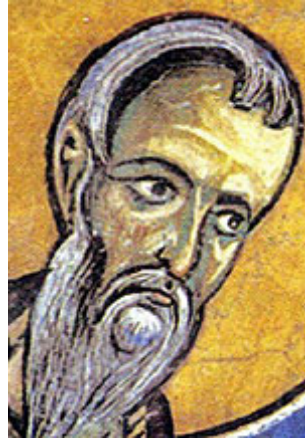


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The baker's son: Saint Tychon of Cyprus (Eva Topping)

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Long ago, in the days when Arcadius and Honorius ruled the Roman Empire, a saint was born on the island of Cyprus. His parents were pious, humble islanders whose names are not recorded. The saint's name was Tychon.



Tychon's father was a baker in a small Cypriot village. Each day, as he measured the flour, kneaded the dough and shaped the loaves of bread, he dreamed one dream, that someday his son would become a priest. Tychon's gentle mother cherished the same dream. How happy and proud these good, simple people

would be when their son was a priest.

Tychon spent the years of his boyhood in the village of his birth. He played in the fields around the village and helped his father in the small bakery, which was next to their house.

Along with the other boys he attended the school belonging to the village church. Here, in the only available school, the village boys learned to write and read. The priest was their only teacher, the Holy Scriptures their single text.

The priest also taught them the long history of their native island. The boys learned that St. Paul himself had brought Christianity to Cyprus. They were proud that their own church was one of the oldest in the world.

Of all the Bible stories that he knew, Tychon's favorite was that of Barnabas. This apostle had been born on Cyprus. In Jerusalem he had become a Christian, and changed his name from Joseph to Barnabas. Barnabas, his new name, meant 'son of consolation.' Tychon liked this new name better than the old.

Tychon liked especially to hear the story of Barnabas' generosity. Soon after he became a Christian, Barnabas sold a piece of the land that he owned and gave the money for the poor. The young village boy never forgot Barnabas' act of charity.

Barnabas' journeys and voyages fascinated Tychon, who had never traveled beyond the fields around his village. He could not imagine any city as large as Antioch, where his favorite apostle had preached. Nor could he imagine Jerusalem, familiar though it was from the Scriptures.

He could, however, imagine Barnabas' journey with Paul to Cyprus, the beautiful island covered with olive groves and vineyards. Tychon knew by heart the story of their visit. The two apostles had landed at ancient Salamis. Together they traveled the length of the island, preaching everywhere. Then the two missionaries sailed away from Paphos, said to be the birthplace of the goddess Aphrodite, born of the sea.

Later Barnabas returned to his native island and became its first bishop. An energetic, eloquent and compassionate saint. He was Tychon's hero. The Cypriot apostle was often in the boy's thoughts, in school, in church, and when he was selling bread from his father's oven.

Every day the baker gave his son a large, round, straw basket filled with round loaves of bread. Taking the basket, Tychon went through the winding, narrow

streets of the village to sell his father's bread. As he went along, he called out in his clear, strong voice, "Bread, fresh bread. Buy some bread warm from the oven." His cheerful words sounded through the streets like a song.

Hearing his cries, the village housewives, especially those who did not have ovens of their own, came out of their walled courtyards to buy fresh bread from the baker's son. When he had sold all the loaves his father had given him, Tychon returned home. He carried an empty basket in one hand, and in the other a little bag filled with coins.

One day as he set out with a basket filled with sweet-smelling loaves of fresh bread to sell for his father, Tychon suddenly remembered how Barnabas had sold his land and given the money to the poor. Then he thought of the poor people of his village. The poor Families who lived on the edge of the village, he knew, were often hungry.

That day Tychon did not follow his usual route among the winding, narrow streets in the village. Instead, he went straight to the outskirts of the village. There stood the hovels, the forlorn houses of the village poor. In a few minutes Tychon distributed all his round loaves of bread, one by one to the hungry families.

Then with empty bread basket and empty money bag, Tychon went home. He laid down the basket and handed his father the empty money bag. The baker eagerly opened the little money bag to count the coins. But there was not a single coin in the bag.

"Where is the money?" the baker demanded, holding the empty bag in his hand.

"I did not get any money today, Father," Tychon replied .

The baker did not understand. "But the loaves are all gone. The basket is empty. You sold the bread, didn't you?"

"No, Father," Tychon replied quietly. "I did not sell the bread today. I gave it all away to our poor neighbors who have nothing to eat."

Tychon's answer enraged his father. The village baker was a poor man himself, not a rich man. He barely earned enough money from the bakery to take care of his family. Of all people he should not be expected to feed the poor. The baker was angry with his son. Tychon had given away a whole basket of bread. A day's profit had been lost.

His father's anger, however, did not frighten Tychon. He tried to explain. "Father," he said, "do not be angry with me. I loaned the loaves to God so that He could feed

the hungry. I have an account with Him. God will repay the loan. I know He will.”

Tychon’s words of explanation fell on deaf ears. His father would not listen to him. Nor could he understand what Tychon was saying. He could think only of the money he had lost because his son imagined he had an account with God!

Despite his father’s anger, Tychon insisted that he had loaned the bread to God. Early the next morning the baker went to the storeroom where he kept his flour. Yesterday he had almost used all of it to make the bread his foolish son had given away. There was not much flour left. And now there was no money with which to buy more. If only Tychon had sold the bread, and not given it to the poor. If he borrowed money from the village moneylender, he would have to pay high interest. By feeding the poor Tychon had impoverished his own family.

Unlocking the storeroom, the baker entered, sadly expecting to find empty flour bags. To his amazement he saw that all the bags were bulging, full of fine, milled flour. Had his eyes deceived him? The baker touched each bag. Each was solid to the touch. He tried to lift them. But he could not. Each bag was too heavy even for a man as strong as the baker to lift. The little storeroom had never contained so much flour before. Today he could bake twice as much bread as yesterday. And still he would have flour left over.

It was a miracle. The loan that Tychon had made to God had been richly repaid. The baker never again reproached his son’s generosity. In time Tychon finished the little school that belonged to the village church. The good priest had taught his pupil well. Tychon now became a reader in the church, reading the Scriptures on Sundays and holy days.

Faithful and conscientious in his duties, loving and generous to all, the young reader was later ordained a deacon by the bishop of Amathus. The baker and his wife were proud of their son. Their dream was coming true. When the bishop died, Tychon was chosen to succeed him. The baker’s son became Bishop of Amathus.

Bishop Tychon still remembered his boyhood hero, Barnabas, the first bishop of Cyprus. For many years Tychon’s words and deeds graced his Episcopal throne. By his eloquence and goodness he converted many pagans. All the islanders loved the bishop who was always kind, patient and generous.

The bright memory of the good Bishop of Amathus still survives any centuries after Tychon's death. Each year, on his feast day which is celebrated on the sixteenth day of June, the story is told again of the baker's son who fed the poor and loaned loaves of bread to God.

Sacred stories from Byzantium, by Eva C. Topping (Holy Cross Orthodox Press)

1977.