

The Iveron Icon of the Mother of God

During the reign of Emperor Theophilos (829-842) the Byzantine Empire was in turmoil because of the heresy of iconoclasm. In accordance with the Emperor's orders, thousands of soldiers scoured the Empire, searching in every corner, city, and village for any hidden icons.

A pious widow living near the city of Nicea had concealed an Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos in her home. Before long, the soldiers found it, and one of them stabbed it with his spear. By God's grace this terrible deed was overshadowed by a miracle: blood began to flow from the wounded face of the Mother of God. The frightened soldiers ran away after witnessing this.

The widow spent the entire night keeping vigil and praying before the Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. In the morning, by God's will, she took the Icon to the sea and cast it upon the water. The holy Icon stood upright on the waves and began to drift westward.

Time passed, and one evening (circa 1004), the monks of the Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos noticed a pillar of light, shining upon the sea like the sun. This miraculous sign lasted for several days, while the Fathers of the Holy Mountain gathered together and marveled. Finally they went down to the edge of the sea, where they beheld the pillar of light standing over the Icon of the Theotokos. When they approached, however, the Icon moved farther out to sea.

At that time a Georgian monk named Gabriel was living at the Iveron (Georgian) Monastery. The Theotokos appeared to the Athonite Fathers and told them that only Father Gabriel was worthy to retrieve the holy Icon from the sea. She also appeared to Father Gabriel and

told him, "Go into the sea, and walk upon the waves with faith, and everyone shall witness my love and mercy for your Monastery."

The monks found Father Gabriel and led him down to the sea, chanting hymns, and censing with holy incense. Father Gabriel walked upon the water as if it were dry land, and taking the Icon in his hands, he carried it back to shore. This miracle occurred on Bright Tuesday.

While the monks were celebrating a Service of thanksgiving, a cold, sweet spring miraculously gushed forth from the ground where the Icon was standing. Afterward, they took it into the church and placed it in the sanctuary with great reverence.

The next morning one of the monks went to light the lamps in church and discovered that the Icon was no longer where they had put it; now it was on the wall near the entry gate. The monks took it down and returned it to the sanctuary, but the next day the Icon was found once again at the Monastery gate. This miracle recurred several times, until the All-Holy Virgin appeared to Father Gabriel, saying, "Inform the brethren that from now on they must not carry me away. For what I desire is not to be protected by you; but instead I shall protect you, both in this life, and in the age to come. As long as my Icon remains in the Monastery, the grace and mercy of my Son shall never be lacking!"

Filled with great joy, the monks built a small church near the Monastery gate in honor of the Mother of God, and placed the wonderworking Icon inside. This holy Icon came to be known as the "Iveron Mother of God." Through the intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos, many miracles have taken place and continue to take place throughout the world.