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John blessed by Fotis Kontoglou

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Every year during New Year's Eve Saint Basil (Santa Claus), travels from country to country, from city to city, from village to village and knocks on people's doors to see who would invite him in with an open heart. One year then, he took his cane and headed off. He was like an ascetic monk, dressed in some old patched cassocks, with crudely made shoes on his feet, and with a bag passed over his shoulder. For this reason, people thought that he was a beggar, and they would not open their doors for him. Saint Basil, would then leave feeling very sad because he saw the heartlessness of people, and was thinking about the poor who beg because they are in need, even if he himself did not need anybody, and he was neither hungry or cold.

After passing from different places, and after he passed from many countries, and thousands of cities and villages, he arrived in the Greek lands of Asia Minor where people were poor. Of all the villages, he chose to most poor ones and headed for there, between dried mountains, where some huts were build, inhabited by hungry people.

He was walking at night, and the northern wind was groaning, the whole creation was savagely wild. Not even a single living soul could be heard, except for a wolf or two howling. After he had walked for a long time, he found himself in a small valley where the strong cold wind was cut off by a small mountain, and saw a stable build on the extension of the rocks. He opened the door of the front yard, which was made from wild shrubs, and entered inside the court yard. The dogs woke up and started to bark. They fell on to him wanting to rib him apart, but as soon as they went near him, they put down their heads, and started licking his shoes, waving their tails. The Saint went near the Shepperd's stable, knocked on the door with his cane and called out:

«Please Christians, be merciful, and give me same alms for the sake of your deceased relatives! Our Christ also begged for alms when he came to this world!»

The door opened and a young strong Shepperd came out who looked to be around twenty-five years old, with a black beard, and without being able to see very well who was knocking on the door, told to the old man:

«Please come inside our house to get warm! I wish you a good day, and a good New Year!»

This Shepperd was Yiannis Mbaikas, which other shepherds called by the nickname Yiannis the Blessed, because he was an innocent man, as innocent as the sheep he was grazing, and totally uneducated.

Inside the stable, a small lamb was giving out a weak light. As soon as Yiannis saw in the light that his guest was an old man who was a monk, he took his hand and kissed it and afterward put it on his head. Afterward he called his wife who was about twenty years old and was rocking their baby in the crib. She also went

humbly and kissed the hand of the old man and said:

«Welcome to our house holy man to take a rest.»

St. Basil stood by the door and blessed the stable and said:

«May you be blessed my children, and your whole house! May your sheep multiply, the same way as Job's after the scourge, and as Abraham's and Laban's! May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

Yiannis added more wood in the fireplace to make the fire stronger. The Saint put his bag in a corner and afterwards took off his patched cassock, and stayed with his belted frock. They put him to seat next to the fire, and the woman also gave him a pillow to put under his head.

The Saint, once again looked around him, and repeated within himself:

«May this stable be blessed!»

Yiannis would come and go to bring different things to eat. His wife was cooking. Yiannis threw some more wood into the fire.

With the strong fire coming out, the stable became very bright, and looked as if it was a palace. The beams seemed as if they were made from gold, and the cheese which was hanging from the roof looked as if they were golden lamps, and all the objects in the house looked as if they were made from diamonds. The wood burning in the fireplace gave out a scent which resembled that of incense.

Yiannis, was a good man, and stayed the same as God made him. He was poor, and had few sheep, but he had a very rich heart. «In poverty richness is found» as people say. He was a good man, but he also had a good wife. Who ever knocked on their door, he ended up eating, drinking and finding a lodge to sleep. If one was feeling sadness in his heart, he would find consolation among them. For this reason, St. Basil stayed at their stable, during New Year's even, during the eve of his his Name Day, and gave Yiannis his blessing.

That night all the countries, cities, and villages, all the noblemen, the bishops, and officials of the world, were waiting for him. However, St. Basil didn't go to any such man, instead he went to the stable of Yiannis the Blessed, without Yiannis knowing who he was.

After going out to look after his sheep, Yiannis came back into the house and said to the Saint. «Holy man», I feel so honoured tonight that we have you with us, so that we could also hear some words of our faith because we don't have a church near us, not even a chapel. I love the words of our faith very much, even if I don't understand them, because I am completely uneducated. Once a holy father visited us from Mount Athos, and left us these papers, and if some times a lettered man passes by our house, I ask him to read it for me.»

It was midnight, the wind was groaning. Saint Basil go up and stood facing towards the east, and made his Cross three times. Afterward he bend down and took from

his bag a paper and said: «Blessed is our Lord always, now and then, and in the centuries of centuries to come!»

Yiannis went and stood behind him and crossed his arms. His wife suckled to baby, and she also went and stood near her husband.

The old monk told the prayers as always in our ancient language «God oh Lord» and the hymn of the circumcision of Christ which is celebrated on New Year's day, but without saying his own hymn who's memory is also celebrated on this same day. He was chanting slowly and humbly, and Yiannis and his wife were listening to him with devotion and made their Cross. Saint Basil said the vespers and the canon of the celebration without saying his, and after he said the whole church service.

They all sat on the table and ate. After they ate, his wife brought the New Year's cake and put it on the table, and Saint Basil took the knife crossed the cake and said:

«In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!»

He cut the first piece and said «This is for Christ», he cut the second, and said «This is for the Madonna», and he then cut the third and instead of saying the accustomed «This is for Saint Basil», he said : «This is for the head of the family, Yiannis!».

Yiannis cut him off and said:

«Holy man, you forgot Saint Basil !.»

The saint replied to him:

«Truly I forgot him !»

He then cut a piece, and said:

«For the servant of God, Basil ! »

He then cut many pieces and for each one he cut he said : «For the mistress of the house», «For the baby», «For the house», «For the animals», «For the poor» and so on.

Yiannis said again to the saint:

«Holy man, why you didn't cut any for your holiness?»

«I have cut Blessed Yiannis !»

But Yiannis did not understand anything.

Yianni's wife made the beds ready to go to sleep. Afterward they all stood up to make their payer. Saint Basil opened his hands out and told the prayer which he wrote many centuries ago and it is still told by the priests during the church service of New Year's day.

«Lord, my God, I have seen that I am not worthy to be under your roof nor for you to come into the house of my soul»

Once he finished the payer and he was getting ready to lie down on the bed, Yiannis said to him:

«You holy man who knows letters, tell us to which palaces might Saint Basil have gone to tonight? What sins could the Noblemen and the Kings have? We the poor, we are sinners and we have bad lives because poverty makes us go to damnation.» Saint Basil cried in the dark. He got up, put his hands out once again and said his prayer differently this time.

«Lord my God, I have seen that your servant Yiannis, the humble is worthy for you to be under his roof, and for You to come into the house of his soul because he is simple, and it is for such people that the Kingdom of God is easy to enter.

Once again, Yiannis did not understand anything.

Written by Photis Gontoglou – Translated by NOCTOC

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