

I SPY IN MY LITTLE ICON

by Kh. Jocelyn Abyad

STS. ZOSIMA AND MARY OF EGYPT

In this month's icon, we find two desert dwellers! Saint Zosima became a monk at a young age and gained a reputation as a very holy and generous man.

At the age of 53, he decided to join a desert monastery known for its austerity. You can see his monastery depicted right behind him at the base of the mountain in the icon. In this monastery, it was the tradition that each of the monks would spend the entire Great Fast alone in the desert in prayer and fasting. They would return to the monastery on Palm Sunday.

On one of St. Zosima's Lenten journeys, he came upon St. Mary of Egypt. At this time, St. Mary had been living in the desert for 47 years! Her clothes had become mere rags, and St. Zosima gave her his cloak to cover her body. This is why she is shown in an ill-fitting robe. St. Zosima immediately recognized that she was a holy



by Fr. Vladimir Lysak

woman and asked her to share the story of her life. She agreed and began to explain, but only if he promised to keep her existence a secret.

St. Mary shared that she was born in Egypt and at the age of 12 ran away from home. She spent her youth attending wild parties and acting sinfully. What money she had she earned from begging and spinning flax.

Just before she turned 30, she decided to follow a group of pilgrims to Jerusalem to the Church of the Holy

Sepulchre. But she was not going as a pilgrim... she was going to try to convince the other pilgrims to leave their faith behind!

This is the moment when God intervened in a miraculous way for St. Mary. As she attempted to enter the church, she felt a strong presence blocking her from entering. She immediately knew it was because of her sins that she could not pass and she was filled with deep remorse. As

she turned to walk away, she saw an icon of the Theotokos and begged her to help her to change her life and follow God's ways. She repented of her sins and promised to leave the world behind if God would only forgive her.

A second time she attempted to enter the church and this time, she could walk right in! She venerated the cross and heard a voice tell her, "If you cross the River Jordan, you will find peace." She immediately sought out confession and received absolution. She kept her promise to the Theotokos and entered the desert, leaving the world behind. Alone in the wilderness with God, she found deep peace and holiness.

After sharing her life story with St. Zosima, she asked him to return to the same desert spot the following year and bring her Holy Communion. He did so, and as he approached the spot, St. Zosima saw her walk across the Jordan River to him! You can see this event in our icon- St. Mary is standing on the water, not on land. You also see St. Zosima presenting to her the Holy and Precious Body and Blood of Our Lord. After receiving Communion, St. Mary asked St. Zosima to return again the following year and he agreed.

As planned, St. Zosima returned, but this time, he found that St. Mary had died and her body lay in the spot where they had agreed to meet. Written in the sand near her was a message that she had died the year before just after receiving Holy Communion. St. Zosima was amazed that her body had been preserved incorrupt the entire year and began the work of burying the saint. But God was not done providing miracles for St. Mary! A lion happened to pass by St. Zosima and began to help him to dig a grave through the dry, desert ground for St. Mary! Now that the saint rested in peace, St. Zosima shared her incredible life and holiness with his monastery brethren. Her story was preserved in oral tradition until it was recorded by St. Sophronius.

ST. JOHN the BAPTIST

Chocolate Locusts

We like to remember that our dear friend St. John the Baptist fasted in the desert from his childhood in order to prepare for his life of preaching by eating, as scripture tells us, wild honey and locusts. Now, raw honey is a real favorite of our family and eating that is a treat, but locusts? Well, yes! Locusts are a treat here, too! Not real insects, of course, but ones made of chocolate!

We found some really nice candy molds here:
<https://www.streichs.com/Molds/Chocolate-Candy-Molds/Animal-Molds/3-D-Grasshoppers-Chocolate-Candy-Mold>

Any bug-shaped molds will do!

Ingredients

Melting Chocolate + Crispy Rice Cereal

Preparation

We just melt some chocolate, either in a double-boiler on the stove or in the microwave, stir in some puffed rice cereal, and fill the molds!

When they harden, you can pop them out and munch on some crispy locusts, just like St. John the Baptist!

A RECIPE from ByziMom.com for February 24:
The 1st & 2nd Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist