecy.

After three years, she was led by divine guidance to the Holy of Holies “as a three-year-old heifer,” where, according to John of Damascus, “planted and fattened by the Spirit like a fruitful olive tree, she became the dwelling place of every

virtue.” There the Theotokos Mary remained for twelve years and was supernaturally nourished with heavenly food. God was thus preparing her for the great ministry of the incarnate economy. He was preparing her to make her “full of grace”—that is, to adorn her with all the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

When the fullness of time had come, an angel of the Lord is sent to the Virgin and announces to her the conception of the Son of God. She humbly and obediently accepted the highest honor and, “full of the Holy Spirit,” exclaimed, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, for He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden.”

With no other virtue did the Theotokos draw God’s condescension as much as with humility. He who humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross indeed needed such a humble mother.

This unprecedented humility, according to Saint Nicodemus, was not only rooted in the depths of her heart, but from there it welled up and flooded her all-blameless body, her movements, her attire, her works, and her words.

The utmost humility of the Theotokos is rivaled by her purity. Saint Gregory Palamas states that the Panagia surpassed even the angels in purity.

Many of the Fathers also agree that the Theotokos was entirely a stranger to sin. The verse from the Song of Songs, “Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee,” perfectly fits and characterizes the purity of the Virgin.

At the Annunciation, the Theotokos was freed, by the descent of the Holy Spirit, even from that common defilement of humanity, the ancestral sin. Thus, she was deemed worthy to become a divine dwelling place and to minister in the supernatural mystery of the Incarnation of God the Word. This mystery was accomplished without

corrupting the purity of the Virgin because the Theotokos conceived, carried, and bore the Lord without seed and without corruption. Thus, she was preserved a virgin before, during, and after the birth of the Lord, and remained Ever-Virgin.

The entire life of the Panagia was a continuous divine doxology. But also her blessed dormition was a worthy seal of her life.

Three days after her burial by the holy apostles, she “was translated to life”—that is, her God-receiving body was transferred to heaven, where her holy soul had preceded it, and where she now enjoys the eschatological incorruption of eternity.

Saint Mark of Ephesus melodiously summarizes this remarkable event: “The Mother of Life accepts death and, having been placed in a tomb, after the third day is gloriously raised up to reign with her Son for ages and to ask for the forgiveness of our trespasses.”

The golden-mouthed saint [John Chrysostom], astonished by the majesty of the Theotokos, challenges the faithful to search and find a similar wondrous being: “There is nothing in life like the Theotokos Mary. Traverse, O man, all creation with your thought and see if there is anything equal to or greater than the holy Theotokos Virgin. Roam the earth, survey the sea, investigate the air, search the heavens with your mind, consider all the invisible Powers, and see if there is another such wonder in all creation.”

After her divine translation, the Theotokos co-reigns with her Son in the heavens. From this honored position, she dynamically supports humanity. She has the “power to will that is equal in balance,” because she lent her flesh “to the all-skillful Word,” Who for this reason is eternally her debtor, according to Saint Nicodemus. Possessing such power, the Theotokos “conveys” divine gifts to all, intercedes

with her saving intercessions on behalf of mankind, and influences the counsels of her Son.

Her miraculous grace, distinct and more powerful than that of the other saints, is manifested to people in many ways. Thus, the Panagia appears as a champion leader in wars, an unmercenary physician in illnesses, and a “swift protection and help” in every need.

* * *

The gratitude, trust, and love of the faithful people for the Panagia are imprinted in hymnography, folklore, art, and worship. Many churches and monasteries are dedicated to the Theotokos. In her honor, a multitude of holy icons have been artfully made. But also hymns, troparia, services, and feasts have their reference to the Mother of God. Many holy pilgrimage sites are established in areas associated with the miracles of the Panagia. In traditions, beliefs, and popular proverbs, the name of the Theotokos is mentioned with exceptional honor and reverence.

Besides the basic feasts of the Theotokos, the life of the church and popular piety have added many others, which are related to wondrous acts of the Mother of God, to the consecrations of her churches, or to the findings of her miraculous icons. In Russia, the feasts of the Panagia held in honor of her miraculous icons amount to two hundred.

The many votive offerings with which Theotokos icons are laden constitute another proof of popular gratitude towards her. Every place has a miraculous icon of the Panagia, each with its own history and legends, which create an atmosphere of religious mystery.

Of the ecclesiastical services that refer to the Panagia, the most popular are the Salutations of Great Lent and the

Paraklesis (Supplicatory Canon) services of the Dormition Fast.

Many epithets have been given to the Theotokos, expressive and sometimes paradoxical adjectives, which correspond to her qualities, to her iconographic types, to the time of her feasts, etc. Such names include: Odigitria (She Who Shows the Way), Glykophilousa (Sweet-Kissing), Gorgoepikoos

(Quick to Hear), Portaitissa (Keeper of the Gate), Prousiotissa (of Proussa), Phaneromeni (The Revealed), Zoodochos Pigi (Life-Giving Spring), Myrtidiotissa (of the Myrtle Tree), etc.



Zoodochos Pigi (Life-Giving Spring),
17th century icon

The miracles of the Panagia which—only as a sample—we have included in this book come from various sources. We offer them adapted and enriched with the necessary geographical and historical information, without, however, altering their essence at all.

The number noted at the end of each text, within brackets, refers to the main source related to the subject, which is found numbered and in alphabetical order by author at the end of the book.

In these miracles, the Theotokos comes into direct contact with people and their problems. Often she appears [to people] during sleep or in a waking state. Other times,



Panagia Odigitria

her presence is made perceptible only by her voice or by some fragrance.

In all these ways, she intervenes miraculously and heals illnesses, encourages warriors, satisfies needs, saves from dangers, and gives solutions to problems and impasses. Other times she guides people to the finding of her holy icons, and other times she evangelizes benefactions or, conversely, foretells misfortunes. Similarly, she stigmatizes disorder

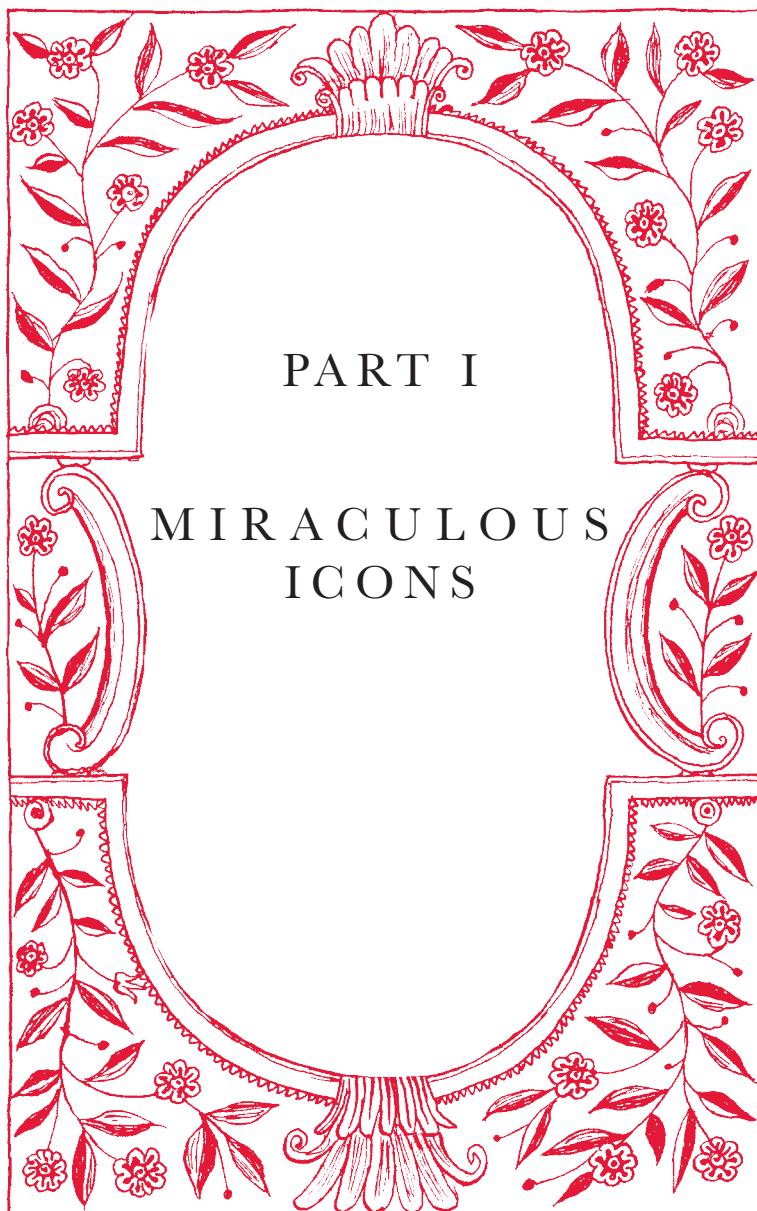
and irreverence or rewards virtue. Finally, she leads to repentance, converts those of other faiths, and exemplarily punishes blasphemers.

However, for this living presence of the Theotokos in both the individual and the common life of Christians to be perceived and accepted, it presupposes an equally living faith. This truth is characteristically emphasized by a Matins Theotokion of January 10:

“Let faith alone lead, and not proof of the miracles beyond understanding, O God-bearing maiden; for you bore the incomprehensible God the Word, Who put on humanity....”



Panagia Glykophilousa (The Sweetly-Kissing),
Philotheou Monastery, Mount Athos, Greece





Panagia Portaitissa (Keeper of the Gate)
Ivion Monastery, Mount Athos, Greece



Panagia Portaitissa (Keeper of the Gate)



he miraculous Portaitissa, the most prominent among the icons of the Theotokos of Athos, was originally kept, as tradition recounts, in Nicaea of Asia Minor. A pious woman and her only son, a monk, had placed it in their private church and honored it.

During the second period of Iconoclasm, royal spies discovered the icon and threatened the woman, stating that they would kill her if she did not pay them. She promised she would give them the money the next day. That night, after praying before the icon, she lifted it with reverence, went down to the shore, and cast it into the sea, saying:

“Lady Theotokos, you have the power both to save us from the king’s wrath and your icon from sinking.”

Then, truly, something wondrous happened. The miraculous icon stood upright on the waves and headed west. Moved by this event, the woman turned to her son and said, “My child, for the love of the Panagia, I am ready to die. You must leave. Go to Greece.”

Without delay, her son prepared and set off for Thessaloniki, and from there to Athos, where he became a monk. As a monk, he practiced asceticism in the place where the Iviron Monastery was later founded. This was by God’s providence, for it was thus that the other monks learned the history of the miraculous icon.

Time passed. The monk from Nicaea died, and the Iviron Monastery was founded and completed. One evening, the monks beheld a strange sight: a pillar of fire starting from the sea and reaching the sky. The vision lasted days and nights. The brothers went down to the shore and saw, with wonder, an icon of the Theotokos at the base of the pillar of fire. However, the closer they approached, the further it moved away. They then gathered in the church and tearfully begged the Lord to grant this priceless treasure to their monastery.

Among the monks was a pious ascetic named Gabriel. The Panagia appeared to him and said, “Tell the abbot and the brothers that I will give you my icon to protect you. You will then enter the sea, walk upon the waves, and thus everyone will understand my favor towards your monastery.”

And so it happened. Father Gabriel walked upon the sea as if on dry land, received the miraculous icon with reverence, and returned to the shore. There, all the monks gathered and accorded it an honorable welcome. Afterward, they took it and placed it in the sanctuary of the main church (katholikon).

The next day, when the ecclesiarch went to light the oil lamps, the icon was missing. He searched everywhere and discovered it on the wall, above the monastery gate. They brought it back to the katholikon, but the icon left again. This happened many times. Finally, the Panagia appeared to the elder Gabriel and told him, “Tell the brothers not to disturb me. I did not come here to be guarded by you, but to guard you. As long as you live virtuously on this Mountain, hope in the mercy of my Son. For as long as my icon exists within your monastery, His grace and mercy will always overshadow you.”

After this, the monks built a chapel near the gate and placed the holy icon there. Indeed, the Portaitissa protects

the monastery and provides for its every need, as she promised.

THE HEALING OF THE PRINCESS

In 1651, the 365 monks of Iviron were experiencing financial hardship, so they entreated the Theotokos to provide for their sustenance. Immediately, the loving Mother hastened to find resources through the following grace-filled miracle.

During that period, the daughter of the Tsar of Russia Alexei Mikhailovich was gravely ill. Her legs were paralyzed and, according to the doctors, incurable. The sorrow of the princess and her royal parents was now to be turned into joy by the miraculous Portaitissa. One night, she appeared to the princess in her sleep, and after encouraging her and promising to heal her, she said, “Tell your father to bring my icon, the Portaitissa, from the Monastery of Iviron.”

In the morning, the sick girl relayed the command, and immediately a special mission set out to convey the Tsar’s wish to the monks of Iviron. The monks feared that the icon might not be returned and decided to send a faithful copy with an honor guard of four hieromonks.

As soon as the venerable icon’s arrival in Moscow became known, the city emptied. Everyone, royals and common folk alike, ran to welcome it. However, in the palace, the princess lay in bed, unaware of anything. At some point, she asked for her mother and was then informed of the great event.



Panagia Portaitissa

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