

Who was Empress Theodora - restorer of Orthodoxy? She lived over 1,100 years ago!

When you enter the Holy Church the first thing you do is to venerate the icons and light your candle.

Can you picture your church without the beautiful icons on the frescos and on the icon stands for you to venerate?

Can you imagine your home without an icon corner or on you bed stand?

There was a time in Christianity when icons were forbidden from being used in the church and even in your own home!

Empress Theodora was a holy dedicated woman, born into a wealthy family, in the city of Paphlagon. She married Theophilus, in a marriage that was arranged by his stepmother Euphrosyne.

They had seven children, 5 beautiful daughters and two sons. The youngest, Michael III, would eventually take his father's place as Emperor or ruler of his people.

Emperor Theophilus didn't approve of icons, but that didn't stop Theodora from teaching her daughters about icons.

Can you imagine having to pray with your icons in secret? St. Theodora raised her daughters to love God and venerate icons, even though her husband forbid them to do so. We often venerate icons by kissing them or touching them.

She secretly kept icons under her pillow and would pray with them each day behind the doors of her rooms where no one could see her.

She loved icons very much and wanted everyone to be able to use icons when they prayed. She worked very hard to have icons brought back to the worship of the Holy Church. She called a special "council" or meeting of the bishops to end the rules against or ban on icons in the church.

In the year 843, the church council issued a special rule making icons legal again! The veneration of Holy Icons was allowed in the Church once more! People made a special procession, bringing their favorite icons out from where they had been hidden for safe keeping. They joyously brought them back into their churches and homes. The reign of the Iconoclast era had finally come to an end!



ST. THEODORA

RESTORER OF ICONS

February 11/24

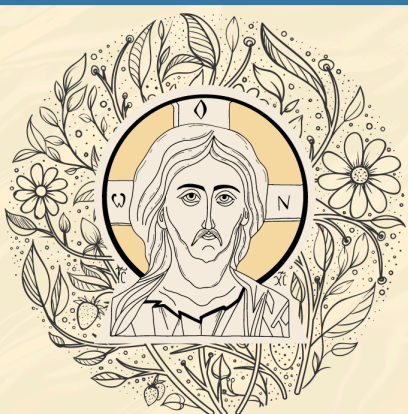
St. Theodora is celebrated on February 11/24 and also commemorated on the First Sunday of Great Lent: The Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. On this day we carry our icons around the Church in procession to remember how Empress Theodora had icons brought back into our Church worship!



DID YOU KNOW?

There were a group of people called "iconoclasts." These people believed that icons went against the second commandment of not worshipping false idols or images. They thought icons did not belong in the church.

UOC MINIS AGES 4-8



IN HIS IMAGE

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2024 - 2025

HOW CAN YOU VENERATE ICONS IN YOUR LIFE?

Who was Empress Theodora? Restorer of Orthodoxy

Empress Theodora lived during the 9th century and is credited with ending the iconoclast era.

Empress Theodora was a pious (holy and devoted) woman who ruled the Empire for 15 years after the repose of her husband in 842. She assumed the throne because her youngest son Michael was too young to rule. She was called his "regent."

During this time she worked fervently to have icons restored to the worship of the Holy Church and was able to finally end the iconoclast era.

Secret Christian and venerating of icons

Born into aristocracy, in Paphlagonia, she entered into a marriage to Theophilus that was arranged by his stepmother Euphrosyne. Together they had seven children, 5 beautiful daughters and two sons. The youngest Michael III would eventually succeed his father to the throne.

She raised her daughters to love God and venerate icons, even though her husband forbid them to do so. She secretly kept icons under her pillow and would pray with them daily, in the privacy of her quarters where no one could see her.

It is told, that one day while at prayer in her quarters the doors to her chambers burst open. She continued to pray, fearful of who had just entered. When she finally looked up, she saw a companion of her husband standing there. He had never seen an icon before and curiously asked the empress "what are you holding?" She told him her "dolls" as she calmly put her icons back into hiding under her pillow.

ICONOCLAST = SOMEONE WHO DESTROYS ICONS



ST. THEODORA

RESTORER OF ICONS

DID YOU KNOW...

Her husband, Emperor Theophilus, was himself an iconoclast.

Who were the iconoclasts? They were a heretical group who had holy icons removed from the church and even forbidden in private homes, because they believed that the faithful were worshipping graven images. Heretical means wrong teaching or belief from that of the church.

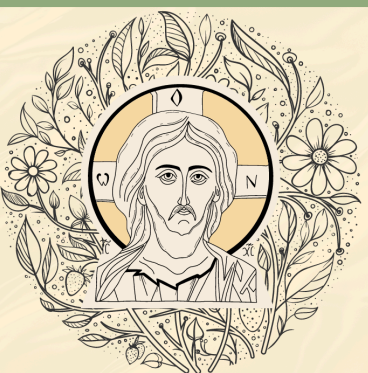
February 11/24



EMPEROR THEOPHILUS ARGUES WITH MONK LAZARUS ABOUT ICONS

The iconoclast movement became very hostile, even persecuting Christians. Empress Irene had begun the process to restore the Icons, but under the rule of Emperor Leo V, iconoclast policies were re-implemented. When Emperor Theophilus came into power, he retained these policies.

UOC YOUTH AGES 9-12



IN HIS IMAGE

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2024-2025



St. Theodora would also take her daughters to visit Theophilus' stepmother Euphrosyne in her monastery. Euphrosyne also secretly kept icons hidden under her bed. At each visit she would bless the girls with the icons before they left. One day the youngest daughter blurted out their secret to her father, telling him of the beautiful pictures that their grandmother had under her bed. He knew what the beautiful pictures were! They were icons that were forbidden to be used. Angered by this discovery he forbid the girls and Theodora from going to the monastery ever again.

Theodora takes on the role as Empress.

Empress Theodora ruled the Empire as "Empress Regent" for fifteen years. She was known for her good policy with foreign countries and being a just ruler.

During this time she worked fervently to have icons restored to the worship of the Holy Church.

She convened a Synod, at which it was decided to condemn the iconoclasts from the church; to forbid them from being a part of the Holy Orthodox

In the year 843 the church council issued a proclamation making icons legal again. The veneration of Holy Icons was reinstated. The reign of the Iconoclast era had finally come to an end!

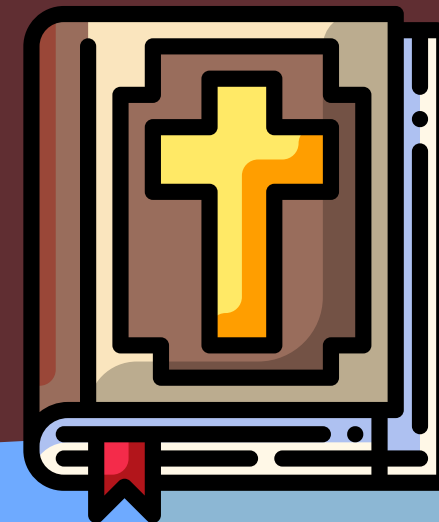


THEODORA'S DAUGHTERS LEARNING TO VENERATE ICONS FROM THEIR GRANDMOTHER EUPHROSYNE

ST. THEODORA

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

February 11/24



DID YOU KNOW?

Her Feast day

She is celebrated on February 11/24 and also commemorated on the First Sunday of Great Lent: The Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy.

A copy of the Gospels, copied in her own hand, is known to exist.



How did she live her life in the Image and likeness of God?

By staying true to the Orthodox faith, leading her people and fighting to restore icons to Orthodox worship!

By defending the faith. Even when her husband, the government and others in the kingdom destroyed icons and punished those who venerated them, she continued to venerate icons AND teaching her daughters to do the same!

By guiding her children to live and defend the faith!

How can you venerate icons and keep them holy?
Are there times when you meet people who tell you you can't live your faith openly? What can you do?

What else can you learn from St. Theodora?
How can you celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy?

A POWERFUL EMPRESS!

She effectively ruled her Empire. She rebuilt it financially and even stopped the invading Bulgarian forces. As her son Michael grew older, he was influenced by his uncle to force Empress Theodora out of power. By the year 855 he forced her to retire. She spent her last days as a monastic in the Monastery of Euphrosyne. She reposed peacefully in the Lord around the year 867

Who was Empress Theodora? Restorer of Orthodoxy!

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Faith in adverse situations

Empress Theodora had such a great love for God and her faith that she did not stop praying to God with her icons because her husband held a different view. Think about how strong her love for God must have been to be able to do this.

A powerful Empress

She assumed the throne after the death of her husband and ruled for 15 years because her youngest son Michael was too young to assume power. She effectively ruled her Empire. She rebuilt it financially and even stopped the aggression of invading Bulgarian forces. As her son Michael grew older, he was influenced by his uncle to force Empress Theodora out of power. By the year 855, he forced her to retire. She spent her last days as a monastic in the Monastery of Euphrosyne. She reposed peacefully in the Lord around the year 867.



Empress Regent

A regent is someone who rules with or in the place of someone who is either too young, absent or ill to rule at a given time. The title "Empress Regent" granted Theodora the ability to rule outright and not just as regent for her son.

Who were the Iconoclasts?

They were a heretical group who had holy icons removed from the church and even forbidden in private homes, because they believed that the faithful were worshipping graven images.

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RESTORER OF ICONS

February 11/24

Restoration of Icons to the Holy Church

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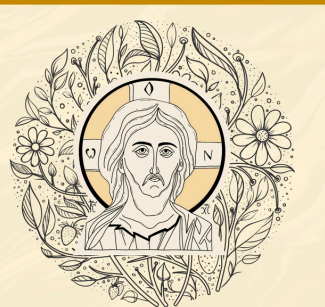
In the icon to the right, you see St. Theodora and her son Michael III to the left of the icon that is known as the Mother of God Hodegetria. The bishops (Patriarch Methodios I of Constantinople on the top right) and monastics of the church join them in restoring the icons. You will see an angel upholding the icon on either side. St. Theodosia on the bottom left holds an icon of Christ Emmanuel and St. Theophanes the Confessor and St. Theodore the Studite jointly hold an image of Christ.



DID YOU KNOW?

The restoration of icons took place at the at the Seventh Ecumenical Council - the Second Council of Nicea. Why is this important? Ecumenical Councils are where all bishops gather to discuss questions on Christian doctrine, discipline and administration amongst other things.

UOC TEEN AGES 13 -18
PART I



IN HIS IMAGE
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Passing on the Faith

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ABOVE YOU SEE THE DAUGHTERS OF THEODORA VISITING THEIR GRANDMOTHER, VENERATING ICONS

ST. THEODORA

RESTORER OF ICONS

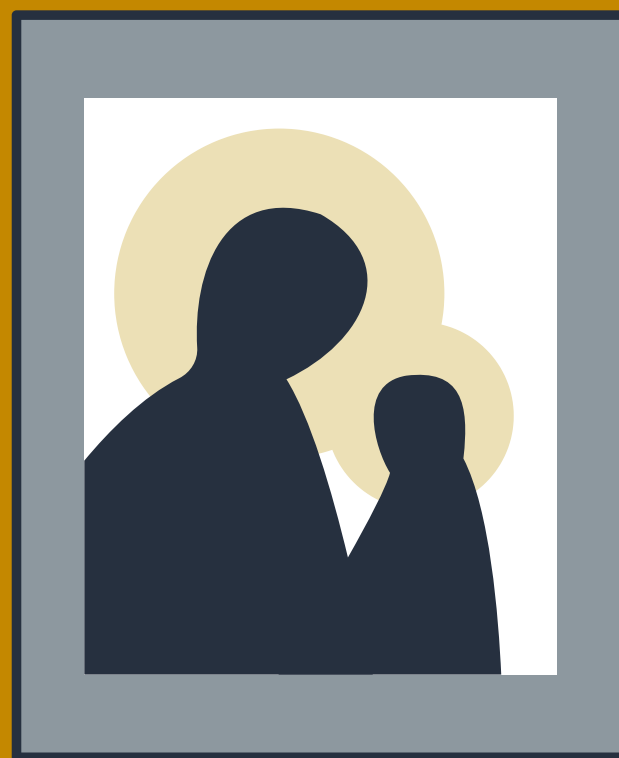
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DID YOU KNOW?

ICONODULE is the opposite of an iconoclast. An iconodule is someone who venerated icons and believed in their rightful place for use in prayer and worship in the church.

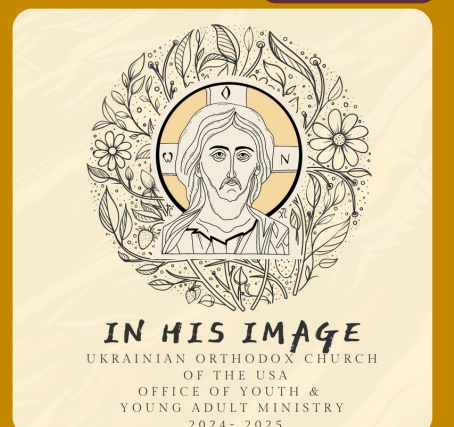
How was Empress Theodora a Christian witness for all - living in His Image and Likeness?

She stood apart from the current times. The circumstances in her life did not influence her decisions, but her deeply rooted love for God and her faith was the foundation of her life.

Orthopraxia :

- How can we be Christian witnesses today and not follow the trends that we see around us?
- Carry a pocket icon with you and pray to your saint in times of stress.
- BE a living icon to others: be the example of love, compassion, helping and respect.
- Actively participate in the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Pay close attention to the prayers and what they say. How can you live your Orthodoxy?

UOC TEEN AGES 13 -18
PART 2





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IN HIS IMAGE

ST. THEODORA GOING DEEPER

Guide for Families
and Parishes

FURTHERING THE DISCUSSION

Once you have shared the handout with your child/youth, you may want to take some time to further discuss how St. Theodora chose to live in Christ's image. Here are some questions to start the discussion!

- Imagine our churches and homes without icons- How would you feel?
- What role do icons play in our worship?
- How do icons help us recognize the image and likeness of God in others?
- How was Empress Theodora a Christian witness to the faith?
- How would the outcome of the iconoclast era have been different if she failed to hold true to her beliefs and speak out against this heresy?
- How can we be Christian witnesses to the faith in our times?

Questions for our Minis (ages 4-8)

- What did you learn about St. Theodora?
- What is the first thing you do when you enter your church?
- You venerate the icons! How different it would be if there was no icon on the icon stand for you to venerate?

PRAXIS - LIVING THE FAITH

- The Sunday of Orthodoxy is celebrated the first Sunday of Great Lent. Some parishes pray the service of vespers for the feast after Divine Liturgy or later in the day. Some Orthodox communities gather together as the Church to affirm the faith. As a family, make a commitment to attend the special services on this day. Take time to discuss the service and the special prayers. Many parishes/communities ask faithful to bring an icon to participate in the procession. Encourage your children to choose an icon to carry AND you to walk with them in faith!
- There are many ways you can use paper icons to create special icons for your home. There are a few suggestions in UOC Youth! and UOC Mini! Winter edition 2025 available at www.uoc youth.org. If you don't have any paper icons in your home, see if your parish has Sunday Bulletins paper that you can use. Use plain thin boards or artist pads as a base.
- As a family, discuss how you should treat icons in your home and life. Why is it important and how is it different from handling art or photographs? There is a guide for how to teach your children the proper use and handling of icons in UOC Parent! Winter edition 2025.
- If you have paper icons, bulletins, etc in your home, discuss as a family how you will properly take care of them.
 - For Minis - Watch the video about Icons and the Sunday of Orthodoxy from Orthodox Pebbles
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gvrkF3XDBk>

