

HEROES OF THE EARLY CHURCH

On the Orthodox calendar, our Holy Church honors the memory of 3 of her greatest saints together: BASIL THE GREAT, GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN, AND JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. These Holy Hierarchs are rightly referred to as “giants” of faith, courage, holiness, and learning. They were well-known in the early Church as teachers, preachers, liturgists, and administrators.

There is an interesting story behind why the Church elected to honor these 4th century saints on the same day. Up until the 11th century, a dispute existed among the faithful as to who was the greatest of these three Church Fathers. All three had unique qualities, and no one could agree on who deserved primacy of honor. By God’s divine providence, however, the issue was finally resolved in a dream that Bishop John of Galatia had one evening in 1081 A.D. While deep in sleep, the bishop had a vision of Basil, Gregory, and John together in all of their glory. In unison, they greeted Bishop John with these words: “WE ARE ONE IN GOD, AND THERE IS NO DISPUTE AMONG US . . . NEITHER IS THERE A FIRST OR SECOND AMONG US.”

Awaking from sleep, Bishop John viewed this as a sign that these three saints should be honored equally with one common feast. Thus ended centuries of controversy. From that day forth, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom were commemorated together, with all of their many accomplishments noted by the Church.