

Dorogiye!

This Saturday / Sunday, the Church commemorates Hieromartyr Babylas, (in Slavonic: Vavil), Bishop of Antioch, and those with him.

The attached Tropar / Kondak text sheet includes the special prayers that will be sung this weekend.

Earlier this week, on Wednesday / Thursday, is the Church New Year.

Also this week, on Thursday / Friday, the Church commemorates the Venerable Anthony and the Venerable Theodosius of the Kiev Caves.

Brief summaries about Saint Hieromartyr Babylas, the Church New Year, and the Venerable Anthony and Theodosius of the Kiev Caves, are provided below. Unless otherwise noted, dates in the briefings below are “new style”.

#### \*\*\*\* HIEROMARTYR BABYLAS, BISHOP OF ANTIOCH, AND THOSE WITH HIM

The Hieromartyr Babylas and with him the three youths Urban, Prilidian, Epolonius and their mother Christodoula died as martyrs under the emperor Decius (249-251).

During Decius’ stay in their city of Antioch, the emperor arranged for a large festival in honor of the pagan gods. At the same time, Babylas, the holy and God-fearing Bishop of Antioch, was serving the Divine Liturgy in church. He prayed for his flock and taught them to endure all tribulations for Christ with courage. The idolater Decius, curious to witness the Divine Mysteries, decided to enter the church.

News of this reached the bishop, so he went out to meet Decius and blocked the path to the church, for he was unwilling to permit impiety in the temple of God. When the emperor approached the church doors, Saint Babylas refused to let him enter, so the emperor had to abandon his intention. He wanted to take revenge on the saint right away, but when he saw the large throng of Christians, he feared they might riot.

The next day the angry emperor ordered that the church be set on fire, and for Bishop Babylas to be brought before him. When asked why he had insulted the imperial dignity by not allowing the emperor to enter the church, the holy bishop answered, “Anyone who would rise up against God and want to desecrate His sanctuary, is not worthy of respect, but has become the enemy of the Lord.”

Decius declared that the holy bishop must worship the idols in order to make up for his lack of respect for the emperor, or else face execution. After convincing himself that the martyr would remain steadfast in his faith, he commanded the military commander Victorinus to put him in heavy chains and lead him through the city in disgrace. The holy martyr replied, “Emperor, these chains are as venerable for me as your imperial crown is for you. For me, suffering for Christ is as desirable as the imperial power is for you. Death for the Immortal King is as precious to me as your life is to you.”

At the trial with Bishop Babylas were three young brothers, who did not forsake him even in this most difficult moment. Seeing them, the emperor asked, “Who are these children? “

“These are my spiritual children,” the saint replied, “and I have raised them in piety, I have given them an education, cultivated them with guidance, and here before you in a small body are these great young men and perfect Christians. Test them and see.”

The emperor tried in all sorts of ways to entice the youths and their mother Christodoula to renounce Christ, but in vain. Then, in a rage, he ordered each of them to be whipped with a number of blows corresponding to their age. The first received twelve blows, the second, ten, and the third, seven. Dismissing the mother and children, the torturer again summoned the bishop, telling him that the children had renounced Christ. He did not believe the lie, however.

Then he commanded all the martyrs be tied to a tree and burned with fire. Seeing the stoic bravery of the saints, the emperor finally condemned them to be beheaded with the sword.

#### \*\*\*\* CHURCH NEW YEAR

The first day of the Church New Year (14-SEP, new style) is also called the beginning of the Indiction. The term Indiction comes from a Latin word meaning, "to impose." It was originally applied to the imposition of taxes in Egypt. The first worldwide Indiction was in 312 when the Emperor Constantine saw a miraculous vision of the Cross in the sky. Before the introduction of the Julian calendar, Rome began the New Year on September 1 (o.s.).

According to Holy Tradition, Christ entered the synagogue on September 1 to announce His mission to mankind (Luke 4:16-22). Quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, the Savior proclaimed, "The spirit of the Lord is upon Me; because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord..." Tradition says that the Hebrews entered the Promised Land in September.

#### \*\*\*\* VENERABLE ANTHONY OF THE KIEV FAR CAVES

Saint Anthony of the Kiev Caves was born in the year 983 at Liubech, not far from Chernigov, and was named Antipas in Baptism. Possessing the fear of God from his youth, he desired to be clothed in the monastic schema. When he reached a mature age, he wandered until he arrived on Mt. Athos, burning with the desire to emulate the deeds of its holy inhabitants. Here he received monastic tonsure, and the young monk pleased God in every aspect of his spiritual struggles on the path of virtue. He particularly excelled in humility and obedience, so that all the monks rejoiced to see his holy life.

The igumen saw in Saint Anthony the great future ascetic, and inspired by God, he sent him back to his native land, saying, "Anthony, it is time for you to guide others in holiness. Return to your own Russian land, and be an example for others. May the blessing of the Holy Mountain be with you."

Returning to the land of Rus, Anthony began to make the rounds of the monasteries about Kiev, but nowhere did he find that strict life which had drawn him to Mt. Athos.

Through the Providence of God, Anthony came to the hills of Kiev by the banks of the River Dnieper. The forested area near the village of Berestovo reminded him of his beloved Athos. There he found a cave which had been dug out by the Priest Hilarion, who later became Metropolitan of Kiev (October 21). Since he liked the spot, Anthony prayed with tears, "Lord, let the blessing of Mt. Athos be upon this spot, and strengthen me to remain here." He began to struggle in prayer, fasting, vigil and physical labor. Every other day, or every third day, he would eat only dry bread and a little water. Sometimes he did not eat for a week. People began to come to the ascetic for his blessing and counsel, and some decided to remain with the saint.

Among Anthony's first disciples was Saint Nikon (March 23), who tonsured Saint Theodosius of the Caves (May 3) at the monastery in the year 1032.

The virtuous life of Saint Anthony illumined the Russian land with the beauty of monasticism. Saint Anthony lovingly received those who yearned for the monastic life. After instructing them how to follow Christ, he asked Saint Nikon to tonsure them. When twelve disciples had gathered about Saint Anthony, the brethren dug a large cave and built a church and cells for the monks within it.

After he appointed Abbot Barlaam to guide the brethren, Saint Anthony withdrew from the monastery. He dug a new cave for himself, then hid himself within it. There too, monks began to settle around him. Afterwards, the saint built a small wooden church in honor of the Dormition of the Mother of God over the Far Caves.

At the insistence of Prince Izyaslav, the igumen Barlaam withdrew to the Dimitriev monastery. With the blessing of Saint Anthony and with the general agreement of the brethren, the meek and humble Theodosius was chosen as igumen. By this time, the number of brethren had already reached a hundred men. The Kiev Great Prince Izyaslav (+ 1078) gave the monks the hill on which the large church and cells were built, with a palisade all around. Thus, the renowned monastery over the caves was established. Describing this, the chronicler remarks that while many monasteries were built by emperors and nobles, they could not compare with those which are built with holy prayers and tears, and by fasting and vigil. Although Saint Anthony had no gold, he built a monastery which became the first spiritual center of Rus.

For his holiness of life, God glorified Saint Anthony with the gift of clairvoyance and wonderworking. One example of this occurred during the construction of the Great Caves church. The Most Holy Theotokos Herself stood before him and Saint Theodosius in the Blachernae church in Constantinople, where they had been miraculously transported without leaving their own monastery. Actually, two angels appeared in Constantinople in their forms (See May 3, the account of the Kiev Caves Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos). Having received gold from the Mother of God, the saints commissioned master architects, who came from Constantinople to the Russian land on the command of the Queen of Heaven to build the church at the Monastery of the Caves. During this appearance, the Mother of God foretold the impending death of Saint Anthony, which occurred on July 10, 1073.

Through Divine Providence, the relics of Saint Anthony remain hidden.

#### \*\*\*\* VENERABLE THEODOSIUS OF THE KIEV FAR CAVES

Saint Theodosius of the Caves, was the Father of monasticism in Russia. He was born at Vasilevo, not far from Kiev. From his youth he felt an irresistible attraction for the ascetic life, and led an ascetic lifestyle while still in his parental home. He disdained childish games and attractions, and constantly went to church. He asked his parents to let him study the holy books, and through his ability and rare zeal, he quickly learned to read the books, so that everyone was amazed at his intellect.

When he was fourteen, he lost his father and remained under the supervision of his mother, a strict and domineering woman who loved her son very much. Many times she chastised her son for his yearning for asceticism, but he remained firmly committed to his path.

At the age of twenty-four, he secretly left his parents' home and Saint Anthony at the Kiev Caves monastery blessed him to receive monastic tonsure with the name Theodosius. After four years his mother

found him and with tearfully begged him to return home, but the saint persuaded her to remain in Kiev and to become a nun in the monastery of Saint Nicholas at the Askold cemetery.

Saint Theodosius toiled at the monastery more than others, and he often took upon himself some of the work of the other brethren. He carried water, chopped wood, ground up the grain, and carried the flour to each monk. On cold nights he uncovered his body and let it serve as food for gnats and mosquitoes. His blood flowed, but the saint occupied himself with handicrafts, and sang Psalms. He came to church before anyone else and, standing in one place, he did not leave it until the end of services. He also listened to the readings with particular attention.

In 1054 Saint Theodosius was ordained a hieromonk, and in 1057 he was chosen igumen. The fame of his deeds attracted a number of monks to the monastery, at which he built a new church and cells, and he introduced cenobitic rule of the Studion monastery, a copy of which he commissioned at Constantinople.

As igumen, Saint Theodosius continued his arduous duties at the monastery. He usually ate only dry bread and cooked greens without oil, and spent his nights in prayer without sleep. The brethren often noticed this, although the saint tried to conceal his efforts from others.

No one saw when Saint Theodosius dozed lightly, and usually he rested while sitting. During Great Lent the saint withdrew into a cave near the monastery, where he struggled unseen by anyone. His attire was a coarse hairshirt worn next to his body. He looked so much like a beggar that it was impossible to recognize in this old man the renowned igumen, deeply respected by all who knew him.

Once, Saint Theodosius was returning from visiting the Great Prince Izyaslav. The coachman, not recognizing him, said gruffly, "You, monk, are always on holiday, but I am constantly at work. Take my place, and let me ride in the carriage." The holy Elder meekly complied and drove the servant. Seeing how nobles along the way bowed to the monk driving the horses, the servant took fright, but the holy ascetic calmed him, and gave him a meal at the monastery. Trusting in God's help, the saint did not keep a large supply of food at the monastery, and therefore the brethren were in want of their daily bread. Through his prayers, however, unknown benefactors appeared at the monastery and furnished the necessities for the brethren.

The Great Princes, especially Izyaslav, loved to listen to the spiritual discourses of Saint Theodosius. The saint was not afraid to denounce the mighty of this world. Those unjustly condemned always found a defender in him, and judges would review matters at the request of the igumen. He was particularly concerned for the destitute. He built a special courtyard for them at the monastery where anyone in need could receive food and drink. Sensing the approach of death, Saint Theodosius peacefully fell asleep in the Lord in the year 1074. He was buried in a cave which he dug, where he had secluded himself during fasting periods.

The relics of the ascetic were found incorrupt in the year 1091, and Saint Theodosius was glorified as a saint in 1108. Of the written works of Saint Theodosius six discourses, two letters to Great Prince Izyaslav, and a prayer for all Christians have survived to our time.

The Life of Saint Theodosius was written by Saint Nestor the Chronicler (October 27), a disciple of the great Abba, only thirty years after his repose, and it was always one of the favorite readings of the Russian nation. Saint Theodosius