



St. Iakovos, Brother of our Lord October 23rd

For a man whose kinship with Jesus Christ was so close that he was referred to as the Brother of the Lord, when actually it is generally believed that he was a cousin to the Savior, surprisingly little is known to detail a full account of his life. The holy memory of his life was assured, if by nothing else than the simple fact that he was related to the Nazarene. But enough is known of the life of St. James to establish him as a saint on his own merits, as a man of God who, though not one of the original Apostles, equaled them in stature through his accomplishments in the early Christian Church.

It was through divine intervention that St. James came to acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God and through divine guidance that he came to be one of the founders of the Christian Church, as attested by the chapter of Corinthians in the New Testament of the Bible. In the dark days of paganism and spiritual ignorance, St. James espoused Christianity, the new religion, a crime which was tantamount to ostracism in the least, and possibly the ultimate penalty of death. In the midst of this stark menace, he never wavered in his mission for Christ, nor slackened his pace for the advancement of Christianity.

Dubbed St. James the Just for his piety and wisdom, St. James was a Nazarene, blessed with an endowment of righteousness. He was also equipped with a strength of character that was so imperative for the successful injection of the way of the Savior into the everyday life of the common, ignorant man, whose need for the knowledge of the Lord was critical. The many challenges to Christianity were met by St. James in masterful fashion and it is to him and the other early fathers of the Church that Christians owe a debt of gratitude for being able to rejoice in Jesus Christ.

After the Pentecost, St. James (Iakovos to the Greeks) was entrusted with the sacred honor of converting the people of Jerusalem to Christianity, a mission in which he was eminently successful and which brought him a reputation that elevated him to the rank of Bishop of Jerusalem. Long a center of religious controversy, the city was to provide for St. James a platform for his mighty oratory, a platform which was, however, to be his scaffold for death. He was capable of stirring the passions of men, some of whom sought to destroy him, but none of whom failed to admire and respect him.

It was as much out of respect for him, as well as envy, that an appeal was sent to him, the kinsman of the Lord, to answer the burning questions raised about the Messiah. In his answer the scribes and Pharisees had hoped they would find his condemnation, and the populace hoped it would end the doubts of some in their midst. He ascended to the rooftop of the temple in Jerusalem, flanked by those bent on destroying him and the threat his new Church represented. St. James might have equivocated or compromised in this perilous situation. He did neither. Refusing to disavow Christ, he openly declared his faith in Jesus and exhorted those below not to be intimidated into retaining old beliefs that would exclude them from the company of Christ.

The public demonstration of faith in Jesus Christ was more than his enemies could bear, and he was pushed off the rooftop, plunging into the courtyard below in a fall that should have killed him immediately. James survived, but only to be stoned to death. The date of his martyrdom is given as the year A.D. 61, but it was not until late in the first century that true reverence was made to St. James, principally because few but the most scholarly in that period of great illiteracy came to know him through his eloquent epistle.

Apolytikion of James (Iakovos), the Brother of the Lord in the Fourth Tone

As the Lord's disciple, O righteous One, you received the Gospel, as Martyr, you have unwavering courage, as the Lord's brother, you have forthrightness, as Hierarch, intercession. Intercede with Christ our God, that our souls may be saved.

Kontakion of James (Iakovos), the Brother of the Lord in the Fourth Tone

O wondrous Iakovos, God the Logos, only-begotten of the Father, who dwelt among us in latter days, declared you, the first shepherd and teacher of Jerusalem, and faithful steward of the spiritual mysteries. Wherefore, we all honor you, O Apostle.