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Venerable Ananias the Iconographer /
Greatmartyr Euphemia the All-Praised /
Blessed Olga (in Baptism Helen), Princess of Russia
July 11, 2021

Troparion – Tone 2

When Thou didst descend to death, O Life immortal, Thou didst slay hell with the splendor of Thy Godhead. And when from the depths Thou didst raise the dead, all the powers of heaven cried out:// “O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to Thee!”

Troparion – Tone 3

Thou didst bring joy to the Orthodox and shame to the defenders of heresy, for thou didst confirm what the Fathers of the Fourth Council had correctly taught. O glorious martyr Euphemia, fair virgin of Christ,// entreat Christ God to grant us His great mercy!

Troparion – Tone 1

Giving thy mind the wings of divine understanding, thou didst soar above visible creation seeking God the Creator of all. When thou hadst found Him, thou didst receive re-birth through baptism. As one who enjoys the Tree of Life, thou remainest eternally incorrupt// O ever-glorious Olga.

Kontakion – Tone 2

Hell became afraid, O almighty Savior, seeing the miracle of Thy Resurrection from the tomb! The dead arose! Creation, with Adam, beheld this and rejoiced with Thee,// and the world, my Savior, praises Thee forever.

Kontakion – Tone 6

For the sake of Christ thy Bridegroom thou didst undergo struggles in both martyrdom and faith. Now intercede with the Mother of God that heresies and the insolent enemies of the Orthodox be placed underfoot. Thou didst receive and guard that which was defined by the six hundred and thirty God-bearing Fathers// O all-praised Euphemia.

Kontakion – Tone 4

Today let us praise God the Benefactor of all, Who glorified divinely-wise Olga// that through her prayers, He may grant our souls remission of sins.

Prokeimenon – Tone 2

The Lord is my strength and my song; / He has become my salvation.

V. The Lord has chastened me sorely, but He has not given me over to death.

Venerable Ananias the Iconographer

Saint Ananias was born in Russia and was tonsured in the monastery of Saint Antony the Roman at Novgorod. God endowed him with a gift for painting icons, and he exercised this talent for the glory of the Lord. The Venerable Ananias painted "marvelous icons of many holy wonderworkers." For thirty-three years, he never went beyond the fence of the monastery.

Historical records do not agree about the year of his repose. Some say that he went to the Lord in 1521, 1561, or 1581. His relics are buried in a hidden place at the Monastery. Saint Ananias is commemorated on the third Sunday of Pentecost and on June 17.

Greatmartyr Euphemia the All-Praised

The Miracle of Saint Euphemia the All-Praised: The holy Great Martyr Euphemia (September 16) suffered martyrdom in the city of Chalcedon in the year 304, during the time of the persecution against Christians by the emperor Diocletian (284-305). One and a half centuries later, at a time when the Christian Church had become victorious within the Roman Empire, God deigned that Euphemia the All-Praised should again be a witness and confessor of the purity of the Orthodox teaching.

In the year 451 in the city of Chalcedon, in the very church where the glorified relics of the holy Great Martyr Euphemia rested, the sessions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council (July 16) took place. The Council was convened for determining the precise dogmatic formulae of the Orthodox Church concerning the nature of the God-Man Jesus Christ. This was necessary because of the widespread heresy of the Monophysites ["mono-physis" meaning "one nature"], who opposed the Orthodox teaching of the two natures in Jesus Christ, the Divine and the Human natures (in one Divine Person). The Monophysites falsely affirmed that in Christ was only one nature, the Divine [i.e. that Jesus is God but not man, by nature], causing discord and unrest within the Church. At the Council were present 630 representatives from all the local Christian Churches. On the Orthodox side Anatolius, Patriarch of Constantinople (July 3), Juvenal, Patriarch of Jerusalem (July 2), and representatives of Saint Leo, Pope of Rome (February 18) participated in the conciliar deliberations. The Monophysites were present in large numbers, headed by Dioscorus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and the Constantinople archimandrite Euty chius.

After prolonged discussions the two sides could not come to a decisive agreement.

The holy Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople proposed that the Council submit the decision of the Church dispute to the Holy Spirit, through His undoubted bearer Saint Euphemia the All-Praised, whose wonderworking relics had been discovered during the Council's discussions. The Orthodox hierarchs and their opponents wrote down their confessions of faith on separate scrolls and sealed them with their seals. They opened the tomb of the holy Great Martyr Euphemia and placed both scrolls upon her bosom. Then, in the presence of the emperor Marcian (450-457), the participants of the Council sealed the tomb, putting on it the imperial seal and setting a guard to watch over it for three days. During these days both sides imposed upon themselves strict fast and made intense prayer. After three days the patriarch and the emperor in the presence of the Council opened the tomb with its relics: the scroll with the Orthodox confession was held by Saint Euphemia in her right hand, and the scroll of the heretics lay at her feet. Saint Euphemia, as though alive, raised her hand and gave the scroll to the patriarch. After this miracle many of the hesitant accepted the Orthodox confession, while those remaining obstinate in the heresy were consigned to the Council's condemnation and excommunication.

After an invasion by the Persians during the seventh century, the relics of Saint Euphemia were transferred from Chalcedon to Constantinople, into a newly built church dedicated to her. Many years later, during the period of the Iconoclast heresy, the reliquary with the relics of the saint was cast into the sea by order of the Iconoclast emperor Leo the Isaurian (716-741). The reliquary was rescued from the sea by the ship-owning brothers Sergius and Sergonos, who gave it over to the local bishop. The holy bishop ordered that the relics be preserved in secret, beneath a crypt, since the Iconoclast heresy was continuing to rage. A small church was built over the relics, and over the reliquary was put a board with an inscription stating whose relics rested within. When the Iconoclast heresy was finally condemned at the holy Seventh Ecumenical Council (in the year 787), during the time of Saint Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople (784-806) and the emperor Constantine VI (780-797) and his mother Saint Irene (797-802), the relics of the holy Great Martyr Euphemia were once again solemnly transferred to Constantinople.

Blessed Olga (in Baptism Helen), Princess of Russia

Saint Olga, Equal of the Apostles, was the wife of the Kievan Great Prince Igor. The struggle of Christianity with paganism under Igor and Olga, who reigned after Oleg (+ 912), entered into a new phase. The Church of Christ in the years following the reign of Igor (+ 945) became a remarkable spiritual and political force in the Russian realm. The preserved text of a treaty

of Igor with the Greeks in the year 944 gives indication of this: it was included by the chronicler in the "Tale of Bygone Years," under the entry recording the events of the year 6453 (945).

The peace treaty had to be sworn to by both the religious communities of Kiev: "Baptized Rus", i.e. the Christian, took place in the cathedral church of the holy Prophet of God Elias (July 20); "Unbaptized Rus", i.e. the pagans, in turn swore their oath on their weapons in the sanctuary of Perun the Thunderer. The fact, that Christians are included in the document in the first place, indicates their significant spiritual influence in the life of Kievan Rus.

Evidently at the moment when the treaty of 944 was being drawn up at Constantinople, there were people in power in Kiev sympathetic to Christianity, who recognized the historical inevitability of involving Rus into the life-creating Christian culture. To this trend possibly belonged even prince Igor himself, whose official position did not permit him personally to go over to the new faith, nor at that time of deciding the issue concerning the Baptism of the whole country with the consequent dispersal throughout it of Orthodox Church hierarchs. The treaty therefore was drawn up in the circumspect manner of expression, which would not hinder the prince to ratify it in either the form of a pagan oath, or in the form of a Christian oath.

But when the Byzantine emissaries arrived in Kiev, conditions along the River Dnepr had essentially changed. A pagan opposition had clearly emerged, at the head of which stood the Varangian vovoda (military-leader) Svel' d (or Sveinald) and his son Mstislav (Mtsisha) to whom Igor had given holdings in the Drevlyani lands.

Strong also at Kiev was the influence of the Khazar Jews, who could not but be displeased with the thought of the triumph of Orthodoxy in the Russian Land.

Unable to overcome the customary inertia, Igor remained a pagan and he concluded the treaty in the pagan manner, swearing an oath on his sword. He refused the grace of Baptism and was punished for his unbelief. A year later, in 945, rebellious pagans murdered him in the Drevlyanian land, cut down betwixt two trees. But the days of paganism and the lifestyle of the Slavic tribes basic to it were already numbered. The burden of government fell upon the widow of Igor -- the Kiev Great-princess Olga, and her three-year-old son Svyatoslav.

The name of the future enlightener of the Russian Land and of her native region is first to be met with in the "Tale of Bygone Years," in the phrase where it speaks about the marriage of Igor: "and they brought him a wife from Pskov, by the name of Olga." She belonged, so specifies the Joakimov Chronicle, to the lineage of the Izborsk princes, -- one of the obscure ancient-Russian princely dynasties, of which in Rus during the 10th-11th Centuries there numbered no less than twenty, but who were all displaced by the Rurikovichs or merged otherwise with them through marriage. Some of them were of local Slavic descent, others -- Varangian new-comers. It is known, that the Scandinavian Viking "koenigs" (kinglets) called to become princes in the Russian cities -- invariably assimilated to the Russian language, and often, they soon became genuinely Russian with Russian names and lifestyle, world-outlook and even physical appearance of attire.

Thus, Igor's wife also had the Varangian name "Helga," which in Russian is pronounced Olga. The feminine name Olga corresponds to the masculine name "Oleg" (Helgi), which means "holy" [from Germanic "heilig" for "holy"]. Although the pagan understanding of holiness was quite different from the Christian, it also presupposed within a man a particular frame of reference, of chastity and sobriety of mind, and of insight. The fact that people called Oleg the Wise-Seer ("Veschi") and Olga the Wise ("Mudra") shows the spiritual significance of names.

Rather later traditions regard her a native of a village named Vybuta, several kilometers from Pskov up along the River Velika. They still not so long ago used to point out at the river the Olga Bridge, the ancient fording place, where Olga was met by Igor. The Pskov geographic features have preserved several names connected with this great descendent of Pskov: the village of Ol'zhinets and Ol'gino Pole (Olga Field); the Olga Gateway, one of the branches of the River Velika; Olga Hill and the Olga Cross near Lake Pskov; and the Olga Stone at the village of Vybuta.

The beginning of the independent rule of Princess Olga is connected in the chronicles with the narrative about her terrible revenge on the Drevlyani, who murdered Igor. Having sworn their oaths on their swords and believing "only in their swords", the pagans were doomed by the judgment of God to also perish by the sword (Mt. 26: 52). Worshipping fire among the other primal elements, they found their own doom in the fire. And the Lord chose Olga to fulfill the fiery chastisement.

The struggle for the unity of Rus, for the subordination to the Kievan center of mutually divisive and hostile tribes and principalities paved the way towards the ultimate victory of Christianity in the Russian Land. For Olga, though still a pagan,

the Kiev Christian Church and its Heavenly patron saint the holy Prophet of God Elias [in icons depicted upon a fiery chariot] stood as a flaming faith and prayer of a fire come down from the heavens, and her victory over the Drevlyani—despite the severe harshness of her victory, was a victory of Christian constructive powers in the Russian realm over the powers of a paganism, dark and destructive.

The God-wise Olga entered into history as a great builder of the civil life and culture of Kievan Rus. The chronicles are filled with accounts of her incessant “goings” throughout the Russian land with the aim of the well-being and improvement of the civil and domestic manner of life of her subjects. Having consolidated the inner strengthening of the might of the Kiev great-princely throne, thereby weakening the influence of the hodge-podge of petty local princes in Rus, Olga centralized the whole of state rule with the help of the system of “pogosti” (administrative trade centers). In the year 946 she went with her son and retinue through the Drevlyani land, “imposing tribute and taxes”, noting the villages, inns and hunting places, liable for inclusion in the Kiev great-princely holdings. The next year she went to Novgorod, establishing administrative centers along the Rivers Msta and Luga, everywhere leaving visible traces of her activity. “Her lovischa (hunting preserves) were throughout all the land, the boundary signs, her places and administrative centers, wrote the chronicler, and her sleighs stand at Pskov to this very day, as are her directed places for snaring of birds along the Dneipr and the Desna Rivers; and her village of Ol’zhicha stands to the present day.”

The “pogosti” established by Olga, as financial-administrative and law-court centers, represented sturdy props of great-princely power in these places.

Being first of all, and in the actual sense of the word, centers of trade and exchange (the merchant as “guest”) gathered together and became organized around the settlements (and in place of the “humanly arbitrary” gathering of tribute and taxes, there now existed uniformity and order with the “pogosti” system). Olga’s “pogosti” became an important network of the ethnic and cultural unification of the Russian nation.

Later on, when Olga had become a Christian, they began to erect the first churches at the “pogosti”; from the time of the Baptism of Rus the “pogost” and church (parish) became inseparably associated. (It was only afterwards with the existence of cemeteries alongside churches that there developed the current meaning of the Russian word “pogost” to nowadays signify “parish graveyard”.)

Princess Olga exerted much effort to fortify the defensive might of the land. The cities were built up and strengthened, Vyshgorod (or Detintsa, Kroma) they enclosed with stone and oak walls (battlements), and they bristled them with ramparts and pallasades. Knowing how hostile many were to the idea of strengthening the princely power and the unification of Rus, the princess herself lived constantly “on the hill” over the Dneipr, behind the trusty battlements of Kievan Vyshgorod (“Verkhna-gorod” or “Upper-city”), surrounded by her faithful retainers. Two thirds of the gathered tribute, as the chroniclers testify, she gave over for the use of the Kiev “veche” (city-council), and the remaining one third went “to Olga, for Vyshgorod” -- for the needs of building fortifications. And to the time period of Olga, historians note the establishment of the first state frontiers of Russia -- to the west, with Poland. Heroic outposts to the south guarded the peaceful fields of the Kievans from the peoples of the Wild Plains. Foreigners hastened to Gardarika (“the land of cities”), as they called Rus, with merchandise and craftwares. Swedes, Danes, Germans all eagerly entered as mercenaries into the Russian army. The foreign connections of Kiev spread. This furthered the development of construction with stone in the city, the beginnings of which was initiated under Olga. The first stone edifices of Kiev -- the city palace and Olga’s upper enclosure -- were discovered by archaeologists only but in this century. (The palace, or more properly its foundations and remains of the walls were found in excavations during the years 1971-1972).

But it was not only the strengthening of the civil realm and the improvement of domestic norms of the manner of life for people that attracted the attention of the wise princess. Even more urgent for her was the fundamental transformation of the religious life of Rus, the spiritual transfiguration of the Russian nation. Rus had become a great power. Only two European realms could compare with it during these years in significance and might: in Eastern Europe -- the ancient Byzantine empire, and in the West the kingdom of Saxony.

The experience of both empires, connected with the exaltation in spirit of Christian teaching, with the religious basis of life, showed clearly, that the way to the future greatness of Rus lay not through military means, but first of all and primarily through spiritual conquering and attainment. Having entrusted Kiev to her teenage son Svyatoslav, and seeking grace and truth, Great-princess Olga in the Summer of 954 set off with a great fleet to Constantinople. This was a peaceful “expedition”, combining the tasks of religious pilgrimage and diplomatic mission, but the political considerations demanded that it become simultaneously a display of the military might of Rus on the Black Sea, which would remind the haughty “Romaioi” [Byzantine

Greeks] of the victorious campaigns of Askold and Oleg, who in the year 907 advanced in their shields “to the very gates of Constantinople.”

The result was attained. The appearance of the Russian fleet in the Bosphorus created the necessary effect for the developing of Russo-Byzantine dialogue. In turn, the southern capital struck the stern daughter of the north with its variety of beauty and grandeur of architecture, and its jumbled mixture of pagans and peoples from all over the world. But a great impression was produced by the wealth of Christian churches and the holy things preserved in them. Constantinople, “the city of the imperial Caesar,” the Byzantine Empire, strove in everything to be worthy of the Mother of God, to Whom the city was dedicated by Saint Constantine the Great (May 21) in 330 (see May 11). The Russian princess attended services in the finest churches of Constantinople: at Hagia Sophia, at Blachernae, and others.

In her heart the wise Olga found the desire for holy Orthodoxy, and she made the decision to become a Christian. The sacrament of Baptism was made over her by the Constantinople Patriarch Theophylactus (933-956), and her godfather was the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos (912-959). At Baptism she was given the name Helen in honor of the holy Equal of the Apostles Helen (May 21), the mother of Saint Constantine, and she also had been the discoverer of the Venerable Wood of the Cross of the Lord. In an edifying word spoken at the conclusion of the rite, the Patriarch said: “Blessed are you among Russian women, for you have forsaken the darkness and have loved the Light. The Russian people shall bless you in all the future generations, from your grandson and great-grandson to your furthestmost descendants.” He instructed her in the truths of the Faith, the churchly rules and the rule of prayer, he explained the commands about fasting, chastity and charity. “She, however,” says the Monk Nestor, “bowed her head and stood, literally like a sponge absorbing water, listening to the teaching, and bowing down to the Patriarch, she said, “By your prayers, O Master, let me be preserved from the wiles of enemies”.

It is in precisely this way, with a slightly bowed head, that Saint Olga is depicted on one of the frescoes of the Kiev Sophia cathedral, and likewise on a Byzantine miniature contemporary to her, in a manuscript portrait of the Chronicles of John Scilitius in the Madrid National Library. The Greek inscription, accompanying the miniature, terms Olga “Archontissa (i.e. ruler) of Rus,” “a woman, Helga by name, who came to the emperor Constantine and was baptized”. The princess is depicted in special head attire, “as a newly-baptized Christian and venerable deaconess of the Russian Church.” Beside her in the same attire of the newly-baptized -- is Malusha (+ 1001), the future mother of the Equal of the Apostles Saint Vladimir (July 15).

For one who had originally so disliked the Russians as did the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos, it was no trivial matter for him to become the godfather to the “Archontissa of Rus”. In the Russian chronicles are preserved narratives about this, how resolutely and on an equal footing Olga conversed with the emperor, amazing the Greeks by her spiritual depth and wisdom of governance, and displaying that the Russian nation was quite capable of accepting and assimilating the highest attainments of the Greek religious genius, the finest fruition of Byzantine spirituality and culture. And thus by a peaceful path Saint Olga succeeded in “taking Constantinople”, something which no other military leader before her had ever been able to do. According to the witness of the chronicles, the emperor himself had to admit, that Olga “had given him the slip” (had outwitted him), and the popular mind, jumbling together into one the traditions about Oleg the Wise and Olga the Wise, sealed in its memory this spiritual victory in the bylina or folk-legend entitled “Concerning the Taking of Constantinople by Princess Olga”.

In his work “About the Ceremonies of the Byzantine Court,” which has survived to the present day in just one copy, Constantine Porphyrogenitos has left us a detailed description of the ceremony surrounding the stay of Saint Olga at Constantinople. He describes a triumphant reception in the famed Magnaura palace, beneath the singing of bronze birds and the roars of copper lions, where Olga appeared with an impressive retinue of 108 men (not counting the men of Svyatoslav’s company). And there took place negotiations in the narrower confines of the chambers of the empress, and then a state dinner in the hall of Justinian. And here during the course of events, there providentially met together at one table the four “majestic ladies”: the grandmother and the mother of holy Equal of the Apostles Saint Vladimir (Saint Olga and her companion Malusha), and the grandmother and the mother of Saint Vladimir’s future spouse Anna (the empress Helen and her daughter-in-law Theophano). Slightly more than half a century would pass, and at the Desyatin church of the Most Holy Theotokos at Kiev would stand side each other the marble tombs of Saint Olga, Saint Vladimir and “Blessed Anna”.

During the time of one of these receptions, as Constantine Porphyrogenitos relates, the Russian princess was presented a golden plate inset with jewels. Saint Olga offered it to the vestry of the Sophia cathedral, where at the beginning of the thirteenth century it was seen and described by the Russian diplomat Dobrynya Yadeikovich (who afterwards was to become the Novgorod archbishop Anthony): “The large golden official plate of Olga of Russia, when she took it as tribute, having come to Constantinople; upon the plate be precious stones, and upon it is written in these stones the name Christ”.

Moreover, the wily emperor, after reporting such details as would underscore how “Olga had given him the slip”, also presents a difficult riddle for historians of the Russian Church. This is it: Saint Nestor the Chronicler relates in the “Tale of Bygone Years” that the Baptism of Olga took place in the Biblical year 6463 (955 or 954), and this corresponds to the account of the Byzantine chronicles of Kedrinos. Another Russian Church writer of the eleventh century, Yakov Mnikh, in his work “Eulogy and Laudation to Vladimir... and how Vladimir’s Grandmother Olga was Baptized”, speaks about the death of the holy princess (+ 969) and he notes that she lived as a Christian for fifteen years, and he places the actual date of Baptism as the year 954, which corresponds within several months to the date indicated by Nestor. In contrast to this, describing for us the stay of Olga at Constantinople and providing the precise dates of the receptions given in her honor, Constantine Porphyrogenitos has us to understand in no uncertain terms that all this occurred in the year 957.

To reconcile the cited chronicles, on the one hand, with the testimony of Constantine on the other hand, Russian Church historians are led to suppose one of two things: either Saint Olga made a second journey to Constantinople in the year 957 to continue negotiations with the emperor, or she was not baptized at Constantinople, having previously been baptized at Kiev in 954, and that she was merely making a pilgrimage to Byzantium, since she was already a Christian. The first supposition is the more credible.

As for the immediate diplomatic outcome of the negotiations, there were basic matters for Saint Olga that had been left unsettled. She had gained success on questions concerning Russian trade within the territories of the Byzantine Empire, and also the reconfirmation of the peace accord with Byzantium, concluded by Igor in the year 944. But she had not been able to sway the emperor on two issues of importance to Rus: the dynastic marriage of Svyatoslav with a Byzantine princess, and the conditions for restoring an Orthodox metropolitan to Kiev as had existed at the time of Askold. The evidently inadequate outcome of her mission is detected in her answer, when she had already returned home, which was given to emissaries sent out by the emperor. To the emperor’s inquiry about promised military aid, Saint Olga curtly replied through the emissaries: “If you had spent time with me at Pochaina, as I did at the Court, then I would send the soldiers to help you.”

Amidst all this, in spite of her failed attempts at establishing the Church hierarchy within Rus, Saint Olga, after becoming a Christian, zealously devoted herself to efforts of Christian evangelization among the pagans, and also church construction: “demanding the distressing of demons and the beginning of life for Christ Jesus”. She built churches: of Saint Nicholas and the church of the Holy Wisdom at Kiev, of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos at Vytebsk, and of the Holy Life-Creating Trinity at Pskov. Pskov from that period has been called in the chronicles the Domicile of the Holy Trinity. The church, built by Olga at the River Velika at a spot pointed out to her from on high, according to the chronicler, by a “light-beam of the Thrice-Radiant Divinity”, stood for more than one and an half centuries. In the year 1137 holy Prince Vsevolod-Gabriel (February 11) replaced this wooden temple with one made of stone, which in turn in 1363 was rebuilt and replaced finally with the presently existing Trinity cathedral.

Another very important monument of Russian “Monument Theology”, as Church architecture frequently is termed, connected with the name of Saint Olga, is the temple of the Wisdom of God at Kiev, which was started soon after her return from Constantinople, and consecrated on May 11, 960. This day was afterwards observed in the Russian Church as a special Church feastday.

In the Mesyatseslov (calendar supplement) of a parchment Epistle-book from 1307, under May 11 is written: “On this day the consecration of Saint Sophia took place at Kiev in the year 6460.” The date is indicated in the so-called “Antiochian” rather than generally-accepted Constantinople chronology, and it corresponds to the year 960 from the Birth of Christ.

It was no mere coincidence that Saint Olga received in Baptism the name of Saint Helen, who found the Venerable Wood of the Cross at Jerusalem (March 6). The foremost sacred item in the newly built Kiev Sophia temple was a piece of the Holy Cross, brought by this new Helen from Constantinople, and received by her in blessing from the Constantinople Patriarch. The Cross, by tradition, was hewn out from an entire piece of the Life-Creating Wood of the Lord. Upon the Cross-Wood was inscribed: “The Holy Cross for the Regeneration of the Russian Land, Received by Noble Princess Olga.”

Saint Olga did much to memorialize the first Russian confessors of the Name of Christ: over the grave of Askold the Saint Nicholas church was built, where according to certain accounts, she herself was afterwards interred. Over the grave of Dir was built the afore-mentioned Sophia cathedral, which stood for half a century and burned in the year 1017. On this spot Yaroslav the Wise later on built a church of Saint Irene in 1050, but the sacred items of Olga’s Sophia temple were transferred into a stone church of the same name now standing as the Kiev Sophia, started in 1017 and consecrated about the year 1030. In the Prologue of the thirteenth century, it says about the Olga Cross: “for It is now at Kiev in Saint Sophia in the altar on the right side.” The plundering of Kiev’s holy things, which after the Mongols was continued by the Lithuanians who captured the city in 1341, did not spare even this. Under Jagiello in the period of the Liublin Unia, which in 1384 united Poland and

Lithuania into one state, the Olga Cross was snatched from the Sophia cathedral and carried off by the Catholics to Lublin. Its further fate is unknown.

But even in Olga's time there were at Kiev among the nobles and retainers no few people who, in the words of Solomon, "hated Wisdom", and also Saint Olga, for having built Wisdom's temple. Zealots of the old paganism became all the more emboldened, viewing with hope the coming of age of Svyatoslav, who decidedly spurned the urgings of his mother to accept Christianity, and even becoming angry with her over this. It was necessary to hurry with the intended matter of the Baptism of Rus. The deceit of Byzantium, at the time not wanting to promote Christianity in Rus, played into the hands of the pagans. In search of a solution, Saint Olga looked to the west. No contradiction here yet existed. Saint Olga (+ 969) belonged still to the undivided Church (i.e. before the Great Schism of 1054), and she had scant possibility to study the theological points involved between the Greek and Latin Creeds. The opposition of West and East presented itself to her first of all as a political rivalry, of secondary importance in comparison with her task, the establishment of the Russian Church and the Christian enlightenment of Rus.

Under the year 959, the German chronicler named "the Continuant of Reginon," records: "to the king came emissaries of Helen, queen of the Russes, who was baptized in Constantinople, and who sought for their nation to have bishop and priests" King Otto, the future founder of the German Empire, willingly acceded to Olga's request, but he urged that the matter not be decided in haste. It was only on Nativity of the following year 960, that there was established a Russian bishop Libutius, from the monastery brethren of Anatolius Alban am Mainz. But he soon died (March 15, 961). In his place was ordained Adalbert of Trier, whom Otto "generously furnishing all needs" finally sent to Russia. It is difficult to say what would have happened, had the king not delayed for so long a while, but when in 962 when Adalbert showed up at Kiev, he "did not succeed in the matter for which he had been sent, and did consider his efforts to be in vain." Furthermore, on the return journey "certain of his companions were murdered, and the bishop himself did not escape mortal danger."

It turned out that after the passage of years, as Olga indeed had foreseen, matters at Kiev had twisted ultimately in favor of paganism, and Rus having become neither Orthodox nor Catholic, had second thoughts about accepting Christianity. The pagan reaction thus produced was so strong, that not only did the German missionaries suffer, but also some of the Kiev Christians who had been baptized with Olga at Constantinople. By order of Svyatoslav, Saint Olga's nephew Gleb was killed and some of the churches built by her were destroyed. It seems reasonable, that this transpired not without Byzantium's secret diplomacy: given the possibility of a strengthened Rus in alliance with Otto, the Greeks would have preferred to support the pagans, with the consequent intrigues against Olga and various disorders.

The collapse of the mission of Adalbert had providential significance for the future Russian Orthodox Church, escaping papal dominion. Saint Olga was obliged to accede to the humiliation and to withdraw fully into matters of personal piety, handing over the reigns of governance to her pagan-son Svyatoslav. Because of her former role, all the difficult matters were referred over to her in her wisdom of governance. When Svyatoslav absented himself from Kiev on military campaigns and wars, the governance of the realm was again entrusted to his mother. But the question about the Baptism of Rus was for a while taken off the agenda, and this was ultimately bitter for Saint Olga, who regarded the good news of the Gospel of Christ as the chief matter in her life.

She meekly endured the sorrow and grief, attempting to help her son in civil and military affairs, and to guide matters with heroic intent. The victories of the Russian army were a consolation for her, particularly the destruction of an old enemy of the Russian state—the Khazar kaganate. Twice, in the years 965 and 969, the armies of Svyatoslav went through the lands of "the foolish Khazars," forever shattering the might of the Jewish rulers of Priazovia and lower Povolzhia. A subsequent powerful blow was struck at the Mahometan Volga Bulgars, and then in turn came the Danube Bulgars. Eighteen years were spent on the Danube with the Kiev military forces. Olga was alone and in worry: it was as though, absorbed by military matters in the Balkans, Svyatoslav had forgotten about Kiev.

In the Spring of 969 the Pechenegs besieged Kiev: "and it was impossible to lead out the horses to water, for the Pechenegs stood at the Lybeda." The Russian army was far away, at the Danube. Having sent off messengers to her son, Saint Olga herself headed the defense of the capital. When he received the news, Svyatoslav rode quickly to Kiev, and "he hugged his mother and his children and was distressed, with what had happened with them from the Pechenegs." But after routing the nomads, the warrior prince began anew to say to his mother: "It does not please me to sit at Kiev, for I wish to live at Pereslavl' on the Dunaj (Danube) since that is the center of my lands."

Svyatoslav dreamed of creating a vast Russian holding from the Danube to the Volga, which would unite all Rus, Bulgaria, Serbia, the Near Black Sea region and Priazovia (Azov region), and extend his borders to those of Constantinople itself. Olga the Wise understood however, that all the bravery and daring of the Russian companies could not compare against the

ancient Byzantine Empire, and that the venture of Svyatoslav would fail. But the son would not heed the admonitions of his mother. Saint Olga thereupon said, "You see that I am ill. Why do you want to forsake me? After you bury me, then go wherever you wish."

Her days were numbered, and her burdens and sorrows sapped her strength. On July 11, 969 Saint Olga died: "and with great lament they mourned her, her son and grandsons and all the people." In her final years, amidst the triumph of paganism, she had to have a priest by her secretly, so she would not evoke new outbursts of pagan fanaticism. But before death, having found anew her former firmness and resolve, she forbade them to make over her the pagan celebration of the dead, and she gave final instructions to bury her openly in accord with Orthodox ritual. Presbyter Gregory, who was with her at Constantinople in 957, fulfilled her request.

Saint Olga lived, died, and was buried as a Christian. "And thus having lived and well having glorified God in Trinity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, having worshipped in the blessed faith, she ended her life in the peace of Christ Jesus, our Lord." As her prophetic testament to succeeding generations, with deep Christian humility she confessed her faith concerning her nation: "God's will be done! If it pleases God to have mercy upon my native Russian Land, then they shall turn their hearts to God, just as I have received this gift."

God glorified the holy toiler of Orthodoxy, the "initiator of faith" in the Russian Land, by means of miracles and incorrupt relics. Yakov Mnikh (+ 1072), a hundred years after her death, wrote in his work "Memory and Laudation to Vladimir": "God has glorified the body of His servant Olga, and her venerable body remains incorrupt to this day."

Saint Olga glorified God with good deeds in all things, and God glorified her. Under holy Prince Vladimir, ascribed by some as occurring in the year 1007, the relics of Saint Olga were transferred into the Desyatin church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos and placed within a special sarcophagus, such as was customary to enclose the relics of saints in the Orthodox East. "And hear ye concerning a certain miracle about her: the grave of stone is small in the church of the Holy Mother of God, this church built by the blessed Prince Vladimir, and in the grave is the blessed Olga. And an opening was made in the tomb to behold Olga's body lying there whole." But not everyone was given to see this miracle of the incorrupt relics of the saint: "For whoever came with faith, the aperture opened up, and there the venerable body could be seen lying intact, and one would marvel at such a miracle -- the body lying there for so many years without decay. Worthy of all praise is this venerable body: resting in the grave whole, as though sleeping. But for those who did not approach in faith, the grave aperture would not open up, and they would not see this venerable body, but only the grave."

Thus even after death Saint Olga espoused life eternal and resurrection, filling believers with joy and confounding non-believers. She was, in the words of Saint Nestor the Chronicler, "a precursor in the Christian land, like the dawn before sunrise or the twilight before the light."

The holy Equal of the Apostles Great Prince Vladimir, himself giving thanks to God on the day of the Baptism of Rus, witnessed before his countrymen concerning Saint Olga with the remarkable words: "The sons of Rus bless you, and also the generations of your descendants."

Epistle: Romans 5:1-10

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Gospel: Matthew 6:22-33

The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look

at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Service Schedule for the week of July 11

Today – 9:45 AM Hours, 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy followed by Coffee Hour in Daria Hall and the Ladies Altar Society stuffed cabbage sale

Wednesday July 14 – 7:00 PM Vespers with Litya **ST VLADIMIR FEAST DAY**

Thursday July 15 – 9:30 AM Divine Liturgy **ST VLADIMIR FEAST DAY**

Saturday July 17 – 5:00 PM Vespers followed by Potluck Supper in Daria Hall

Sunday July 18 – 10:00 AM Hierarchical Divine Liturgy followed by Social in Daria Hall

Weekly Giving

July 4 – 52 adults, 13 youth, \$2,754

Parish Announcements

The Ladies Altar Society will be selling stuffed cabbages today during Coffee Hour. There are extras for sale in case you did not already order!

There will be a Parish Council Meeting this Tuesday, July 13 at 7:00 PM in Daria Hall.

Archbishop Michael will visit the parish for our St. Vladimir Feast Day on

Saturday July 17 – Vespers followed by Potluck Supper

Sunday July 18 – Divine Liturgy followed by a Social (not a formal dinner) in Daria Hall

Sign-up sheets are in the back of the church for the Potluck Supper on July 17 and the Social on July 18. There is no charge for the Social, however, a donation basket will be available. The Social will be an enhanced Coffee Hour with appetizers and various foods to choose from, along with beverages, wine, and desserts. Vladika will gladly accept contributions from the various church organizations for the Distinguished Diocesan Benefactor Fund.

The FOCA Club is selling bundt cakes as a summer fundraiser! The cakes are freshly baked at the "Nothing Bundt Cake" bakery in Newtown. Free samples will be available at the July 18 Social. Order forms are in the back of the church and also will be with the cake samples in Daria Hall on July 18. The last day to order is August 1, and the cakes will be available for pick-up on August 15 in Daria Hall during Coffee Hour. All cakes are made with dairy products and are drizzle iced. The large cake will serve 8-10 people and is priced at \$25; the small bundtlet mini-bundt cake will serve 1-2 people and is priced at \$5. Flavor choices are chocolate chocolate chip, lemon, red velvet, and vanilla. Thank you for your support!

MOSAIC ICON: Donation envelopes are available at the candle desk. Please write "Mosaic Icon" in the memo portion of your check and turn in your donation envelope at the candle desk. If you have any questions please see Father Volodymyr or a member of the Parish Council. Thank you!

Please see a member of the FOCA Club if you are interested in purchasing a mural block (Daria Hall); funds will be used for Daria Hall improvements. Donors will have a brass nameplate added to the commemoration boards on the sides of the mural – either "Donated By" or "In Memory Of", with the names inscribed as designated by the donor.