

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, was born at Antioch about the year 347. His father died, and his mother devoted herself to raising him as a Christian. When his mother died, he entered **monasticism**, which he called **the “true philosophy.”**

He lived four years as a monk in the wilderness and wrote books defending monastic life. For two years he lived in a cave in complete silence, but he became ill and returned to Antioch, where he was ordained a Deacon and then a Priest. For twelve years, he preached in church, and his words inspired people so deeply that he was given the name **“Golden-Mouthed” (Chrysostom).**

To help people understand Holy Scripture (the Bible), he wrote many books and sermons explaining its spiritual meanings. He also wrote about the Feasts and the lives of Saints, and he **defended the Orthodox Church** against heresy (false teaching).

Under St. John’s direction, the Orthodox Church at Antioch provided food each day to as many as 3,000 widows and orphans, in addition to caring for homeless and sick persons.

In 397, Archbishop Nectarius, successor to St. Gregory the Theologian, died. St. John Chrysostom was then elected Archbishop of Constantinople.

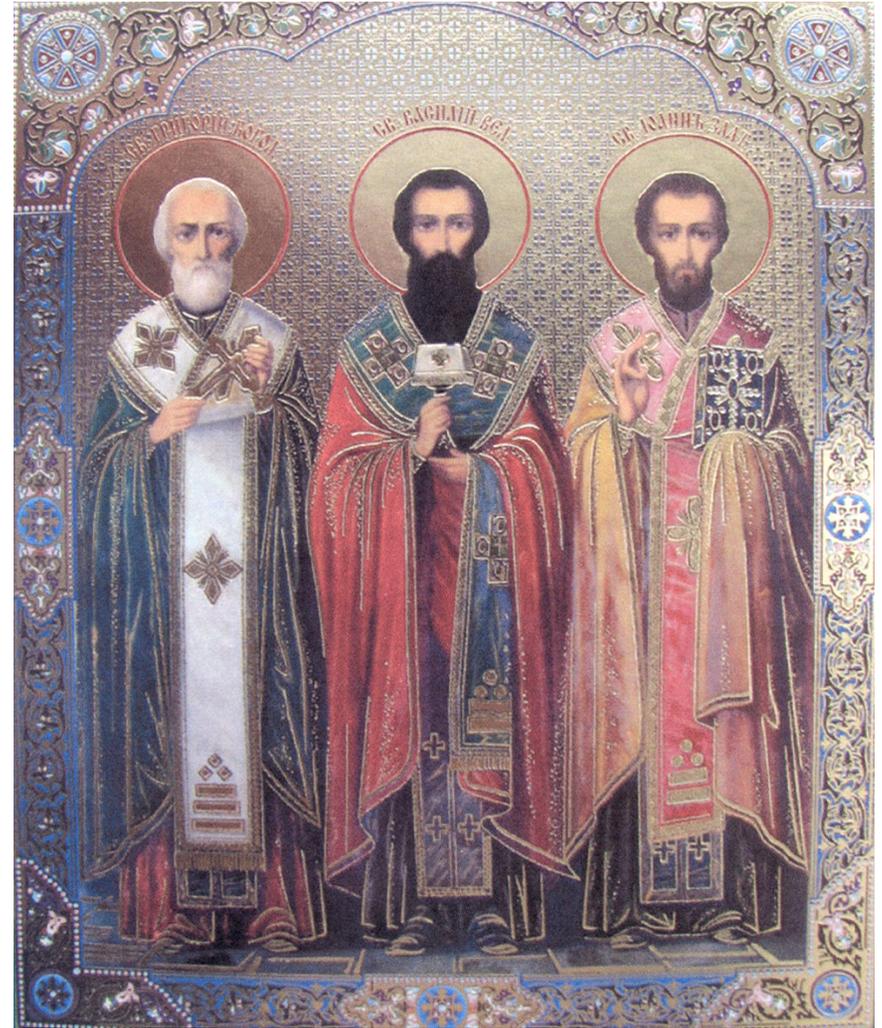
St. John compiled a Liturgy, the **Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom**, which is served on most Sundays and Holy Days in Eastern Orthodox churches. He introduced antiphonal singing for the all-night Vigil, and he wrote several prayers for anointing the sick with oil.

When he criticized the Empress Eudoxia (the wife of the Emperor Arcadius) for vanity, he was **exiled (sent away)**. That night, there was an earthquake, and the Emperor begged him to return. But when he objected to the Empress placing a statue of herself near the Church of Hagia Sophia, she exiled him again. Under military escort, he traveled for three months in the rain and cold. He became ill and died at Komani, Republic of Georgia, on September 14, 407. His last words were, **“Glory to God for all things!”**

The holy relics of St. John Chrysostom were brought back to Constantinople in the year 438.

St. Michael’s Orthodox Church, Jermyn, Pennsylvania

Synaxis of the Three Holy Hierarchs St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory the Theologian



From the Troparion:

Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom ... have enlightened the world with the rays of their divine doctrines. They are sweetly-flowing rivers of wisdom filling all creation with springs of heavenly knowledge. Ceaselessly they intercede for us before the Holy Trinity!

SYNAXIS OF THE THREE HOLY HIERARCHS

The word “**Synaxis**” means “**gathering.**” On this day, the faithful gather to honor three important saints of the Orthodox Church: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. John Chrysostom.

The word “**Hierarch**” refers to **leadership** in the Church. These three saints are honored for their leadership in teaching about the Truths of Orthodoxy. Because they stood up and defended Orthodoxy against false teaching, they are also called “pillars” of the Faith.

During the eleventh century, people argued about which of the three hierarchs was the greatest. To end the disagreement, the three hierarchs miraculously appeared to St. John the Bishop of Euchaita in the year 1084, and said that they were equal before God. “There are no divisions among us, and no opposition to one another.” To end the disagreement, Bishop John chose **January 30** for their joint Feast Day.

St. Basil and St. Gregory the Theologian were monks who were good friends to one another and studied the Holy Scriptures (the Bible) and the writings of the Fathers of the past. From all these works they put together a **collection of Orthodox wisdom**, called **the Philokalia**. This book has been a guide about Orthodox teaching for centuries.

ST. BASIL THE GREAT wrote a collection of rules for monastic life. Under his leadership, monasteries were organized for men and for women, and the monks and nuns followed St. Basil’s teachings.

During the fourth century there was a heresy (false teaching) that threatened the unity of the Church. St. Basil **defended Orthodoxy** against any teaching that was not true. He has been compared to a bee, stinging the Church’s enemies, yet nourishing his flock with the sweet honey of his teaching. Most importantly, St. Basil defended the **divinity of the Holy Spirit** and **the Trinity** of one God in Three Persons.

St. Basil wrote many books about the faith, which are still read today. He composed a Liturgy, the **Liturgy of St. Basil the Great**, which the Orthodox Church uses during Great Lent and certain Holy Days.

Upon the death of Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea, St. Basil was chosen to succeed him as Bishop in the year 370. He used all his personal wealth to help the poor, including sponsoring the building of shelters for wanderers and the homeless. St. Basil died on January 1, 379 at age 49. Shortly before his death, he blessed St. Gregory the Theologian to become Archbishop of Constantinople.

ST. GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN is also called **St. Gregory Nazianzus**. He was the son of a bishop, also named Gregory, who was Bishop of Nazianzus. St. Gregory was ordained to the priesthood by his father. However, when the elder Gregory wished to make him a bishop, he instead went away to join his friend St. Basil as a simple monk at the monastery that Basil had organized in the town of Pontus.

St. Gregory explained what it means to be a theologian. The word “**theologian**” refers to a person who knows God and can, therefore, teach others. He said that knowledge of God does not come from studying philosophy or science but from **faith** and **prayer** and living a pure life according to God’s commendments.

Like St. Basil, St. Gregory also **defended Orthodoxy** against false teaching (heresy). On the night of Pascha (April 21, 379), a mob of armed heretics burst into the church and threw stones at the Orthodox people, killing one bishop and wounding St. Gregory.

But St. Gregory Nazianzus did not fight heretics with weapons. St. Gregory had a gift for writing, and he offered his talent to God by writing many books and sermons explaining the Orthodox faith. He also wrote poems and letters to encourage the people to love God and follow Orthodox teachings.

Because St. Gregory had been elected as **Archbishop of Constantinople** when certain other bishops were late coming to the Council and were absent from the voting, they did not want to acknowledge his right to be archbishop. He was not a proud man, and he felt that **unity in the Church** was more important than who would be bishop. Therefore, even though he had done nothing wrong, he resigned for the sake of peace in the Church.

St. Gregory left Constantinople and **spent the remainder of his life as a solitary monk**. He continued to defend Orthodoxy by writing letters and poems, while remaining in the wilderness. He died on January 25, 389 and was buried at Nazianzus. In the year 950, his holy relics were transferred to Constantinople into the church of the Holy Apostles. Later, some of relics were sent to Rome.

St. Gregory Nazianzus is honored by the Orthodox Church with the title “Theologian,” a title that is also given only to the holy Apostle and Evangelist St. John.