

# Once Upon a **SAINT**

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## The Wonderful Pokrov

A long time ago, when the Virgin Mother gave birth to the baby Jesus, she wore a veil made out of a simple pale-colored Syrian/Palestinian designed silk. She wore the same veil when she watched her son crucified, and when she learned the news that He had risen from the dead. But when she herself was assumed into Heaven at her Dormition, she left behind that simple veil (and many wonderful smelling flowers too!). The Apostle John had been taking care of Mama Mary ever since Jesus died on the cross. And so he gathered up the Theotokos' things and treasured them. He gave the veil to the Church, along with other articles of her clothing such as her belt and a tunic, where they ended up being brought for safe-keeping in the Blachernae Church in Constantinople a few hundred years later. Did you know that the Russian word Pokrov (Ποκροβ), and the Greek word Skepi (Σκέπη), both mean "veil?" The words also mean protection or intercession! And something happened to show us that our Lady's veil is indeed both a veil and a protection.

It was 4am on Sunday, the first day of October, and St. Andrew the Blessed Fool-for-Christ was praying with a Church full of people. He was a Slav by birth and had worked as a bodyguard in Constantinople before becoming a Fool-for-Christ. The people were gathered to beg the Theotokos' intercession against an army that was fast approaching (some say the enemy was Muslim, others the pagan Rus). The people had stayed up praying all night, and were singing the Akathyst in praise of the Theotokos. As St. Andrew prayed, he saw the top of the church opening up! The Theotokos descended through the dome with angels and saints, light coming out from all around her. She knelt in the Church, praying and weeping to God, begging for His mercy to be upon all the faithful Christians in the world. When her prayer was finished, she walked to the altar where her veil was kept, took it in her hands, and as it miraculously grew, she spread it over the whole Church, covering the whole people! St. Andrew turned to his student, Epiphanius, in amazement.

"Do you see, brother, the Holy Theotokos, praying for all the world?" Epiphanius replied whispering, in wonder: "I do see, holy Father, and I am in awe."

St. Andrew knew that when the Virgin spread her veil out over the people, that this was a special sign that she would save them. The result of her protection was two-fold: the enemy fleet was defeated, and those who survived became Christian without hesitation.

The Empress Irene (do you remember that she was the ruler that ended iconoclasm?) gave the veil to the Emperor Charlemagne of France as part of an attempted marriage a mere decade after this miracle took place. In turn, Charlemagne's grandson, King Charles the Bald, presented the veil of the Theotokos to the Chartres Cathedral for public veneration. But the veil's protection did not end there. A pagan invasion from Normandy came to defeat Chartres. The French prayed, and the Bishop held out the veil as a banner to the French Christian armies. The courage of the French armies increased a great deal, but the pagan Normans suddenly became terrified. Everyone knew that the veil of the Theotokos had once again come through for them, and they thanked the Theotokos for protecting them.

During the French Revolution, the sacred veil was cut up into pieces as many Churches were desecrated. The devout French people gathered up the torn veil, saving and venerating the relics in their homes. Once France stabilized, the people returned some of the pieces, and the largest part of the veil can be venerated in the Chartres Cathedral to this day. Smaller relics of the veil of the Theotokos have been taken apart into even smaller pieces and spread throughout the world. It makes me a little sad to think that St. Irene gave such a treasure away, but I think Mama Mary knew that her veil would be cut up in France and spread out over the world later. After all, it is another version of St. Andrew's vision: the Theotokos' veil is literally spread all over the world now, and more importantly, so is her protection. Among many other relics, the Chapel of St. Anthony in Pittsburgh has a piece of the Theotokos' veil, and there's even a traveling ministry of relics (including the Theotokos' veil!) in the U.S. called "Treasures of the Church," which will visit Churches upon request so that Christians can venerate these sacred items. We honor the Prokov of the Theotokos on October 1st.

To celebrate the feast of the Theotokos spreading and covering Christians with her protective veil, one can eat any foods that spread and cover something else (like crackers and cheese spread), but my favorite spreading dish is cinnamon rolls with a buttercream frosting (light colored like the Prokov!) that melts and spreads on top of warm rolls.

*"Protected by your appearance, O Mother of God, today we devout people solemnly celebrate. Gazing upon your most pure icon, we fervently say: Protect us with your holy veil, and deliver us from all evil, imploring your Son, Christ our God, to save our souls...Today the Virgin is present in the Church, and with the choirs of saints, invisibly prays to God for us.*

*The angels worship with the hierarchs, the apostles rejoice with the prophets; because the Theotokos prays for us to the eternal God." -Troparion and Kontakion of the Feast of the Holy Protection of the Mother of God*