

Discovering the Wonder of Jesus Christ

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On December 24, the eve of the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord, the Church commemorates Saint Eugenia of Rome.

Born in 280, she belonged to a noble pagan family. Though Roman by birth, she lived in Alexandria, Egypt, where her father Philip had been sent by the emperor to govern.

Philip not only worshipped pagan gods, but strongly opposed Christianity. Like many highborn Romans, he distrusted this new religion that seemed to exalt the humble and weak. Rome had built its empire on brute power and conquest—ideals very different from those the itinerant preacher from Palestine taught. The preacher's teachings were spreading far and wide, and Philip worried that they threatened traditional Roman society.

The account of Eugenia's life tells us that she discovered Jesus Christ by reading the words of Saint Paul. How thrilled she must have been by the stirring description of Him in one of this day's readings, Hebrews 1: 1-3:

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high..."

Eugenia was determined to follow this wonderful Lord who so loved human beings that that He had "by Himself purged our sins." She fled her home, accompanied by two male servants. They accompanied her to a place far enough away that she could escape being found out.

Nearby was a men's monastery. Eugenia looked at it with a mixture of joy and sadness; joy because it was a place where her newly-discovered God was truly worshipped, and sadness because, as a woman, she could not join that worship.

But she was a resourceful, courageous woman, and so she decided to disguise herself as a man and apply to enter the monastery. Her servants hesitated to help her—cutting her hair, and putting together loose-fitting garments—but she convinced them, and in her disguise she approached the abbot.

Abbot Helenon saw at once that this delicate-featured person was not a man, even though she lowered the pitch of her voice. But he didn't turn her away, or reproach her. Seeing her sincere spiritual desire, he gave her an isolated cell, where she would spend many years in monastic effort.

Saint Eugenia saw the wonder of Christ in her own life. She was given the gift of healing, and had the joy of converting her adamantly-pagan father to the faith.

Both Philip and Eugenia were ultimately martyred. Like the shepherds who "made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child" (Luke 2: 17a) they had bravely spread the Gospel, and unflinchingly faced His enemies, who killed their bodies but not their souls.

Troparion - Tone 4

Your lamb Eugenia, O Jesus,
Calls out to You in a loud voice:
I love You, O my bridegroom,
And in seeking You, I endure suffering.
In Baptism I was crucified so that I might reign in You,
And died so that I might live with You.
Accept me as a pure sacrifice,
For I have offered myself in love.
By her prayers save our souls, since You are merciful.