



## St. Athanasios the Great January 18th

In the half-century after the First Ecumenical Council held in Nicea in 325, if there was one man whom the Arians feared and hated more intensely than any other, as being able to lay bare the whole error of their teaching, and to marshal, even from exile or hiding, the beleaguered forces of the Orthodox, it was Saint Athanasios the Great. This blazing lamp of Orthodoxy, which imperial power and heretics' plots could not quench when he shone upon the lampstand, nor find when he was hid by the people and monks of Egypt, was born in Alexandria

about the year 296. He received an excellent training in Greek letters and especially in the sacred Scriptures, of which he shows an exceptional knowledge in his writings. Even as a young man he had a remarkable depth of theological understanding; he was only about twenty years old when he wrote his treatise "On the Incarnation." Saint Alexander, the Archbishop of Alexandria, brought him up in piety, ordained him his deacon, and after deposing Arius for his blasphemy against the Divinity of the Son of God, took Athanasios to the First Council in Nicea in 325. Saint Athanasios was to spend the remainder of his life laboring in defense of this Holy Council. In 326, before his death, Alexander appointed Athanasios his successor.

In 325, Arius had been condemned by the Council of Nicea; yet through his hypocritical confession of Orthodox belief, Saint Constantine the Great was persuaded by Arius's supporters that he should be received back into the communion of the Church. But Athanasios, knowing well the perverseness of his mind, and the disease of heresy lurking in his heart, refused communion with Arius. The heresiarch's followers then began framing false charges against Athanasios. Finally Saint Constantine the Great, misled by grave charges of the Saint's misconduct (which were completely false), had him exiled to Tiberius (Treves) in Gaul in 336. When Saint Constantine was succeeded by his three sons Constantine II, Constans, and Constantius, in 337, Saint Athanasios returned to Alexandria in triumph. But his enemies found an ally in Constantius, Emperor of the East, and he spent a second exile in Rome. It was ended when Constans prevailed with threats upon his brother Constantius to restore Athanasios (see also Nov. 6). When Julian the Apostate succeeded Constantius in 361, Athanasios returned again, but only for a few months. Because Athanasios had converted many pagans, and the priests of the idols in Egypt wrote to Julian that if Athanasios remained, idolatry would perish in Egypt, the heathen Emperor ordered not Athanasios's exile, but his death. Athanasios took a ship up the Nile.

The great Athanasios passed the remaining seven years of his life in peace. Of his fifty-seven years as Patriarch, he had spent some seventeen in exiles. Shining from the height of his throne like a radiant evening star, and enlightening the Orthodox with the brilliance of his words for yet a little while, this much-suffering champion inclined toward the sunset of his life, and in the year 373 took his rest from his lengthy sufferings, but not before another luminary of the truth -- Basil the Great -- had risen in the East, being consecrated Archbishop of Caesarea in 370. Besides all of his other achievements, Saint Athanasios wrote the life of Saint Anthony the Great, with whom he spent time in his youth; ordained Saint Frumentius first Bishop of Ethiopia; and in his Paschal Encyclical for the year 367 set forth the books of the Old and New Testaments accepted by the Church as canonical.

### **Apolytikion of Athanasios and Cyril, Patriarchs of Alexandria in the Third Tone**

Shining forth with works of Orthodoxy, ye quenched every false belief and teaching and became trophy-bearers and conquerors. And since ye made all things rich and with true piety, greatly adorning the Church with magnificence, Athanasios and wise Cyril, ye both have worthily found Christ God, Who doth grant great mercy unto all.

### **Kontakion of Athanasios and Cyril, Patriarchs of Alexandria in the Fourth Tone**

O great Hierarchs of piety and brave champions of the Church of Christ, you watch over all who sing, "Save us who in faith honor you, O Compassionate."