

SYNAXIS OF THE HIERARCHS BASIL THE GREAT, GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN AND JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

By Archpriest Peter Olsen

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Today we celebrate the memory of the three great hierarchs, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom. The Orthodox Church is a patristic Church. This means that we have Holy Fathers who have defined and explained the theology and beliefs of our Orthodox Christian faith. Today we celebrate the memory of the three greatest of these Holy Fathers upon whose teachings we base our understanding of the Christian faith. Our faith is not exclusively based on the Holy Fathers. Of course the greatest source of our faith is Holy Scripture. In addition, we have the Canon Law of the Church, as well as Holy Tradition. However, the Holy Fathers are totally in agreement and in accord with all of these other sources of the understanding of our Holy Orthodox Christian faith.

Many heresies, or false teachings about Christianity, have challenged our faith from the very inception of Christianity until today. The first heresy which had the greatest influence and caused the most temptation and havoc in the Church was Arianism, which taught that Jesus Christ was a creation of God. The belief in One God revealed as the Holy Trinity is a fundamental and basic understanding and part of the Orthodox Christian faith. In the early years of Church history there were no catechisms or many theological works by Fathers and saints of the Church. The true understanding of Christianity was mainly inscribed in the hearts and oral tradition of the Christian people. In fact, the canon of Holy Scripture of the New Testament was only later defined by the Church fathers, as various letters and gospels were disseminated and being read in the churches, but not all of them were ultimately accepted and recognized by the Church as part of the Holy Scripture of the New Testament.

The truth of the Orthodox Church teaches that Jesus Christ is perfect man and perfect God, one in essence with the Father. The Lord Himself taught us to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, there is One God, revealed to us as Holy Trinity, but nonetheless One god, not three separate Gods. This is the Mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Jesus Christ is fully God, equal and one in essence with the Father. If this were not true, then our Christian faith would be a lie and a deception. Then we wouldn't need the Church or the Holy Mysteries of the Church. All of our dogmatic teaching, all of the Holy Mysteries of the Church, are based on the foundation of the dogma that Jesus Christ is not simply the Son of God, but God incarnate, one in essence with the Father.

In the IV century when this horrible heresy of Arianism was causing disturbance and division in the Church, the great Holy Luminaries Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and later on John Chrysostom defended the Orthodox and expounded the true Christian understanding of the nature of God, the Holy Trinity, and our Savior Jesus Christ. The teaching of the Christian faith on the Holy Trinity once and for all was formulated and established as the foundation of the true understanding of God, and no Arius or any other heretic or heresy could challenge the truth of the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ as perfect God and perfect man. This is the faith that was given to us by our Savior Jesus Christ Himself and passed on to us and affirmed by the Holy Apostles. The difficult task of expounding and explaining the Holy Trinity and the two natures of our Lord Jesus Christ fell upon the shoulders of our three great fathers and holy hierarchs — Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom.

St. Basil the Great courageously stood against the Arian heresy. All of his efforts were devoted to the defense of true Church teaching until the end of his earthly life when he died at the age of 49 years old. After his death the torch was passed to his disciples, including St. Gregory the Theologian, for the defense of Orthodoxy and for the exposition of the true Christian faith concerning the Holy Trinity. In the IV century when St. John Chrysostom

became the archbishop of Constantinople, he continued the defense of the Orthodox Christian faith against Arianism concerning the dogma of the Holy Trinity.

Orthodox Christians today should read the works of the Holy Fathers, especially the three Holy Hierarchs whose memory we celebrate today. Their teachings are the foundation and basis of the Holy Orthodox Christian faith. If today we have doubts about our faith, if we question the dogma of the Holy Trinity or the natures and person of Jesus Christ our Savior, if contemporary heretics tell us that “we don’t have to believe in the Holy Trinity,” or if others tell us that “we don’t have to believe in one God because God does not exist,” we must turn again and again to the Holy Fathers, whose dogmatic teachings are the foundation of the Holy Orthodox Christian faith. Our forefathers and foremothers preserved the true understanding and faith in God in their hearts, in times of persecution and in times when the true understanding of Christianity was challenged by so many and in so many different ways, especially during the Soviet-Communist era in Russia, up until today. This challenge exists today as well, as we all know, in the modern world of today. Let us firmly keep the Orthodox Christian faith, and let no false teachings or temptations of the modern world sway us from remaining faithful to the true Christian faith. Holy Ecumenical Teachers and Hierarchs of God Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom pray unto God for us! Amen.

See:

1. “On the Holy Trinity” by St. Gregory of Nyssa
2. “On the Holy Spirit” by St. Basil the Great
3. “ Homily against Sabellius, Arius and the Anomeans” by St. Basil the Great
4. Stephen Hildebrand, “The Trinitarian Theology of Basil of Caesarea” (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007).
5. John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 1 and 2 (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press).
6. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
7. “On the Holy Spirit” by St. John Chrysostom.
8. Dumitru Staniloae, “The Holy Trinity: In the Beginning There Was Love” (Holy Cross Press, 2012).