



## **Saint John Chrysostom, the Golden Mouth**

**A** very long time ago there lived a great man named St. John Chrysostom. The word 'Chrysostom' means 'golden mouthed.' This name was given to him after he died because all his sermons were eloquent and very lovely to hear.

**St. John was born in Antioch in the fourth century.** During that time Antioch was a very wealthy nation. As a matter of fact, it was the second wealthiest nation in the entire world. There were great palaces and theaters. In the market place you could buy silks that came from China and furs that came from Russia. There was one broad street four miles long, which was paved with marble, and had pure gold statues lining the avenue.



**Antioch was also blessed with natural beauty.** There was a beautiful, pale green river called Orontes which watered a forest called the 'Groves of Daphne'. People used to say that living in the forest of Daphne was close to living in Paradise.

**St. John's father was a rich pagan, an idol worshiper who** did not believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. His father was a very important man who was the General in command of



the Eastern Army. We don't know much about his father, only that his father died shortly after St. John was born.

**St. John's mother was a Christian woman whose piety and goodness was not equaled among the women of Antioch.** He also had a sister named Anthusa. Anthusa married when she was very young and her husband died when she was only twenty years old.

**When St. John was fourteen years old, the Emperor Julian made Antioch the empire's capital.** Antioch became the center of the world at that time.

**One story that was recorded when St. John was a teenager was this.** The emperor Julian, who attended great ceremonies at the Temple of Apollo, a pagan god, gave orders that the holy body of a martyr, which was near the temple, be removed from his church and the church destroyed. The order was obeyed. The Christians of the city went into the streets and carried the body of the saint to another church, displaying their affection for the martyr and their dislike of the emperor.

**That same night the Temple of Apollo was struck by lightning and burned to the ground.** St. John, who went out with the rest of the Christians to move the holy body, ran back and saw the temple burn down.

**St. John grew and became the student of a famous philosopher** named Libanius. Libanius liked St. John a lot and wanted him to become as the head of his school but St. John had other desires. St. John wanted to become a hermit, to live in the caves of Antioch and to spend his time in prayer. The bishop of Antioch at the time did not want St. John to leave. So for three years St. John was a disciple of the bishop of Antioch and became a preacher. Throughout all these years he kept asking to be sent to the wilderness to be a



**St Basil**

hermit. Finally the bishop granted St. John's request.

**St. John went out to the mountains and began** to live a life of self-discipline in the company of an old Syrian named Hesychius (which means quietness). St. John wanted to follow his closest friend from college, St. Basil the Great. For a few years he lived the monastic way, in prayer and reading the Holy Bible.

**But the life of a hermit was hard, especially in** the caves of Antioch where it gets very cold. Eventually St. John's health deteriorated and he went back to the Archbishop who sent him directly to a doctor. Because his health became poor he was unable to go back and live as a hermit. But he never forgot the peaceful life of the hermits. He would say that 'The monks in the monasteries live lives that belong in Heaven. They are like the angels without any quarrels or troubles.'

**For six years St. John was a deacon under the Archbishop, St. Melatius,** but when he died, the new Archbishop, St. Flavian, ordained St. John as a priest and St. John's active work began. For twenty years he wrote sermons and books, many of which are still with us today. He preached to the people and gave them the Holy Sacraments. His one real desire was that everyone in Antioch would know the love of God through His Son Jesus Christ.

**When the Archbishop of Constantinople died in 397 AD,** the people wanted St. John to become Pope in his place. However, St. John hated any form of power and did not want to become Pope. In order to ordain him, the people tricked



him and in the year 398 He was ordained as Pope of Constantinople.

**St. John did not live very long after he was ordained Pope.** However, all the years he was Pope he had problems from people who were jealous of him. Because he was not afraid of the king he often stood up to him. Once the emperor became angry with St. John after hearing lies from people who accused him of very bad things. Without hearing St. John's defense, the emperor exiled him to a far away place. The king also made sure that no one helped St. John on the journey.

**A small army guard escorted St. John and often they would sleep** on the hard ground and have little to eat. This would not have affected a healthy man but remember that St. John did not regain his health after coming down from the caves of Antioch. The journey made him very sick but he survived and eventually he began to get some of his health back.

**Once he was able to get on his feet again, St. John began writing** to his people back in Constantinople and Antioch. So much was his writing affecting the people that they began to journey to see him and some stayed with him. His influence on the people increased and soon the emperor became frightened and ordered that he be taken even farther away from Constantinople than he was already. The king ordered that he be sent to the farthest place in the empire.

**St. John knew that he would probably not survive this second** journey. He was already sick with a fever when they left and the two guards assigned to move him were terribly mean. They would not allow him to rest when they came near a city. They would make him walk, even when it was raining and they made him cross the river, even though the water was reaching his chest and neck. They would not give him any rest at all and were pleased when the sun would beat down fiercely on him.



**For three months the saint endured this suffering. They lodged** outside of a city called Comana, at a shrine of a martyr. That night, St. John had a dream that Basilicus, Bishop of Comana, who was martyred under Maximinian, and Lucian, a priest of the Church of Antioch, who also had passed away, appeared to him and said: “Be of good cheer, brother. Tomorrow we shall be together.” St. John knew this was a warning. The next day he asked his guards to remain at the shrine until eleven o’clock but they refused. They had walked only about 30 yards when the saint became so ill that they had to return to the shrine.

**Back at the shrine, St. John asked for white garments. He re-** moved his old clothes and gave them away to those around him. Then he dressed himself in the white garments from head to feet, still fasting, he prayed to the Lord one final time. He closed his prayer with the words, “Glory be to God for all things,” and then crossed himself at the last ‘Amen’. He stretched out his feet and fell asleep, waking up in the arms of the Lord Jesus Christ whom he loved so much.

**On September 14, 407, St. John of Antioch, known as St. John** Chrysostom died. It was only after his death that the people began to honor the man who lived to bring others to Christ Jesus by his words and actions. In the year 438 AD, the relics of St. John were moved to Constantinople. The people of Constantinople gathered in close-packed boats lit with torches at the mouth of the river to see his coming back home. He was put to rest in the Church of the Apostles. The new emperor laid his head on the coffin and begged forgiveness before God for the wrongs committed by his mother and father (they were the ones who exiled St. John). After him the Emperor’s sisters, the four princesses Flacilla, Pulcheria, Arcadia and Marina prayed. There in the decorated tomb the saint remained until 1204 when the Crusades began.



**St. John was a man of courage and inner strength. He was a man who loved God so much that nothing else mattered. He had a love for his people that allowed him to fight for them even against the kings. St. John was a man of beautiful words. He was man who used all his talent for the service and glory of God.**

May the prayers of St. John the Golden-mouth be with us all.

## **W** **Doxology of Saint Mena** **d**

(to be said on Hatoor 15 and Baounah 15)

What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul, this would be the life of vanity.

The Saint Abba Mena, heard the Divine Voice, and has forsaken the whole world, and its corrupt glory.

He gave his soul unto death, and his flesh to the fire, and received great sufferings, for the Son of the Living God.

Therefore our Savior, lifted him to His Kingdom, and granted him the good things, which an eye has not seen,

Hail to you, O Martyr, Hail to the courageous hero, Hail to the struggle-mantled, the Saint Abba Mena.

Pray to the Lord on our behalf, O struggled-mantled martyr, the Saint Abba Mena, that He may forgive us our sins.