

Today we commemorate the apostle James, the brother of our Lord, the brother of God. In Greek he is referred to as Adelphotheos, which means Brother of God. He is not to be confused with the apostle we commemorated two weeks ago who was also named James, but was the son of Alpheus. We first become aware of James, the brother of our Lord in the icons of the holy family fleeing from Israel to Egypt. Often in these icons, we see a young man either leading a donkey or following behind the donkey that Mary is riding. Tradition has it that this young man is the son of Joseph from his first wife, Salome. St. Joseph's first wife, Salome, probably died at the birth of a daughter. It was customary in those days to name a daughter after the mother if her mother died in child birth. We know that St. Joseph's youngest daughter was named Salome, therefore his wife probably was also named Salome. St. Joseph's daughter, Salome, was one of the myrrh-bearing women who followed Jesus throughout his ministry and stayed with Him at His crucifixion.

St. James is called Brother of the Lord or Brother of God because he is the son of St. Joseph the Betrothed, who is the husband of the Most-holy Theotokos, therefore a stepbrother of our Lord Jesus, who is both God and man. We know this from the Gospels, as it is written in the Gospel of Matthew 13:55: "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?"

We do not know when St. Joseph passed away, but we do know that he lived until Jesus was at least 12 years old. It was when Jesus was 12 that Mary and Joseph and Jesus went to Jerusalem and Jesus stayed behind talking to the elders and teaching them. We also can discern that he had died before Jesus began his public ministry, since he was not at the Wedding of Cana.

In the Prologue it is written:

"When Joseph was dying, he shared out his goods among his sons and wanted to leave a share to the Lord Jesus, the Son of the most holy Virgin Mary, but his sons opposed this, not reckoning Jesus to be a brother of theirs. James, though, loved Jesus greatly and announced that he would include Him in his share, counting himself to be indeed brother to the Lord."

St. James was so respected by all, including even unbelieving Jews, that he was nicknamed "the Just". In Israel there were Jews who would take an ascetical vow called Nazarites. A Nazarite was a Jew who took the ascetical vow which was described in the Book of Numbers 6:1-21.

The term *Nazarite* comes from the Hebrew word *nazir* meaning "consecrated" or "separated." The Nazarite is "holy unto the Lord" (Numbers 6:8) and must keep himself from becoming ritually unclean. This vow required the person to observe the following:

- Abstain from wine, vinegar (which was made from wine), grapes, raisins, and all intoxicants;
- Refrain from cutting one's hair and beard;
- And to avoid corpses, even those of a family member.

The vow was usually for a fixed period of time—30, 90 or even 100 days. At that time, the man would make a sacrifice that included a lamb, a ewe, a ram, and a basket of bread and cakes. If we recall, St. Paul made this type of vow at the suggestion of St. James, hoping to placate the Jews in Jerusalem who were saying that he no longer observed the Law. There are also cases where a parent would make this vow for a child, which the child would observe for his entire life. Examples of this in the Old Testament are Samuel the prophet and Sampson a Judge of Israel. In the New Testament the Forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist, appears to live under this lifelong vow. These people were called Nazarites and St. James was a Nazarite.

St James also never married and remained a virgin all of his life. It is also said that he never ate fat or oil.

He was a great lover of long prayer vigils at night, and he is said to have “knees like a camel”, from his frequent and long periods of kneeling in prayer.

We know that James was an apostle of our Lord, but by that we mean that he was one of the Seventy. The Seventy Apostles are those whom the Lord chose, in addition to the original Twelve Apostles, to go before Him into the cities He would visit (Luke 10:1), and lay down the groundwork and infrastructure for Jesus’ going throughout Israel, teaching and healing. According to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus appointed them and sent them out in pairs to preach the gospel. When they returned they were amazed that “even the demons are subject to us in Your name.”

We know that he was not one of the Twelve, since he was made the first Bishop of Jerusalem. None of the Twelve were made bishops of any particular location, for this was not their calling.

In the book of Acts, we are told about a dispute in the church as to how the gentiles were to be received into the church. Did they need to be circumcised? They held a council of all the Apostles and many of the disciples of Christ. St. James presided over this council because he was the Bishop of Jerusalem. It is known as the Council of Jerusalem and St. James’ word was decisive. After hearing both sides, St. James answered, saying, “Men and brethren, listen to me: “Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ... “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, “but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from having sex outside of marriage, from things strangled, and from blood.” Note, that even though Peter is present with the 12 Apostles, James, being the bishop of Jerusalem, presides at this council. He interprets the testimony in light of the Scriptures and finds that Simon Peter’s testimony is in agreement with the Old Testament prophets (v. 15). Thus, James makes his decision by recognizing the consensus of the apostles in light of the Holy Scriptures. When James declares, I judge (v. 19), he does not mean “I think” or “In my opinion”; rather, he is making the final decision. Nevertheless, this verdict is not merely his own opinion, but a summary of the testimony of the council. The four prohibited acts (v. 20) reflect both qualities of Christian behavior and minimal requirements of the Old Testament Law. Some interpreters understand

blood to mean eating blood, which was forbidden in the Levitical Law (Lv 17: 14); others, such as St. John Chrysostom, understand this to mean murder, the shedding of blood.

In today's Epistle reading of St. Paul's to the Galatians, St. Paul tells about how he became a follower of Jesus. And that when he went to Jerusalem, he visited with Cephas, also known as Peter. He said that he saw no one else except James the Lord's brother. This shows that St. Paul understood that St. James was the brother of our Lord.

In his thirty years as bishop, St. James converted many of the Jews to Christianity. During this time, he wrote what I consider to be the most powerful letter of all the letters in the New Testament. Some consider his letter the first New Testament book, written after the martyrdom of Stephen and the dispersion of Christians from Jerusalem, which we read about in Acts 8. The major Theme of his letter is the harmony of faith and works. The letter has many direct parallels with the Sermon on the Mount. St. James does not teach we are saved by works, but he does teach that a dead faith, one without works, does not save. This is an early argument against invisible religion, wherein salvation by faith has no visible works, and against antinomianism, the teaching that moral behavior is irrelevant to salvation. St. James is clear: the human will is not bypassed in salvation; grace does not nullify personal responsibility. Unlike most New Testament letters, St. James does not address a particular church, or even a geographical region, but "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (1: 1). Though St. James was a Jewish Christian and assumes the recipients are familiar with the Old Testament, the letter is written in elegant Greek. There is no indication that it addresses only Jewish Christians. The people St. James addresses are experiencing various trials: persecution, deception, economic injustice and poverty, apostasy and personal fragmentations in the Church. St. James uses his authority as bishop to rekindle true living faith and encourage repentance, patience, and self-control.

St. James also composed the first Divine Liturgy, on the instruction of our Lord. It proved to be too long for later Christians to use every day, and was later shortened by St Basil and St John Chrysostom who used it as the basis for their Liturgies. We still serve the "Liturgy of St. James" in some parishes on his feast day. It is also still served by the Syriac Orthodox church.

Annoyed by his powerful teaching, the Pharisees and the Scribes plotted together to kill St. James. "When Ananias became High Priest, he decided, along with other of the Jewish elders, to kill James as a preacher of Christ. One day, at Pascha, when many people were gathered in Jerusalem, the elders told St. James to climb up onto summit of the Temple in Jerusalem and speak against Christ. They fully expected him to obey them. Instead, St. James climbed up there, and began to speak to the people about Christ as the Son of God and the true Messiah, and of His Resurrection and eternal glory in heaven. The infuriated priests and elders and they cast him down from the roof, and he was badly injured though still alive. A man then ran up and gave him such a vicious blow on the head that his brains spilled out. Thus this glorious apostle of Christ died a martyr's death and entered into the Kingdom of his Lord. St. James was killed in the year either 61 or 62 AD under the reign of the Emperor Nero, and many considered his martyrdom the cause for the subsequent calamities that befell Jerusalem during Vespasian's invasion of Jerusalem in 67 AD, and its fall in 70 AD.

Through the prayers of the Holy Apostle James, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us.