

## 30 November: Saint Frumentios (George Poulos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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The dark continent of Africa made famous two Englishmen named Stanley and Livingston whose exploits have been well chronicled in books and motion pictures, but way back in the fourth century two brothers experienced a saga which by comparison makes the Livingston-Stanley affair seem like a Boy Scout outing in the park. For sheer heroism and glory not even the epic achievements of Colonel T.E. Lawrence can match the African adventures of two Christians brothers, one of whom became a saint for his contribution to the cause of Christianity.



Frumentios and his brother Adesios were scholarly philosophers who lived during the reign of the Emperor Constantine the Great (A.D. 330) and were natives of the Middle Eastern city of Tyre. Devout Christians though they were, their primary interest was philosophy, and in furtherance of this branch of learning they joined with their mentor, Meropios, the greatest philosopher of that era, when he proposed a trip to India in order to observe the way of life in that distant and mystical country.

After many months in India, where among other things they saw that Christianity had taken root since the first Apostle St. Thomas carried his mission there, they set sail for Tyre, but the ship never made port. The vessel was rendered helpless in the storm and was blown ashore in a remote and wild section of the Africa coast now known as Ethiopia. The captain and crew, as well as Meropios, were slaughtered by the savage natives, but the brothers were spared and taken in chains to the port city of Axum, where they were eventually brought before the king. The captives soon won the king over and were given their freedom with the provision that they remain in Ethiopia to impart to the Ethiopians all of their knowledge and crafts.

After a time, Frumentios was made place treasurer and Adesios was made an executive officer. Between the two they managed to bring a new prosperity to the city, including trade with Christian merchants from other lands. When the king died, the queen prevailed upon Frumentios to guide the young prince Ezana until he was capable of governing by himself, for the next couple of years Frumentios was the power behind the throne. When the prince became a full-fledged king, Frumentios requested permission to go to his homeland and left with his brother for the native Tyre. En route, the hand of God led Frumentios to Alexandria, because he suddenly decided to visit the Patriarch there, who at the time was Athanasios the Great. Frumentios parted with his bewildered brother.

After hearing Frumentios detail the account of his stay in Ethiopia, the Patriarch reminded him that he was eminently qualified to help in making Ethiopia a Christian nation. Not one to shirk this Christian duty, Frumentios agreed to return to the African country after a period of indoctrination to assume the duties of prelate in the city of Axum, where Christianity had already taken a foothold. He returned to Ethiopia as the Archbishop of Axum and was welcomed by the young king and his mother, both of whom were won over to Christianity and were instrumental in fulfilling the hope of Frumentios that Ethiopia would come into the fold of Christian nations.

King Ezana gave his former tutor his full cooperation, and the task was made much

easier for Frumentios with the royal influence. It is doubtful that without the friendship of the king and so many of his subjects, to whom Frumentios had endeared himself in prior years, the swift conversion of this spiritually darkened area could have been so readily accomplished.

By now the emperor of the Byzantine Empire was Constantios, the son of Constantine the Great and an adherent of Arianism who had deposed other Patriarchs in an effort to purge the Empire of those prelates who opposed his views. In a letter to King Ezana he urged that Frumentios be likewise banished if he sided with his old friend Athanasios in branding Arianism as heresy. The Ethiopia monarch was not about to betray his archbishop and friend and in defiance of the emperor bade his prelate to do as he saw fit.

Frumentios died 30 November 378. His burial site is a national shrine.

George Poulos, *Orthodox saints*, vol. 2, c 1978.