

TWO-FOLD BEAUTY

The story of ST IRENE OF CHRYSOVALANTOU is truly a tale of beauty, Both PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL. She was born in the 9th century in Cappodocia, the daughter of noble parents. It has been written that she possessed exquisite features, highlighted by long-flowing, golden hair. Standing nearly six feet tall, it would seem that St. Irene's appearance would be the envy of all in today's society, which places great importance on such matters!

From an early age however, St. Irene was interested only in dedicating her life to the Lord. She desired to flee the world and the pleasures it offered. She longed to live a life of monasticism. For awhile, it appeared her dream would never be fulfilled. Irene was chosen by the royal family of Constantinople to be the wife of Prince Michael the heir to the throne. Filled with dismay, Irene visited the renowned hermit Ioannikios, who assured her that this marriage would never take place. The words of this saintly recluse come true, when the brother of the Empress Theodora fell in love with Irene's sister! After this unexpected wedding, Irene was free to become the "handmaiden of the Lord!"

Irene entered a woman's monastery in Chrysovalantou, where she soon became well-known for her spiritual accomplishments. Her most famous feat centered around spending a period of THREE YEARS where she prayed constantly from sunrise to sunset, existing only on a minimal amount of food and water. This miraculous display of SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE won her the admiration of her sisters-in-Christ, and soon she was selected to be the Abbess of her beloved monastery. Long after her death, Irene was remembered for being a "model of devotion" to Christ.