

## HOLY AND GLORIOUS PROPHET ELIAS (ILIAS, ELIJAH), THE TISHBITE \*

July 20<sup>th</sup> (New Calendar)/August 2<sup>nd</sup> (Old Calendar)

### Troparion – Tone 4

Incarnate Angel and summit of the Prophets,/ second forerunner of the coming of Christ,/ glorious Elijah sent down grace from on high to the Prophet Elisha./ He heals diseases and cleanses the leprous./ He pours healings on all who honour him.

### Kontakion – Tone 2

O great Prophet Elijah,/ seer of God's mighty works,/ who didst halt the torrential rain by thy word,/ pray for us to the Lover of Mankind.

**The Holy Prophet Elias (Ilias) (Elijah)** – one of the greatest of the prophets and the first dedicated to virginity in the Old Testament – he was born in Galaadian Thesbia (Tishbe) into the Levite tribe 900 years before the Incarnation of the Word of God.

Sainted Epiphanius of Cyprus gives the following account about the birth of the Prophet Elias: "When Elias was born, his father Sobach saw in a vision, that handsome men greeted him, they swaddled him in fire and fed the fiery flame". The name Elias (meaning, the Lord's strength) given to the infant defined his whole life. From the years of his youth he dedicated himself to the One God, settled in the wilderness and spent his whole life in strict fasting, Divine-meditation and prayer. Called to prophetic service afront the Israelite king Ahab, the prophet became a fiery zealot of the true faith and piety. During this time the Israelite nation had fallen away from the faith of their fathers, they abandoned the One God and worshipped pagan idols, the worship of which was introduced by the impious king Jereboam. An especial advocate of idol-worship was the wife of king Ahab, the paganess Jezebel. The worship of the idol of Baal led the Israelites towards complete moral decay. Beholding the ruin of his nation, the Prophet Elias began to denounce king Ahab for impiety, and exhorting him to repent and turn to the True God. The king would not listen to him. The Prophet Elias then declared to him, that in punishment there would then be neither rain nor dew upon the ground, and the dryness would cease only through his prayer. And indeed, through the prayer of the prophet the heavens were closed, and there befell drought and famine throughout all the land. The nation suffered from the incessant heat and hunger. The Lord through His mercy, seeing the suffering of the people, was prepared to forgive all and send rain upon the earth, but did not want to annul the words of the Prophet Elias, sorrowed with the desire to turn about the hearts of the Israelites to repentance and return them to the true worship of God. Having saved the Prophet Elias from the hands of Jezebel, the Lord during this time of tribulation sent him into a secret place of the stream Horath. The Lord ordered rapacious ravens to bring food to the prophet, moving him to pity for the suffering nation. When the stream Horath dried up, the Lord sent the Prophet Elias to Sidonian Sarepta to a poor widow, who suffered together with her children in the expectation of death by starvation. At the request of the prophet she prepared him a bread with the last measure of flour and the remainder of the oil. Thereafter through the prayer of the Prophet Elias, flour and oil were not depleted in the home of the widow for all the duration of the famine. By the power of his prayer the prophet did another miracle -- he resuscitated the dead son of the widow. After the end of three years of drought the Merciful Lord sent the prophet to king Ahab to bring an end to the misfortune. The Prophet Elias gave orders to gather upon Mount Carmel all Israel and the pagan-priests of Baal. When the nation had gathered, the Prophet Elias proposed the building of two sacrificial altars: one -- for the pagan-priests of Baal, and the other -- for the Prophet Elias in the service of the True God. "Upon whichever shalt come down upon it fire from the heavens, that one wilt be shewn to have the True God, -- said the Prophet Elias, -- and all shalt be obliged to worship Him, and if not invoking Him shalt be given over to death". The prophets of Baal rushed off first to offer sacrifice: they called out to the idol from morning till evening, but in vain -- the heavens were silent. Towards evening the holy Prophet Elias built up his sacrificial altar from 12 stones -- the number of the tribes of Israel; he placed the sacrifice upon the fire-wood, gave orders to dig a ditch around the altar and commanded that the sacrifice and the fire-wood be soaked with water. When the ditch had filled with water, the fiery prophet turned to God with a prayer and asked, that the Lord send down fire from the heavens to teach the wayward and obdurate Israelite people and turn their hearts to Himself.

Through the prayer of the prophet there came down fire from the heavens and it fell upon the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and even the water. The people fell down to the ground, crying out: "In truth the Lord is the One God and there is no other besides Him!". Then the Prophet Elias had put to death all the pagan-priests of Baal and he began to pray for the sending down of rain. Through his prayer the heavens opened and there came down an abundant rain, watering the parched earth.

King Ahab acknowledged his error and repented his sins, but his wife Jezebel threatened to kill the prophet of God. The Prophet Elias fled into the kingdom of Judea and, grieving over his failure to eradicate idol-worship, he asked of God his death. An Angel of the Lord came before him, strengthened him with food and commanded him to go upon a long journey. The Prophet Elias went for forty days and nights and, having arrived at Mount Horeb, he settled in a cave. Here after a terrible storm, an earthquake and a burst of flame the Lord appeared "in a quiet wind" (3 Kings 19: 12) and revealed to the grieving prophet, that He preserved seven thousand faithful servants who were not worshippers of Baal. The Lord commanded the Prophet Elias to anoint Elisei (Elisha) unto prophetic service. Because of his fiery zeal for the Glory of God the Prophet Elias was taken up alive to Heaven on a fiery chariot. The Prophet Elisei (Elisha) began with the testimony of the ascent of the Prophet Elias to the heavens on a fiery chariot and received together with his fallen-down mantle (cloak) a gift of prophetic spirit twice as great, than the Prophet Elias had possessed.

According to the tradition of Holy Church, the Prophet Elias will be a Fore-Runner of the Terrible Second Coming of Christ upon the earth and during the time of preaching will be a sign of bodily death.

The life of the holy Prophet Elias is recorded in the Old Testament books (3 Kings; 4 Kings; Sirach/Ecclesiastes 48: 1-15; 1 Maccabees 2: 58). At the time of the Transfiguration [Preobrazhenie] the Prophet Elias conversed with the Saviour upon Mount Thabor (Tabor) (Mt. 17: 3; Mk. 9: 4; Lk. 9: 30).

For the day of the fiery ascent to Heaven of the Prophet Elias his veneration in the Church of Christ was constant over the centuries. The Russian Orthodox Church venerates the Prophet Elias among the saints. The first church, built at Kiev under prince Igor, was in the name of the Prophet Elias. After Baptism the holy Equal-to-the-Apostles princess Olga (Comm. 14 July) built a temple of the holy Prophet Elias in his native region, at the village of Vibuta.

The iconographic tradition portrays the Prophet Elias rising up on a chariot with fiery wheels, which are encircled on all sides with flames and harnessed to four winged horses.

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#### \* NOTES

*Simple Explanation of Old and New Calendar: The Gregorian Calendar was established in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII to correct the inaccuracy of the Julian Calendar. When Pope Gregory decreed the change in the calendar, the Julian Calendar date of March 21 fell ten days after the astronomical event of the Spring Equinox. This newly established calendar came to be called the Gregorian Calendar, and by 1930 it had been adopted almost universally as the civil calendar by governments around the world. However, Eastern Orthodox churches continued to use the Julian calendar for liturgical purposes. At a synod held in May of 1923, a Revised Julian Calendar was proposed that is so nearly identical with the Gregorian Calendar that it does not diverge until the year 2800. Some Eastern Orthodox churches adopted the Revised Julian Calendar (the New Calendarists) and others rejected it, continuing to use the original Julian Calendar (the Old Calendarists). In spite of the calendar difference, the consensus of the Orthodox Church is the centrality of the Resurrection of the Lord where this Feast of Feasts and all movable feasts revolving around it are celebrated by both Old and New Calendarists on the same actual day.*

*(Troparia and Kontakia are short verses telling about the lives of the saints of the Orthodox Christian Church. The verses are chanted or sung in Orthodox worship services, and used in daily prayers. The verses are listed and used on the calendar date of the saint's celebration.)*

*(This reading, Troparia & Kontakion are from the Computer Software "[Menologion](#)", by Thomas G. (Michael) Purcell)*