

St. Maria, the Niece of Abramius, the Recluse of Mesopotamia



Commemorated on October 29

St. Abramius the Hermit and Blessed Maria, his niece, lived the ascetic life in the village of Chidan, near the city of Edessa in Mesopotamia. They were contemporaries and fellow countrymen of St. Ephraim the Syrian, who afterwards wrote about their life.

St. Abramius began the solitary life in the prime of youth. He left his parents' home and settled in the wilderness and spending his days in unceasing prayer. After the deaths of his parents, the saint refused his inheritance and requested his relatives to give it away to the poor. By his strict ascetic life, fasting, and love for mankind, Abramius attracted many seeking spiritual enlightenment, prayers and blessings.

Soon his faith was put to a serious test, as he was appointed presbyter in one of the pagan villages of Mesopotamia. For three years, the saint worked to enlighten the pagans. He had a pagan temple destroyed and built a church in its place. Humbly enduring mockery and beatings from idol-worshippers, he entreated the Lord, "Look down, O Master, upon Your servant, hear my prayer. Strengthen me and set Your servants free from diabolical snares, and grant them to know You, the one true God." He was granted the happiness to see the culmination of his righteous efforts: the pagans eventually came to believe in Jesus Christ, and St. Abramius baptized each of them himself.

Having fulfilled his priestly duties, Abramius again withdrew into his wilderness, where he continued to glorify God. The devil, put to shame by the deeds of St. Abramius, tried to entrap him with proud thoughts. Once at midnight, when St. Abramius was at prayer in his cell, a light suddenly shone and a voice was heard, "Blessed are you, Abramius, for no other man has done my will as you have!" Understanding the temptations from the enemy, the saint said, "I am a sinful man, but I trust in the help and grace of my God. I do not fear you, and your illusions do not scare me." Then, in the name of Jesus Christ, he ordered the devil to depart.

Another time, the devil appeared before the saint in the form of a youth, lit a candle and began to sing Psalms 118 and 119: "Blessed are the blameless in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." Realizing that this also was a demonic temptation, St. Abramius crossed himself and asked, "If you know that the blameless are blessed, then why trouble them?" The devil answered, "I provoke them in order to conquer them and turn them away from every good deed." To this, the saint replied, "You gain victory over those who, like yourself, have fallen away from God. You are forced to vanish, like smoke in the wind, from before the face of those who love God." After these words the devil vanished. Thus, St. Abramius defeated the Enemy, being strengthened by divine grace. After fifty years of ascetic life, he peacefully fell asleep in the Lord.

St. Abramius' niece, the Nun Maria, grew up being sustained by his spiritual instruction. Her father died when she was seven, and so she was raised by her saintly uncle. However, the devil tried to turn her from the true path. When she was 27, she fell into a sinful relationship with a man. Thoroughly ashamed, she left her cell, went to another city, and began to live in a brothel. Two years later, when he learned of this, St. Abramius dressed himself in soldier's garb so that he should not be recognized, and he went to the city to find his niece. Pretending to be one of her clients, he revealed his identity once they were alone. With many tears and exhortations, he brought her to repentance and took her back to her cell.

St. Maria spent the rest of her days in prayer and tears of repentance. The Lord forgave her and even granted her the gift of healing the sick. She peacefully died five years after St. Abramius.

Troparion (Tone 1) " "

You abandoned all earthly comforts, O Father Abramius,

Living righteously in hope of things to come and receiving a sacred anointing.

Initiated into divine mysteries, you enlighten those who cry:

Glory to him who has strengthened you!

Glory to him who has granted you a crown!

Glory to him who through you works healing for all!

Kontakion (Tone 3) “

You lived on earth as an angel in the flesh

And flourished as a well“planted tree, watered by abstinence and tears,

O Abramius, vessel of the Holy Spirit!

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