

Legend of the Miracle of the Mother of God the Guarantor

Of particular interest is the Miracle which occurred in Sinai when the fathers, because of a scarcity of bread, wanted to leave the monastery and disperse. The story relates that the monks of the Sinai monastery were hard pressed by hunger and also tormented by a great number of flies.

Abandoning hope of being able to feed themselves, they decided to close down the monastery, but first set off on a farewell pilgrimage to the Holy Summit (Moses Mountain or Jebel Musa on Sinai).

The Virgin Mary, in the form of an Arab woman with a child in her arms appeared at the same time to the holy fathers close to the Holy Summit, and to the steward at the foot of the hill, dissuaded them from abandoning the monastery and promised help. The monks believed this only when they saw a caravan bearing alms in front of the monastery. When they asked who had sent this beneficence, they were told that it had been "a princess, with her epitropos" (guardian).

As they could not find the mysterious benefactors in the monastery, the monks realized that they were the Virgin Mary and Moses. This was not the only miracle: "From that time onward the flies disappeared as well, not only from the monastery but from the entire surrounding of that Holy Hill; and further on in the desert, most of all in Raita, they can be found in their multitudes to this day."

In remembrance of the miracle and to bear witness to the truth of the tradition are the chapel in honor of the Virgin Mary which exists "to this day under the name of Panagia Oikonomissa"(Mother of God the Guarantor), and a stone niche with an icon on the Path of Moses where the Virgin Mary appeared before the fathers up on the Holy Summit. The Sinai Monastery, or the Monastery of St. Catherine, was built by the Emperor Justinian in the 6th century and dedicated to the Virgin Mary, but the dedication was changed in the 7th or 10th century. During its long history, the monastery enjoyed special status, received generous alms and attracted numerous Christian and Muslim pilgrims, among them St. Savathe Serbian. The chapel mentioned in the legend as Panagia Oikonomissa exists to this day among the crags of the Sinai hills above the Monastery of St. Catherine on the Holy Summit.