

MEANWHILE, BACK IN BYZANTIUM

by Kathryn Reetzke



Mosaic of St Irene in Hagia Sophia: (wikipedia image)

As Princess Piroska of Hungary looked upon her family and homeland for the last time, she thought not about her beautiful clothing or jewels, but about who she could help once she became queen in Constantinople. Her uncle had arranged for her to marry the Byzantine Emperor John II Komnenus

(c. 1087-1143). Upon her conversion to Orthodoxy from Roman Catholicism before her wedding, she became known as Irene.

While serving as queen and mother to her 8 children, she spent much of her time devoted to building churches, monasteries, hospitals, and orphanages in Byzantium. She used her position of authority to help others. Queen Irene also helped pilgrims travel from her homeland of Hungary to Constantinople. Queen Irene made sure that her largest project, a complex to honor Christ, had a place for all people to be treated while sick. She also secured the promise of her husband's help to complete the Cathedral of Christ the Savior Pantocrator. Queen Irene reposed on August 13, 1124 and her husband Emperor John kept his promise to finish the Cathedral. It became the second largest monastery complex in Constantinople after the Hagia Sophia and still stands (as a mosque) today.

May Queen Irene teach us to value not the things of this world but to worship Christ the Pantocrator, the Almighty-One, who is the true King of us all.



Christ the Pantocrator mosaic from Hagia Sophia: (wikipedia image)