

THE ORTHODOX WEEKLY BULETIN VESTAL, CLIFFWOOD, NEW JERSEY

A BUILDER AND A BELIEVER

Throughout history, we rarely find rulers whose faith in God played an important role in the governing of their subjects. One such person was the EMPEROR JUSTINIAN. Justinian ruled the Byzantine Empire from 527 A.D. to 565 A.D. During this 38 year period, his deeply rooted Orthodox beliefs had a profound influence on him. It is said that the Emperor lived an ascetic life, fasting severely and sleeping sparingly. He was a diligent student of the Sriptures and the writing of the Church Fathers. It was his keen interest in the well-being of the Church that caused him to convene the Fifth Ecumenical Couoncil in 553 A. D.

Justinian will always be remembered best, however, as being a great builder. Along with his wife, the Empress Theodora, Justinian had a particular fondness for building churches. His crowning accomplishment was the construction of the magnificent Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople. Its huge center dome and its expansive interior made it one the architectural wonders of its time. When he arrived at the great edifice on its day of consecration in 537 A.D., it was perfectly natural for Justinian to proclaim: *“O Solomon, I have outdone you!”* Centuries later, this was the church to which the Emissaries of Vladimir the Great would come. After seeing the beaautiful mosaics and the majestic columns that characterized the Church of the Holy Wisdom, they returned home with this message for their ruler: *“We knew not if we were in heaven or on earth.”*

Justinian’s peaceful and productive reign came to an end in 565 A.D. when he fell asleep in the Lord at the age of 80. He and his beloved wife are commemorated on the Church Calendar in November.