



Two Tales of One Basilica

Several of our parishioners have had the good fortune to visit Istanbul in the past year. Here are reports from two of them on Orthodoxy's greatest basilica.

Consider these two different perspectives as synoptic accounts:

Hagia Sophia

Robert Klein

The Byzantine architectural wonder known as Hagia Sophia (*Holy Wisdom*) is the third Christian basilica to be built on the site.

The first church, known as the Megale Ekklesia (Great Church), was consecrated as the cathedral of Constantinople in 360. This was during the reign of the Roman Emperor Constantius II, the son of Constantine, who had legalized Christianity and established the city bearing his name as the imperial capital.

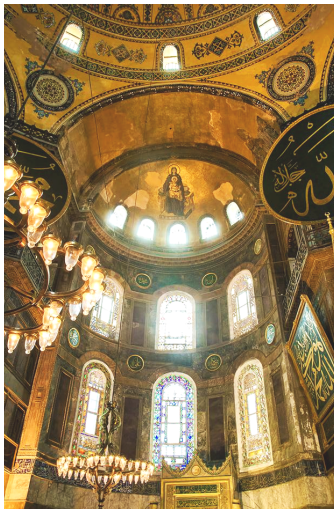
The Megale Ekklesia was the cathedral in which St. John Chrysostom preached, confirmed his nickname as the Golden-Tongued, presided as archbishop, and probably refined the Antiochian Divine Liturgy associated with his name and still used today by Orthodox Christians worldwide. Ironically, it was St. John Chrysostom's exile in 404 that resulted in riots by his supporters that burned down the Great Church.



The second cathedral was consecrated in 415 and stood until 532 when another series of political riots caused it too to be destroyed by fire. The Emperor Justinian, after quelling the unrest, decided that this was his opportunity to build the grandest and most spectacular cathedral the world had ever seen. And he did.

The present-day Hagia Sophia was erected in just five years, in contrast to the centuries it sometimes took for later Western cathedrals to be built. The building materials were taken from throughout the empire, and the construction crew was made up of ten thousand artisans and laborers.

The cathedral has 104 columns, some repurposed from temples and structures in Egypt, Syria, and Anatolia. The outer and inner walls were clad in multi-hued marble and porphyry, while the interior mosaics were made of gold, silver, terra cotta, and colored glass.



The length of the cathedral, from outer narthex to apse, is 328 feet, and its width is 228 feet. Its dome rises 182 feet from ground level and has a diameter of 104 feet.

For almost 1,000 years the Hagia Sophia was the largest cathedral in the world, surpassed only in the 1500s by the cathedral in Seville, Spain. As the cathedral for the Byzantine Empire, the basilica was the site of coronations and other imperial rites. (A church can be a cathedral, which describes its role as a bishop's seat, or a basilica, which describes its architectural style. Hagia Sophia was both.)

At Hagia Sophia's consecration in 537, Justinian reportedly said, "Solomon, I have surpassed you!" The emperor's boast was justified, as the millions of pilgrims and tourists who over the centuries have visited the basilica can attest.

The modern tourist today approaches the Hagia Sophia on foot from the Sultanahmet tram stop and through Sultanahmet Square, about 500 yards away. As one gets closer to the building, its immensity and grandeur become more evident.

Once inside, the visitor is overwhelmed by the scale and majesty of the building. Although "awesome," "inspiring," and "beautiful" are among the adjectives one can come up with, they all seem inadequate when standing in Hagia Sophia.



Sadness is also a feeling that Hagia Sophia evokes in the hearts of Christians. The building's exterior marble and gold – which had once glistened so much in the sun that the church could be seen from miles away at sea – has long been

stripped away. The majority of the interior mosaics are also gone, as they too have been destroyed or effaced. Only praying Moslems are allowed in the lower sanctuary, while all others are relegated to the upper gallery alone.

From that upper gallery, where once the Byzantine emperors and their courtiers stood for church services, a Christian pilgrim can observe the surrounding beauty and pray that some day in the future, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom will once again be sung and celebrated in the Hagia Sophia. ❖

Hagia Sofia & Chora Church

Katie Moulder-Reif

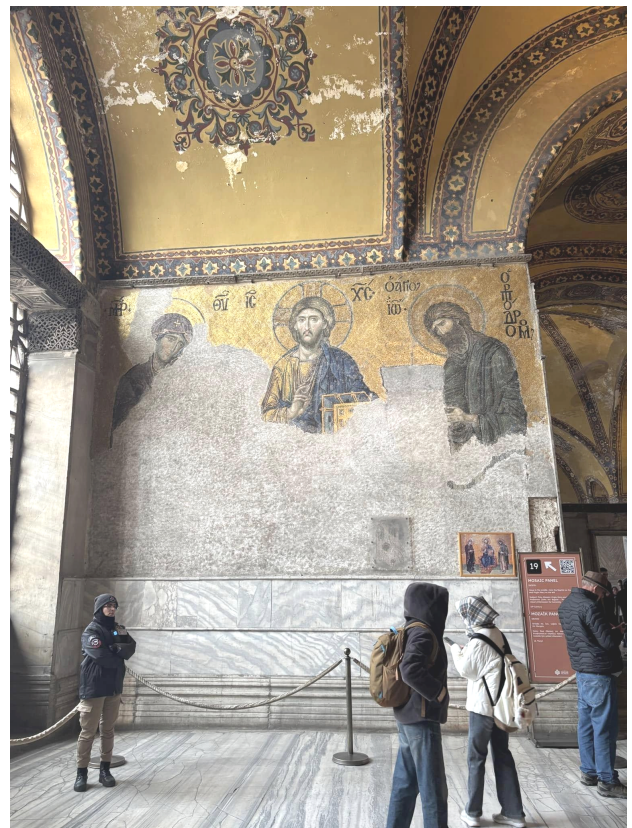
Constantinople | Istanbul, Türkiye

Having traveled to many countries all around the world, I have yet to travel to a place as special as Constantinople (Istanbul, Türkiye). The city is full of magnificent historic architecture and culturally significant landmarks. There were two places in particular that were most remarkable. The most famous being Hagia Sophia. In recent years, the community has started to celebrate, or “cash in”, on the history and architecture of the building.

Due to this, some of the previously concealed Christian iconography and antique mosaics have been uncovered and even advertised.

Tourists are only allowed to view the church from the mezzanine since it is an active mosque. Though much of the ancient Christian décor overlooking the

interior is covered with Islamic symbols, there are glimpses of the faces of saints and Seraphim angels peeking through. Many of the Christian symbols and icons are called attention to by large posters written in many languages explaining the church’s rich Christian history. It was touching to see the number of visitors from all over the world who seemed to be focused on learning about the Church’s Christian roots.



On the opposite side of the entry, visitors pass through large gates leading to a smaller section of the mezzanine. This is where the famous icon “Christ Pantocrator” is located. The icon appears almost unexpectedly. Though mostly deteriorated, the icon still holds such magnificence it was hard to walk away from. There are several stunning displays of better maintained Christian iconography in gold mosaics in the same area of the mezzanine. Large groups of people crowded around them with their

tour guides speaking a variety of languages, including a very friendly cat who was searching for treats.



One of the lesser-known notable landmarks is Chora Church. Now called Kariye Mosque, it is just a short train ride away from Hagia Sophia. It was built in the early 4th

century as part of a Christian monastery complex. In the 16th century it was converted into a mosque. To access the church, visitors enter through a small garden and a modern vestibule. Upon entering the church you're immersed in Byzantine architecture.

The walls and ceilings are ensconced in gold and colorful mosaics of life size and larger-than-life Christian iconography. The church has undergone intense restoration to uncover the mosaics and frescoes. There are posters throughout with historical references and icon descriptions promoting the church's Christian antiquity. Like Hagia Sophia, there are still areas in disrepair where imagery has fallen away with time but most of the icons are still visible and very impressive. Where the walls are not covered in mosaics and frescoes, they are clad in marble and other opulent stonework. The stone is meticulously installed to create symmetrical patterns. Visitors can easily imagine what the church looked like in all its splendor and

grandeur prior to the earthquakes of the 12th century and muslim invasion.



Chora Church is a must visit for any Orthodox Christian visiting Türkiye. Seeing and experiencing such ancient Christian history in real time is almost indescribable. Hagia Sophia in person, specifically the famous icon of Christ, was an unbelievably awe-inspiring experience as well but incredibly heartbreaking. It was hard to swallow the feeling of wonderment juxtaposed with the disappointment of seeing the desecration and disrepair of what was once esteemed as heaven on earth. Imagine having seen them in their glory days, I don't know how they didn't inspire the entire world to follow Christ. ❖

You can take a virtual tour of the Hagia Sophia of the Official Tourism page of Istanbul, or by clicking the link here: <https://ayasofyacamii.gov.tr/>

Saint James the Just

10 Facts about our Church Patron

Jessica Green

1. “Brother of the Lord”

(*Adelphótheos*/Ἰάκωβος Ἀδελφóθεος)

In Orthodox tradition, James is often called James Adelphótheos — literally, “James the Brother of God.” This expresses the special relationship he had with Christ. This title is understood both in terms of familial kinship and spiritual closeness.

His “brotherhood” does not mean he was a biological child of the Theotokos.

2. Son of Joseph prior to his betrothal to Mary

According to the earliest church traditions St. Joseph was quite old and had been married before his betrothal to Mary. St. James was born from that prior union. Thus, he is the step-brother of Jesus, accounting for the “brothers” of the Lord mentioned in Scripture.

3. James “the Just” (*Dikaïos*/ὁ δίκαιος)

St. James is widely known by the epithet “the Just.” This speaks of his exceptional holiness, integrity, and devotion to justice and righteousness in his life and leadership. Providing a model for Christian virtue and morality:

“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath” (James 1:19) and “Be doers of the word, and not just hearers, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22).

4. First Bishop (or Patriarch) of Jerusalem

After Christ’s Ascension and the first apostolic era, James became the chief shepherd of the Church in Jerusalem. He is traditionally considered the first Bishop or Patriarch of Jerusalem.

5. A Nazarite and a life of ascetic devotion

Orthodox tradition describes James as living under a Nazarite vow: abstaining from wine, from cutting his hair, and from worldly pleasures. He is also said to have prayed so constantly at times that his knees became hardened like a camel’s—thus earning the nickname “camel-kneed.”

6. He presided over the Council of Jerusalem in 50 AD

St. James played a pivotal role in the lives of the people of Jerusalem and presided over the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) where his word was decisive. In his 30 years as Patriarch he converted many Jewish residents of Jerusalem to Christ, often angering religious authorities.

7. Authorship of the Epistle of James and the Divine Liturgy

This letter emphasizes faith working through love, care for the poor, control of the tongue, and endurance under trial. St. James also composed a Divine Liturgy, which formed the basis of the Liturgies of Saints Basil the Great and John Chrysostom.

8. Martyrdom by Defenestration.

St. James met a martyr's death in Jerusalem. According to early Christian historian Hegesippus he was cast from the pinnacle of the Temple, stoned, and then clubbed to death in 62 or 63 AD by the Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem.

However James did not immediately die. It is said he prayed even for the forgiveness of his murderers.

9. Counted Among the Seventy Apostles

St. James the Brother of the Lord is honored among the Seventy Apostles.. Reflecting his early discipleship and his role in spreading the Gospel even before Christ's Resurrection.

The Seventy were sent out by Christ “two by two” (Luke 10:1–20) to preach, heal, and proclaim the Kingdom of God. James's inclusion among them emphasizes his apostolic authority, his personal witness to Christ's teachings, and his close participation in the earliest mission of the Church.

His commemoration among the Seventy on **January 4** underscores his dual dignity: both as a family member of the Lord and as a true apostle, chosen by grace rather than blood.

10. Other Feast Day(s) and liturgical commemoration

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, James is commemorated on **October 23** (his principal feast) as Apostle James the Just,

Brother of the Lord. Additionally, he is remembered in some traditions with Joseph the Betrothed on the first Sunday after the Nativity.

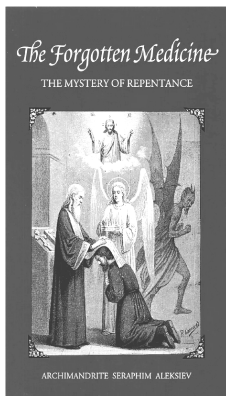
The hymn sung at our parish every Sunday, and for his feast day all through the Orthodox Church, highlights his boldness, his priestly role, and his intercessory power. ❖

As a disciple of the Lord, O Righteous one, thou hast received the gospel / as a martyr thou art never turned away / as the Brother of God, thou hast boldness / as a hierarch, thou canst intercede / Do thou intercede with Christ God that he save our souls

Troparion — Tone 4



Available in the St. James Orthodox Church Lending Library:



“The Forgotten Medicine: The Mystery of Repentance” by Archimandrite Seraphim Aleksiev: Every Christian feels a natural yearning of the heart towards God, a true desire to taste the sweetness of communion,

of being with Him as He created us to be; but the impurity of our hearts--full of passions, conflicts, and fears--bars the way. Yet there is a cure for the weight of sin which burdens the heart and soul of each one of us and afflicts the conscience, keeping us from that longed-for inner peace and from peace with our neighbors and loved ones. That cure is the Mystery of Repentance. Archimandrite Seraphim in *The Forgotten Medicine* details the reasons many have for not coming to Confession, and for each of these he clearly brings forth the truth of the matter. For those who feel awkward because of not knowing how to approach Confession, he explains in depth how to prepare beforehand, what to do when we are with the confessor, and what to do afterwards. He then writes of the wondrous changes in the lives of those who enter into the Mystery of Repentance, illustrating with several true accounts.

(Summary on Goodreads)

About the Author:

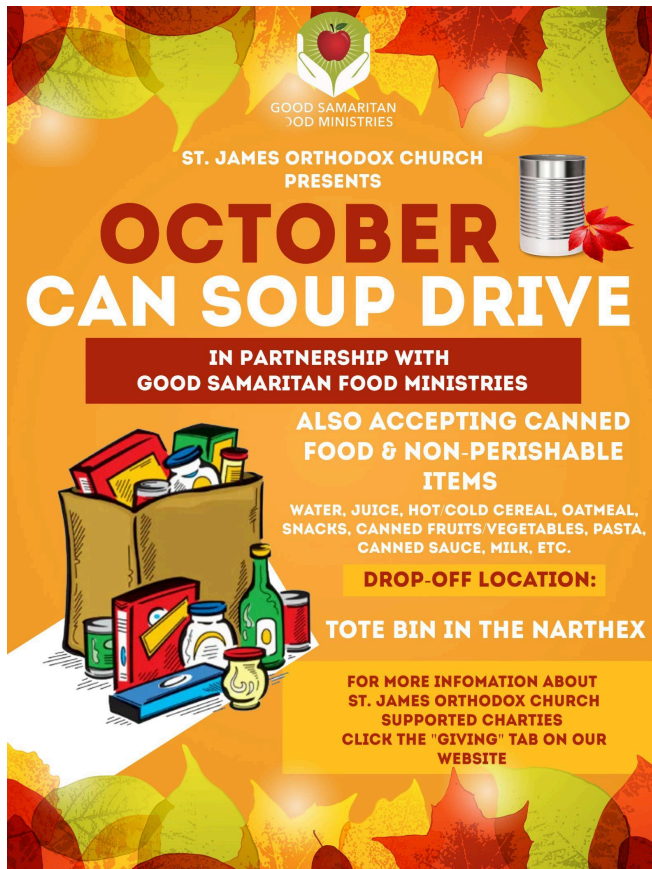


Archimandrite Seraphim Alexiev (1912–1993) was a Bulgarian monk and theologian formed under the holy Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev), whose spiritual son he became after meeting him at Rila

Monastery. Gifted yet humble, he earned a doctorate of Theology in Bern, Switzerland. After which he returned to Bulgaria, and dedicated his life to reviving genuine Orthodox piety, preaching repentance, renewing confession, and writing widely read works. Through decades of communist pressure he remained pastorally gentle but uncompromising, defending persecuted clergy and refusing concessions to ecumenism and the 1968 calendar reform, even at personal cost.

In later years at a Holy Protection of the Mother of God Convent in Knyazhevo, Bulgaria he continued guiding souls and producing patristically grounded books such as *“The Meaning of Suffering, and Strife & Reconciliation”* He reposed on January 26, 1993, and is remembered as a meek confessor and a faithful guardian of the spiritual testament of St. Seraphim of Sofia. ♣

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DURING
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Roasted Butternut Squash Soup

(Lenten)

DrVeganBlog.com

This roasted butternut squash soup is fall comfort food at its best, plant-based but super creamy, nourishing, and cozy. With just 10 minutes of prep and a handful of basic ingredients, it's one of our favorite soups to make during the fall and winter months. Perfect for those chilly days when you want something comforting yet wholesome.

Ingredients

- 1 medium-sized Butternut Squash
- 7 fl oz Coconut Milk
- 1-2 Red Onions
- 2 Carrots
- 1 Bell Pepper
- 1-2 heads of Garlic
- 1 cup of Cherry Tomatoes
- 1 1/2 cups Vegetable Broth
- 1 tsp Fresh Ginger optional; grated
- Choice of Oil: enough to drizzle over vegetables during roasting
- Fresh Cilantro (for garnish)

Seasonings

- 1 tsp Black Pepper
- 1 tsp Ground Cumin
- 1 tsp Paprika
- 1 tsp Dried Thyme
- 1 tsp Dried Rosemary
- 1 tsp Chili Oil (optional)

Instructions

1. **Preheat the Oven:** Set your oven to 390°F
2. **Prepare the Vegetables:** You can either peel and chop the butternut squash, or, like I do in the video, simply cut the

squash in half for roasting. Note: Halving the squash will require a longer roasting time, while chopping the vegetables smaller will speed up the cooking process.

3. **Season the Vegetables:** Add the seasonings (pepper, cumin, paprika, thyme, rosemary, and chili flakes) to the vegetables. Drizzle with olive oil and toss to coat evenly. If halving the squash, drizzle olive oil on the exposed flesh. Cover the dish with aluminum foil.
4. **Roasting:** Roast for about 1 1/2 hours, or until the vegetables are golden and soft inside. If you've chopped the vegetables smaller, the roasting time can be reduced. If you've halved the butternut squash, expect a longer roasting time. For the last 10 minutes, remove the aluminum foil to allow the vegetables to caramelize slightly.
5. **Blending:** Once roasted, scoop out the flesh of the butternut squash (if halved) and transfer all the vegetables to a blender. Add the vegetable broth and ginger (if using), and blend until smooth and creamy.
6. **Cooking the Soup:** Pour the blended mixture into a pot and place it on medium heat. Stir in the coconut milk and cook for about 2 minutes, allowing everything to warm through.
7. **Final Touch:** Adjust the seasonings to your taste. Garnish with fresh cilantro, a drizzle of coconut milk, and a pinch of chili flakes or some chili oil



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If you are interested in contributing an article to the newsletter contact:

Jessica Green

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"The way to God lies through the love of people. At the Last Judgment I shall not be asked whether I was successful in my ascetic exercises, nor how many bows and prostrations I made. Instead I shall be asked did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners. That is all I shall be asked. About every poor, hungry and imprisoned person the Savior says 'I: 'I was hungry and thirsty, I was sick and in prison.' To think that he puts an equal sign between himself and anyone in need. I always knew it, but now it has somehow penetrated to my sinews. It fills me with awe."

St. Maria of Paris

