

**St Nino (Nina), Equal of the Apostles and Enlightener of Georgia
Commemorated on January 14**

Nino of Cappadocia was a relative of Great-martyr George and the only daughter of a widely respected and honorable couple. Her father was a Roman army chief by the name of Zabulon, and her mother, Sosana, was the sister of Patriarch Juvenal of Jerusalem. When Nino reached the age of twelve, her parents sold all their possessions and moved to Jerusalem. Soon after, Nino's father was tonsured a monk. He bid farewell to his family and went to labor in the wilderness of the Jordan.

After Sosana had been separated from her husband, Patriarch Juvenal ordained her a deaconess. She left her daughter Nino in the care of an old woman named Sara, who raised her in the Christian Faith and told her the stories of Christ's life and His suffering on earth. Sara taught Nino how Christ's Robe had arrived in Georgia, a country of pagans.

Soon Nino began to pray to the Theotokos, asking for her blessing to travel to Georgia and be made worthy to venerate the Sacred Robe that she had woven for her beloved Son. The Most Holy Virgin heard her prayers and appeared to Nino in a dream, saying, "Go to the country that was assigned to me by lot and preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will send down His grace upon you and I will be your protector."

But the blessed Nino was overwhelmed at the thought of this responsibility and answered, "How can I, a fragile woman, perform such a momentous task, and how can I believe that this vision is real?" In response, the Most Holy Theotokos presented her with a cross of grapevines and proclaimed, "Receive this cross as a shield against visible and invisible enemies!"

When she awoke, Nino was holding the cross in her hands. She dampened it with tears of rejoicing and tied it securely with strands of her own hair.

Nino told her uncle, Patriarch Juvenal, about her vision and explained her desire to preach the Gospel in Georgia. Juvenal led her in front of the Royal Doors, laid his hands on her, and prayed, "O Lord, God of Eternity, I beseech Thee on behalf of my orphaned niece: Grant that, according to Thy will, she may go to preach and proclaim Thy Holy Resurrection. O Christ God, be Thou to her a guide, a refuge, and a spiritual father. And as Thou didst enlighten the Apostles and all those who feared Thy name, do Thou also enlighten her with the wisdom to proclaim Thy glad tidings."

When Nino arrived in Rome, she met and baptized the princess Rhipsimia and her nurse, Gaiana. At that time the Roman emperor was infamous for persecuting Christians. The cruel emperor fell in love with Rhipsimia and decided to marry her, but St. Nino, Rhipsimia, Gaiana, and fifty other women escaped to Armenia, a nearby country. The furious emperor ordered his soldiers to follow them and sent a

messenger to the Armenian king so that he could watch for the women.

The Armenian king found the women and also fell in love with Rhipsimia. But St. Rhipsimia would not agree to marry him, and in his rage the king had her tortured to death with Gaiana and the fifty other women. St. Nino, however, was being prepared for a different, greater task, and she escaped the king by hiding among some rose bushes.

When she finally arrived in Georgia, St. Nino was greeted by a group of shepherds, and she received a blessing from God to preach to the pagans of this region. One time, St. Nino came across a group of Georgians who were making a pilgrimage to venerate the pagan idol Armazi. There she watched with great sadness as the Georgian people trembled before the idols. She was very sad and prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, send down Thy mercy upon this nation ...that all nations may glorify Thee alone, the One True God, through Thy Son, Jesus Christ." Suddenly the wind began to blow and hail fell from the sky, shattering the pagan statues. The terrified worshipers ran away.

St. Nino made her home beneath a bramble bush in the garden of the king, with the family of the royal gardener. The gardener and his wife were childless, but through St. Nino's prayers God granted them a child. The couple was so happy that they became Christians and became disciples of St. Nino. Wherever St. Nino went, those who heard her preach converted to the Christian Faith in great numbers. St. Nino even healed Queen Nana who was very sick. She also converted.

Her husband, King Mirian, was a pagan and was not at all pleased with the great impression St. Nino's preaching had made on the Georgian nation. One day while he was out hunting, he became so angry that he decided to kill all followers of Christ. Even his wife, Queen Nana, who had become a Christian.

While he was hunting, it suddenly became very dark. King Mirian became afraid and prayed for the help of the pagan gods. When nothing happened, he finally lost hope and, miraculously, he turned to Christ. He said, "God of Nino, illumine this night for me and guide my footsteps, and I will declare Thy Holy Name. I will erect a cross and venerate it and I will construct for Thee a temple. I vow to be obedient to Nino and to the Faith of the Roman people!"

Suddenly the dark was gone and the sun shone radiantly. King Mirian gave great thanks to God and when he returned to the city, he informed St. Nino of his decision to become a Christian. Because of St. Nino's hard work, Georgia was established as a nation solidly rooted in the Christian Faith.

St. Nino, Equal to the Apostles, died in eastern Georgia and, according to her will, she was buried in the place where she took her last breath. King Mirian later erected a church in honor of St. George over her grave.

Adapted from <http://www.antiochian.org/node/17330>

Sts. Cyril and Methodius

Constantine (later Cyril) and Michael (later Methodius) were born early in the 9th century in Thessalonika into a government family. Their father was the ruler of a part of Greece and a part of Macedonia. Being raised in an area where people spoke both Greek and Slavic languages, the brothers were able to understand both languages. They were also well educated.

Unfortunately, their father died when they were young and they had to be taken care of by their uncle, who was a powerful official in the Byzantine government. He helped Cyril to get into a very respected school where he became a deacon and taught others about Christ. Their uncle also helped Methodius to become a government worker in the Slavic area of the empire. Methodius also went to a monastery on Mount Olympus where he became a monk.

Cyril and Methodius became well known and respected for their knowledge about Christ and the church. They were sent on missionary trips to convince people to become Christians. They were also invited to other countries by leaders who wanted their people to know more about Christ.

In 862 the two brothers were invited by Prince Rastislav of Great Moravia to preach Christianity in his nation. The people in Moravia spoke a Slavic language that had never been written down before. Cyril and Methodius knew that their family was from this area of the world and wanted to make sure that the people there were able to learn about Christ long after they had finished their mission. They developed an alphabet which became the Cyrillic alphabet and is used in our Ukrainian parishes and many other Eastern European languages. They used this new alphabet to translate all of the Scriptures and holy books into the language of Moravia.

The work of Saints Cyril and Methodius helped the people in the Slavic lands to learn more about Christ, but not everyone was happy about this. As long as the people could not read or write, the rulers of the land had more power over them. Now that the people could read and write their own language, they could communicate with people all over their land. They could tell others about Christ. The rulers were slowly losing power over their people.

While the rest of the world remembers Sts. Cyril and Methodius for writing what would become the Cyrillic alphabet, Orthodox Christians remember them as examples of the Apostles. Just as the Apostles spoke to those of all languages on Pentecost, Cyril and Methodius made it possible for Slavic speakers to learn about Christ in their own language.

Information adapted from http://orthodoxwiki.org/Cyril_and_Methodius

Saint Cosmos of Aitolia

Holy Father Cosmos was from the town of Mega Dendron (which means Great Tree) in Aitolia, Greece. At the age of twenty, he went to study at a school in the Monastery of Vatopedi. Later, he came to the Athonite Monastery of Philotheou where he was tonsured. With the blessing of his abbot, St. Cosmos went to Constantinople where he learned to speak to the public about Christ. He developed one of God's many gifts and skills so that he could serve God better. Soon, he began to preach throughout all the regions of northern Greece, the Ionian Islands, but especially in Albania. Many people in Albania knew nothing about Christ because the rulers at the time were Muslims and forced everyone to practice Islam. Even the people who wanted to become Christians knew very little about Christ and the church because they had to learn in secret.

St. Cosmos spent many years in Albania greatly strengthening and enlightening the people there by working many signs and wonders. He travelled by foot, by donkey and by ship. Since many of the towns had no churches or places where everyone could listen to St. Cosmos, when he came to a village he would ask the villagers to plant a large wooden cross in the village square. Then he would climb onto a bench next to the cross and preach to the villagers about the love of God and the Orthodox faith. He helped to build over two hundred schools and set up charities and churches all over the countryside. St. Cosmos convinced the rich to donate money for the repair and building of the churches, for the purchase of Holy Books that he gave to the people in the towns he visited and other religious items like prayer ropes, crosses, baptismal fonts and head coverings.

In 1776, he was falsely accused of conspiracy by the leaders of the Jewish people and was executed by the Muslim Turks in Albania.

Information adapted from <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?FSID=102390> and <http://www.comeandseeicons.com/c/phn56.htm>

St. Nicholas, Equal to the Apostles and Enlightener of Japan

Nicholas was born in Russia and was originally named Ivan Kasatkin. His father, Dmitri, served as a deacon. His mother died when he was five. The deacon's family was big and very poor. Despite that, young Ivan was sent to several seminaries where he was always one of the best students. When Ivan was about to finish his studies, his future mission was revealed.

The Russian ambassadors in Japan sent a request to the Holy Synod of bishops, asking for a priest "who would be useful both as a spiritual director and a scholar, and whose private life would give a good idea of our clergy not only to Japanese, but also to foreigners." Ivan found out about this request and asked the bishop in charge of his seminary to send him to the Russian Consulate in Japan. Bishop Nectarius agreed and Ivan eventually became Hieromonk Nicholas. The bishop's words of blessing of the young monk's new mission were remarkable: "You are supposed to live your ascetic life outside the monastery. You will have to leave your homeland and to serve God in a country that is distant and unfaithful. Along with the cross of an ascetic you must take your staff of a pilgrim, along with monastic exploits you must embark on an apostolic mission!"

Early years in Japan

On his way to Japan, Nicholas met Saint Innocent, called the Apostle of America and Siberia. He listened to Saint Innocent's stories and learned from the elder missionary's experience. Nicholas learned all that was necessary to continue his apostolic mission.

When Nicholas arrived in Hakodate, Japan, preaching the Gospel there seemed almost impossible. The people of Japan were not used to the idea of Christianity and believed that only magicians and sorcerers belonged in the church. It took Nicholas eight years to begin to understand the country, its people and language, and the customs and traditions of the people he had come to teach. To learn more about the culture, Hieromonk Nicholas attended popular gatherings to listen to visiting storytellers and Buddhist preachers. He mastered spoken Japanese and his knowledge of the history of Japan was deeper than even many Japanese people. In the meantime, he also learned English, which was becoming an international language. Nicholas wanted to be as prepared as possible to spread the word of Christ in Japan.

After a while, Hieromonk Nicholas went back to St. Petersburg to report on the results of his work. The Synod of bishops decided to create a special mission team that was dedicated to teaching the people of pagan lands about Christ and the church. Nicholas was chosen to lead this team. When he returned to Japan, he found out that his mission would be even more difficult than before because the rulers in Japan began persecuting Christians.

Building of the mission

After a few years, the government became less strict and it became possible for Christians to worship and teach about Christ. Nicholas succeeded in providing many ways for the people of Japan to learn about Christ. He started by building a church and a school for fifty people in

Tokyo. Soon after, a theological school was also built. Many more schools were built and eventually, graduates of the seminary were ordained deacons and priests so that they could also help to spread the word of Christ.

Nicholas and his followers also began to publish a magazine, *The Church Herald*, on a regular basis. He completed the construction of the Holy Resurrection Cathedral (Tokyo, Japan) and then translated liturgical books into Japanese. He did all of things while still travelling to Orthodox communities all over the country.

In 1911, after fifty years of work as a missionary, the Church of Japan had grown to over 33,000 Orthodox Christians, one archbishop, one bishop, 35 priests, and six deacons. Many more people were learning about Christ and preparing to be baptized. Nicholas was honored for his hard work by being elevated to the rank of bishop and eventually archbishop.

Information adapted from http://orthodoxwiki.org/Nicholas_of_Japan and <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp?FSID=100419>

Portions taken from *Father Herman: Alaska's Saint* by F.A. Golder

In 1794 a group of Russian missionaries from Valaam Monastery arrived in Kodiak, Alaska, bringing Orthodox Christianity to North America. For the next forty (40) years one member of their party, St. Herman, would remain on Spruce Island and endure hunger, cold, and mockery to share Jesus Christ with the people of Alaska. Saint Herman showed his love for the Kodiak natives, the Alutiiq people, by his service to them throughout his life. He was a protector of the persecuted, a nurse to the sick, and a father to orphans. As a hermit on Spruce Island, he wore a deer hide shirt, a sheet of rough leather as sandals and a patched monastic cloak. He used a bench covered with a seal skin for a bed, two bricks for a pillow, and a board for a blanket. He ate little, slept little, prayed long, and worked hard. On the grounds where he lived was a small wooden chapel, a small wooden house used for teaching, and a small guest house. St. Herman lived in a cell on these grounds with a garden surrounding it.

When sickness broke out in Kodiak and many fled to avoid becoming ill, Saint Herman never left the village but went from house to house, nursing the sick, comforting the afflicted, and praying for the dying. It is no wonder that the natives loved him and came from far away to hear him tell the story of Christ and His love for them. Fr. Herman fed the hungry, cheered the troubled, and anyone who came to him sad or depressed left with God's peace in their hearts. He gave to the orphan children a home, he taught them to read and write, and he trained them to do useful and honest work. He and the students planted gardens, caught fish, picked wild berries, and dried mushrooms.

Many miracles are attributed to St. Herman. In one instance, St. Herman used an icon of the Theotokos to protect the island from a tidal wave. St. Herman regularly shared with the Alutiiq that Jesus gave His life to save humanity and that it was the duty of every person to help mankind. These teachings were not very different than the native beliefs that already existed in the Alutiiq culture. Patience, silence, respect for others, and charity were all respected. When they heard the message of Jesus Christ, they found this to be a fulfillment of their customs and traditions. Here and throughout Alaska, thousands were soon baptized and gave their lives to Jesus Christ. At the heart of St. Herman's ministry was love. Becoming a Christian and giving your life to Jesus Christ means finding peace and hope in this world despite struggles and barriers when you view the world as Christ views it, through these same eyes of love. What this does not mean is having to completely change your way of life, learn a new language, or change the way you dress. Over time, the Orthodox Church became part of their culture and way of life. Even today the natives of Alaska refer to Saint Herman as their father, a connection that has never been broken, and this is visible on the landscape as you visit parish communities and speak with the faithful throughout Alaska.

Portions taken from the OCA website, www.oca.org

St. Raphael was born in Syria in 1860 and, being a wonderful student, went on to study at the School of Theology at Halki. Following his ordination to the Diaconate in 1885, he studied at the Theological Academy of Kiev and was ordained to the priesthood in 1889. For many years he taught at the theological academy in Kazan until being invited by the Syrian Orthodox Benevolent Society of New York to come to the United States and serve the Arab Orthodox community there. St. Raphael arrived in New York on November 2, 1895, and less than two weeks after his arrival, he found a place set up a chapel, and filled it with church items that he had brought with him from Russia. The new chapel was blessed and dedicated to St Nicholas of Myra. A strong pastor, St. Raphael remained in New York teaching, preaching, and celebrating the divine services for his parishioners.

It was not long, however, before he heard of smaller communities of Orthodox Christians scattered throughout the length and breadth of North America. Since these immigrant communities had no pastor to care for them, it was not surprising that some turned to other denominations or even completely fell away from the Church. This was an ongoing concern for Saint Raphael. In the summer of 1896, Saint Raphael undertook the first of several pastoral journeys across the continent. He visited thirty cities between New York and San Francisco, seeking out Christians in cities, towns, and on isolated farms. He fed the spiritually hungry people with the Word of God in each place where he stopped. He performed marriages, baptisms, heard confessions, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the homes of the faithful where there was no church building.

In 1899 he embarked on a second trip, during which he visited 43 cities throughout the northeastern, southern, and midwestern regions of the United States, and though he was traveling to reach out to Orthodox Christians who had settled in the USA from the Middle East, he continued to reach out to all nationalities. In 1901, Metropolitan Gabriel

of Lebanon, wrote to St. Raphael asking if he would return home to the Middle East and serve as a bishop. St. Raphael said that he could not step away from his important work in America. As the Church continued to grow in the United States, it became too large for Bishop Tikhon of the Russian Orthodox Church to make all the visits from the See (or seat of the Church) in San Francisco. During Lent in 1904, St. Raphael became the first Orthodox Bishop to be consecrated on American soil as Bishop Raphael of Brooklyn under the Russian Orthodox Church. As Bishop, however, he retained a position as head of a Syro-Arab Orthodox mission in America and continued in his advocacy for Arabic speaking clergy and Arabic texts to serve native Arabs across America. From his youth, St. Raphael's greatest joy was to serve the Church. When he came to America, he found his people scattered abroad, and he called them to unity. He never neglected his flock, but traveled throughout America, Canada, and Mexico in search of them so that he might care for them. During twenty years of faithful ministry he nurtured them and helped them to grow. At the time of his death in February 1915, St. Raphael had under his spiritual guidance 30 parishes and 25,000 faithful. He zealously fulfilled his ministry as a preacher of the Gospel, enduring many hardships and afflictions.