

KNOW YOUR FAITH

By Lynne Wardach



Eight hundred years before the birth of Jesus there lived a prophet named Jonah who one day heard the word of God...

Jonah 1-3 *The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord. Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.*

Have you ever tried to run away from God? Anytime we ignore the voice of our conscience and neglect to do the right thing, we are like Jonah. The Ninevites were a cruel and difficult people, and Jonah didn't want to be the one to reach out to them because he truly didn't like them. He didn't think they would believe him, and so he was afraid to do what God had asked him. Jonah decided to ignore the voice of God. This was wrong, but God knows all things!

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”...

It looks like Jonah wasn't about to get away with it. He decided he should confess what he did and accept the consequences of his actions.

He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.) The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

How brave of Jonah to take responsibility for what he had done wrong! He may have disobeyed God, but he did not sin further by denying it and subjecting the others to the wrath of God, because they had done nothing wrong.

Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said:

"In my distress I called to the Lord and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry. You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me...."

Jonah continued to pray to God and ask for forgiveness for what he had done. The Lord, Who is so very merciful and forgives everyone who sincerely repents, accepted his prayer and gave Jonah one more chance.

And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time:

"Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

What do you think Jonah did this time?

Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh....

This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

"By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

This time, Jonah could assure the people of Nineveh that no matter how badly they had sinned, God would forgive them if they repented sincerely. This time he had the confidence to do the job well because he KNEW God would do this, because He had just done so for HIM!

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

HOORAY for the Ninevites! Hooray for Jonah! Hooray for everyone who repents of their sins and accepts the forgiveness that God has to offer to those who obey Him!

The Prophet Jonah is commemorated on September 21 by Greeks and on September 22 by Slavic tradition.

