



# Theotokos of the Life-Giving Spring

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*O Mother of God, living and overflowing fountain, strengthen those who sing your praise and who gather now to honor you, and on this occasion of your divine commemoration, deem them worthy of the glorious crown of heaven.*

*(From the Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokos, Ode 3)*

The first week after Pascha is known as Bright Week. During Bright Week, we celebrate the Divine Liturgy as we did during the midnight Resurrection (Anastasis) Service. Anyone who is Orthodox may partake of Holy Communion during this week without fasting in the morning; all are welcome to partake of the bounty of this great feast. This is a true week of celebration. Why is Friday of Bright Week so important? On that day we commemorate the consecration of the Church of the Theotokos of the Life-Giving Spring (*Zoodochos Peghe*).

The church is located outside of Constantinople toward the district of the Seven Towers. Long ago, when the city was known as Byzantium, the area was a thick forest. In the fifth century, a man by the name of Markellis used to take long walks there meditating and praying to God. Markellis was no one special, but he loved his walks through the forest enjoying the beauty of the environment and most of all his meditations. He was a simple man. One day during his walk Markellis met a blind man, who said he was very thirsty. Markellis had no water to give him, but that did not stop

him. Taking the blind man in hand, Markellis went in search of water. Markellis heard a voice tell him to search deep into the forest, so they forged deeper into the thick of the forest. Markellis still found no water, but then he heard a voice. He did not know who the voice was, but heeded what it said. The voice called him by a different name: "Emperor Leo! Go a little deeper into the forest and find the muddy water. Quench the man's thirst and wash the man's face with the muddy water and you will see the power of the Lord."

Markellis followed the voice; he persisted through the forest and found the muddy water. Markellis immediately washed the man's eyes and gave him a drink. All at once, the blind man's face changed. He opened his eyes for the first time and saw the beauty of the forest and the world around him. Markellis was as shocked as the blind man.

Two events happened in this story: Markellis heard a voice, and the blind man drank and his eyes were washed with muddy water. The first incident, the voice that spoke to Markellis told



him four things: first, that he would find water in the forest; second, the voice called him Emperor Leo; third, it told him to give the man water to drink and to wash his eyes; and finally it told him to behold the power of the Lord. Everything that Markellis heard actually came to be, not in the order he heard them. First, he found the small pool of water in the thick of the forest. Second, he gave the blind man water to drink and washed his eyes with the muddy water. What other miracle involved a blind man whose eyes were washed with mud, and sight was given him? That's right, it was Jesus with the blind man at the pool of Siloam, one of His many miracles. Markellis's washing of the man's eyes became the second Siloam. The voice had also said that he would see the "wonder of the Lord." Jesus used Markellis to perform a miracle with the blind man. This shows us that Jesus works through each one of us when we are receptive to his instructions.

Who was the first person to be receptive of Jesus that we know? His mother, the Theotokos, when she accepted the will of God to be the vessel that would carry the Lord.

This wasn't the end to Markellis's story! He became an Emperor and his name was changed to Leo. What's more, he built a huge church at the place where the spring gave sight to the blind man. The Church was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and called the Church of the Life-Giving Spring. It is named in honor of her, as we sing in this hymn:

"O Mother of God, living and overflowing fountain, strengthen those who sing your praise and who gather now to honor you, and on this occasion of your divine commemoration, deem them worthy of the glorious crown of heaven." (From the Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokos, Ode 3)

Subsequently, many miracles happened at the spring. The point that needs to be emphasized is that both these people were simple people; their life was immersed in their faith. The Theotokos lived in the Temple; Markellis meditated and prayed daily. With that, God used these two simple people – with their consent – as vehicles for His work.

The feast day we are actually celebrating is the consecration of that church. What is a church consecration? It's like a baptism for a church building. During the service, the bishop seals the holy relics of a saint into the altar table. Then the he washes, dries, and "dresses" the altar table with a cloth called the antimension. The bishop then anoints the entire church, including the iconography and the walls.



## STORYBOARD PROJECT

A storyboard involves a series of pictures that help tell a story. Animators and cartoonists use storyboards to help them convey a storyline. In this case, a storyboard will help us remember the main events of the feast we just learned about, allowing us to use our creativity to render the essence of the story so that others may enjoy it also.

### MATERIALS

- Paper
- Crayons, colored pencils, markers, oil crayons
- Hole punch or stapler
- Ribbons, yarn, or decorative paper holders

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Read the above story about the Life-giving Spring carefully.
2. Break down the story into events that you can imagine and draw on paper.
3. Color the pictures you have made.
4. Place them in the order of sequence.
5. Staple, tie, or affix the pages together to form a booklet.

Try the storyboard with other miracles, lives of the saints and see what you can create!