



# St Demetrios

*Feast Day Oct 26th*

**Saint Demetrios** is also the well-known patron saint of **Thessaloniki, Greece's second-largest city**, and millions of Greeks hold a special place in their hearts for this important Christian martyr for this reason.

**His feast day of October 26** also coincides with Thessaloniki's most important day in its modern history: **The city's liberation from the Ottoman Turks in 1912.**

Understandably, Thessalonians all over the world consider this day one of the most important of the entire year, since they celebrate not only the feast day of their patron saint but also the day their beloved city was free once again, after nearly **five centuries of Ottoman rule.**

The Great Martyr Demetrios (Dēmétrios) **the Myrrh-gusher of Thessaloniki** was the son of a Roman proconsul in Thessaloniki. Three centuries had elapsed and Roman paganism, spiritually shattered and defeated by the multitude of martyrs and confessors of the Savior, intensified its persecutions. The parents of Saint Demetrios were secret Christians, and he was baptized and raised in the Christian Faith in a secret church in his father's home.

By the time Demetrios had reached maturity and his father had died, **Emperor Galerius Maximian had ascended the throne (305).** Maximian, confident in Demetrios's education as well as his administrative and military abilities, appointed him to his father's position as proconsul of the Thessaloniki district. The young commander's principal duties were to defend the city from barbarians and to eradicate Christianity. The Emperor's policy regarding Christians was expressed simply: "Put to death anyone who calls on the name of Christ." The Emperor did not suspect that by appointing Demetrios he had provided him with the opportunity to bring many people to Christ.

Accepting the appointment, Demetrios returned to Thessaloniki and confessed and glorified our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of persecuting and executing Christians, he began to **teach the Christian Faith openly** to the inhabitants of the city and to overthrow pagan customs and the worship of idols. The compiler of his Life, Saint Simeon Metaphrastes (November 9), says that because of his teaching zeal he became "a second Apostle Paul" for Thessaloniki, particularly since "the Apostle to the Gentiles" founded the first community of believers in the city (1 Thess. and 2 Thess.).

The Lord also destined Saint Demetrios to follow Saint Paul on the path to martyrdom. When Maximian learned that the newly-appointed proconsul was a Christian, and that he had **converted many Roman subjects to Christianity**, the Emperor's rage knew no bounds. Returning from a campaign in the area of the Black Sea, the Emperor decided to lead his army through Thessaloniki, determined to massacre the Christians.

Learning of this, Saint Demetrios ordered his faithful servant Lupus to give his wealth to the poor saying, "Distribute my earthly riches among them, for we shall seek heavenly riches for ourselves." He began to pray and fast, preparing himself for martyrdom.

When the Emperor came into the city, he summoned Demetrios, who boldly confessed himself a Christian and denounced the falsehood and futility of Roman polytheism. **Maximian ordered Demetrios to be thrown into prison. An Angel appeared to him, comforting and encouraging him.**

Meanwhile the Emperor amused himself by **staging games in the circus.** His champion was a German by the name of **Lyaeos.** He challenged Christians to wrestle with him on a platform built over the upturned spears of the victorious soldiers. A brave Christian named **Nestor** went to the prison to Saint Demetrios, his instructor in the Faith, asking for his blessing to fight the barbarian. **With the blessing and prayers of Saint Demetrios,** Nestor defeated the fierce German and hurled him from the platform

onto the spears of the soldiers, just as the murderous pagan would have done with the Christian. The enraged commander **ordered the execution of the holy Martyr Nestor (October 27)** and sent a guard to the prison to **kill Saint Demetrios. At dawn on October 26**, 306 soldiers appeared in the Saint's underground prison and ran him through with lances. His faithful servant, Saint Lupus, gathered up the blood-soaked garment of Saint Demetrios he took the imperial ring from his finger, a symbol of his high status, and dipped it in the blood. With the ring and other holy things sanctified the blood of Saint Demetrios, Saint Lupus began to heal the infirm. The Emperor ordered his soldiers to arrest and kill him.

The body of the holy Great Martyr Demetrios was cast out for wild animals to devour, but the Christians took it and secretly buried it in the earth.

During the reign of **Saint Constantine (306-337)**, a church was built over the grave of **Saint Demetrios**. A hundred years later, during the construction of a majestic new church on the old spot, the incorrupt relics of the holy martyr were uncovered. **Since the seventh century a miraculous flow of fragrant myrrh** has been found beneath the crypt of the Great Martyr Demetrios, so he is called “**the Myrrh-gusher.**”

Several times, those venerating the holy wonderworker tried to bring his holy relics, or a part of them, to Constantinople. Invariably, Saint Demetrios made it clear that he would not permit anyone to remove even a portion of his relics.

It is interesting that among the barbarians threatening the Romans, Slavs occupied an important place, in particular those settling upon the Thessalonian peninsula. Some even believe that the parents of Saint Demetrios were of Slavic descent. While advancing towards the city, pagan Slavs were repeatedly turned away by the apparition of a threatening radiant youth, going around on the walls and inspiring terror in the enemy soldiers. Perhaps this is why the name of Saint Demetrios was particularly venerated among the Slavic nations after they were enlightened by the Gospel. On the other hand, Greeks dismiss the idea that Saint Demetrios was a Slavic saint.

The very first pages of the Russian Primary Chronicle, as foreordained by God, is bound up with the name of the holy Great Martyr Demetrios of Thessaloniki. The Chronicle relates that when Oleg the Wise threatened the Greeks at Constantinople (907), the Greeks became terrified and said, “This is not Oleg, but rather Saint Demetrios sent upon us from God.” Russian soldiers always believed that they were under the special protection of the holy Great Martyr Demetrios. Moreover, in the old Russian barracks the Great Martyr Demetrios was always depicted as Russian. Thus this image entered the soul of the Russian nation.

Church veneration of the holy Great Martyr Demetrios in Russia began shortly after the Baptism of Rus. Toward the beginning of the 1070s the Dimitriev monastery at Kiev, known afterwards as the Mikhailov-Zlatoverkh monastery, was founded. The monastery was built by the son of Yaroslav the Wise, Great Prince Izyaslav, Demetrios in Baptism (+ 1078). The mosaic icon of Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki from the cathedral of the Dimitriev monastery has been preserved up to the present day, and is in the Tretyakov Gallery.

In the years 1194-1197 the Great Prince of Vladimir, Vsevolod III the Great-Nest (Demetrios in Baptism) “built at his court a beautiful church of the holy martyr Demetrios, and adorned it wondrously with icons and frescoes.” The Dimitriev cathedral also reveals the embellishment of ancient Vladimir. The wonderworking icon of Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki from the cathedral iconostasis is located even now in Moscow, at the Tretyakov gallery. It was painted on a piece of wood from the grave of the holy Great Martyr Demetrios, brought from Thessaloniki to Vladimir in 1197.

One of the most precious depictions of the saint, a fresco on a column of the Vladimir Dormition

cathedral, was painted by the holy Iconographer Andrew Rublev (July 4).

The family of Saint Alexander Nevsky (November 23) also venerated Saint Demetrios. Saint Alexander named his eldest son in honor of the holy Great Martyr. His younger son, Prince Daniel of Moscow (March 4), built a church dedicated to the holy Great Martyr Demetrios in the 1280s. This was the first stone church in the Moscow Kremlin. Later in 1326, under Ivan Kalita, it was taken down and the Dormition cathedral was built in its place.

The memory of Saint Demetrios of Thessaloniki is historically associated in Rus with the military, patriotism and the defense of the country. This is apparent by the saint's depiction on icons as a soldier in plumed armor, with a spear and sword in hand. There is a scroll (in later depictions) on which is written the prayer of Saint Demetrios for the salvation of the people of Thessaloniki, "Lord, do not permit the city or the people to perish. If You save the city and the people, I shall be saved with them. If they perish, I will perish with them."

In the particular spiritual experience of the Russian Church, veneration of the holy Great Martyr Demetrios of Thessaloniki is closely linked with the memory of the defense of the nation and Church by the Great Prince of Moscow, Demetrios of the Don (May 19). "An Account of the Life and Repose of the Great Prince Demetrios of the Don, Tsar of Russia," written in the year 1393, already regards the Great Prince as a Saint, as other old Russian histories do. Great Prince Demetrios was a spiritual son and disciple of Saint Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow (February 12), and a disciple and associate of other great figures of prayer in the Russian Land: Saint Sergius of Radonezh (September 25), Demetrios of Priluki (February 11), Saint Theodore of Rostov (November 28). The Account states:

He [Great Prince Demetrios] worried a great deal about the churches of God, and he held the territory of the Russian land by his bravery: he conquered many enemies who had risen against us, and he protected his glorious city Moscow with wondrous walls. ...The land of Russia prospered during the years of his reign.

From the time of the building of the white-walled Kremlin (1366) by Great Prince Demetrios, Moscow was called "White-Stoned."

By the prayers of his Heavenly patron, the holy warrior Demetrios of Thessaloniki, Great Prince Demetrios, in addition to his brilliant military victories, also gained the further prominence of Russia. He repelled the onslaught of the Lithuanian armies of Olgerd, he routed the Tatar army of Begich at the River Vozha (1378), and he smashed the military might of all the Golden Horde at the Battle of Kulikovo Field on September 8, 1380 (the Feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos), set between the Rivers Don and Nepryadva. The Battle of Kulikovo, for which the nation calls him Demetrios of the Don, became the first Russian national exploit, rallying the spiritual power of the Russian nation around Moscow. The "Zadonschina," an inspiring historic poem written by the priest Sophronios of Ryazem (1381) is devoted to this event.

Prince Demetrios of the Don had a great reverence for the holy Great Martyr Demetrios. In 1380, on the eve of the Battle of Kulikovo, he solemnly transferred from Vladimir to Moscow the most holy object in the Vladimir Dimitriev cathedral: the icon of the Great Martyr Demetrios of Thessaloniki, painted on a board from the grave of the saint. A chapel dedicated to the Great Martyr Demetrios was built at Moscow's Dormition Cathedral.

The Saint Demetrios Memorial Saturday was established for church-wide remembrance of the soldiers who fell in the Battle of Kulikovo. This memorial service was held for the first time at the Trinity-Saint Sergius monastery on October 20, 1380 by Saint Sergius of Radonezh, in the presence of Great Prince Demetrios of the Don. It is an annual remembrance of the heroes of the Battle of Kulikovo, among whom are the Schema-monks Alexander (Peresvet) and Andrew (Oslyab).

**Saint Demetrios is regarded as a protector of the young, and is also invoked by those struggling with lustful temptations.**