THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE (842-1025)

Scripture: Psalm 90
Prayer
Hymn: 460 "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"

THE DAWN OF THE NEW AGE: MICHAEL III THE DRUNDARD

Michael III, the last of the Amorian Dynasty, was only six at the death of his father, Theophilius, the last Iconoclastic emperor. Michael's mother, Theodora, who published her husband's death-bed confession favoring the images, became regent for her son in 842. Theodora, her brother, Bardas, and Theoctistus, the minister of finance, ousted the iconoclastic patriarch of Constantinople, John Grammaticus, and installed an iconodule, Methodius, as Patriarch. In March 843 they held a synod in Constantinople that restored the images, proclaimed the first Sunday of Lent as "The Festival of Orthodoxy" and began the custom of reading on that Sunday the Synodicon, an official statement of the doctrine of the church. They inaugurated a cultural revival giving strong backing to education and scholarship. Circumspectly they liquidated the iconoclastic regime showing considerable moderation toward former adherents of iconoclasm. The Studite monks demanded stronger action against iconoclasts. Patriarch Methodius excommunicated the Studite monks. Theodora began a blood bath against the Paulicians. The patriarch Methodius died in 847 and the Studites were able to secure the elevation of one of their number, Ignatius to the patriarchate. Ignatius was the son of the former emperor Michael Rangabe. He had been castrated at the deposition of his father and had entered the monastery. Ignatius was stubborn, strong-willed, and conservative. Theoctistus the minister of finance ousted Bardas, the brother of Theodora, and became her sole adviser. A series of military defeats by the Moslems on land and sea weakened the position of Theoctistus. Bardas secretly returned and joined Michael III against his mother, Theoctistus, and the Patriarch Ignatius. Theoctistus was murdered in the palace in the presence of Michael III. Theodora and her daughters were shaved and imprisoned in a nunnery. When the patriarch proved uncooperative his head was shaved and he was imprisoned in a monastery and Photius was installed as patriarch.

PHOTIUS THE PATRIARCH: Photius was born into a family of wealth but his parents were martyred as iconodules. Photius had not been deprived of wealth but had been brought up by guardians who saw that he received an excellent education. He developed into the greatest scholar of his day. One of his first and most famous works was his Bibliotheca (Library or Myriobiblon), a digest of what he considered the 280 most important books written up to his time. It was a classic of literary criticism as well as an anthology. Many of the works have perished except for what Photius gives. His Amphilucia was a book of questions and answers prepared for Christians. He prepared a Greek Lexicon, wrote Bible commentaries, published sermons and addresses, wrote many important letters on the questions of the day, published poems and hymns, and wrote polemical works against Moslems, Paulicians, and the Roman church. His polemical masterpiece was his Mystagogia of the Holy Spirit, setting forth the Eastern doctrine of the Holy Spirit and condemning the Roman doctrine of the "filoque."

Photius' reputation as a scholar attracted the attention of Michael III and Bardas and they made him the head of the imperial university in Constantinople. He proved such an able administrator that they made him Captain of the Imperial Guard. He performed so well in the military that they made him First Secretary of State. He filled this office with such distinction that they decided to oust Ignatius as Patriarch and to install Photius as Patriarch of Constantinople (861).

Photius faced with opposition from friends of Ignatius sent letters of enthronement to patriarchs and to Pope Nicholas of Rome. Friends of Ignatius appealed to Pope Nicholas. Nicholas sent emissaries Bishop Rhodocaldus of Portus and Bishop Zacharias of Anagni to Constantinople to investigate the matter. Nicholas offered to accept the situation if Constantinople would surrender its claims to Thessalonica, Syracuse, Calabria and Sicily. Photius held a council in Constantinople that declared his elevation to Patriarch valid and Photius persuaded the pope's emissaries to
acquiesce but Constantinople did not give up its claims on Thessalonica, Syracuse, Calabria and Sicily. Pope Nicholas disavowed his emissaries and held a synod in 863 declaring Photius deposed and excommunicated and demanding that Ignatius be reinstated as Patriarch. Photius and Michael III declared the independence of Constantinople from Rome. The Patriarch of Constantinople was the only leader of the Byzantine Church and the emperor was the sole head of the empire. The Emperor Michael III sent the pope a strong letter calling Latin a barbarian and Sythian tongue. The pope replied that it was ridiculous for the emperor to call himself "Emperor of Rome" if he felt this way about Latin. In 867 Photius and Michael III held a synod in Constantinople and excommunicated Pope Nicholas. Nicholas died during this first Photian schism.

MICHAEL III AS EMPEROR: Supported by able generals they pursued the war against the Arabs with great energy. They failed to retake Sicily and Southern Italy but recaptured most of Asia Minor. Michael repulsed a strong Russian attack. He forged an alliance with Moravia as protection against Bulgaria and with the Khazars for protection against Russia. Michael encouraged missionary work in Moravia and among the Khazars. Massing strong forces against Bulgaria he persuaded Boris, king of Bulgaria, to abandon plans to join Rome. Boris was baptized with Michael as witness and changed his name to "Boris Michael." Later disappointed that Michael and Photius would not grant him an archbishopric of Bulgaria, Boris turned again to Rome. Fifty-two Bulgarian bojars were beheaded for opposing the adoption of Christianity.

THE APOSTLES TO THE SLAVS: CONSTANTINE AND METHODIUS: Brothers from a Greek senatorial family of Thessalonica, where they were ordained. Came to Constantinople to study. Constantine became librarian of Santa Sophia. In 862 Michael III sent the brothers as ambassadors and missionaries to the Khazars. When the Moravian prince Rastislav requested Michael III to send his people missionaries, Michael sent Constantine and Methodius. Patriarch Photius gave them permission to preach and worship in Slavic. They invented the Slavonic script (the so-called glagolithic alphabet), translating the Bible into Slavonic, and also the liturgy in Slavonic. The Frankish clergy of Rome were jealous of their success and strongly opposed the use of Slavonic instead of Latin. Nicholas summoned the missionaries to Rome but died before they arrived. The brothers were converted to the Roman way and Constantine took the name "Cyril." Pope Adrian II consecrated them bishops to work in Moravia, but Cyril died in Rome in 869 and was buried in San Clemente. Pope John VIII sent Methodius as Archbishop into Moravia with permission to use the Slavonic. The Frankish clergy imprisoned Methodius for two years. Pope John VIII secured his release but withdrew permission to use Slavonic. Methodius worked among the Bohemians of northern Moravia. The Frankish clergy appointed Wiching as suffragan bishop to spy on his work and to send false letters against him. Methodius finally had to leave Bohemia, tired and worn out. There is a tradition that he worked with some success in Bulgaria and that his painting of the Last Judgment helped convert King Boris. Methodius returned to Constantinople and to the Eastern Church. He spent his remaining days working on the Slavonic translation of Scripture and a translation of ecclesiastical law, dying in 885.

BASIL I AND THE MACEDONIAN DYNASTY: Basil, a champion wrestler, came from a very poor family of Macedonia. He became a favorite of the imperial stables. The clever, crafty Basil married a former mistress of Basil, the ambitious Eudocia Ingerina. During the campaign against the Moslems in Crete Basil murdered Bardas (865). Michael III made Basil co-Emperor. Basil at a banquet in 867 murdered Michael and became emperor, founding the Macedonian dynasty. In 869 he crowned his oldest son (by a youthful marriage to Maria, a Macedonian) as co-emperor. The Patriarch Photius was deposed and sent into exile and Ignatius was reinstated as patriarch. Basil restored relations with Rome by holding a council in Constantinople 869-870 in which Photius was excommunicated in the presence of the legates of Pope Adrian II. The Romans counted this the Eighth Ecumenical Council. Despite the protests of Rome Basil won the Bulgarians back to Constantinople and had Patriarch Ignatius consecrate an archbishop of Bulgaria. Basil defeated the Arabs on the sea,
retook Southern Italy and Sicily, and consolidated Byzantine control in Asia Minor and Armenia. A proposed marriage between Basil's son, Constantine, to the daughter of Louis II, was broken off when Louis laid claim to part of Byzantine Italy. Basil encouraged education and a codification of Byzantine Law known as the Procheiron. Basil brought Photius back to tutor his sons by Eudocia Ingerina, Leo, Alexander, and Stephen. When Ignatius died Photius was reinstated as Patriarch. He appealed to Pope John VIII for recognition. Pope John offered to recognize him and to give up the "filoque" if Constantinople would give up its claims to Bulgaria. Photius decided to ignore Pope John. He held a synod in Constantinople that recognized him as Patriarch. Again relations were broken off between Rome and Constantinople. Basil became mentally ill and incompetent at the early death by drowning of his favorite son, Constantine, in 879.

LEO VI: Became emperor in 886 and made his brother Stephen, patriarch, deposing Photius and sending him into exile in Armenia. He accused him of planning to be both patriarch and emperor. Leo's brother, Alexander, was emperor in name but devoted himself completely to pleasure. Leo VI was a scholar and writer of ability. His Basilica was a new collection of Byzantine Law. He reorganized the empire, greatly strengthening the central power and beginning a movement to limit the growing power of large land holders. His four marriages kept him in trouble: youthful marriage with Theophano. His second wife had been his mistress: Zoe, the daughter of his chief adviser, the Armenian Stylianus Zautzes. In the summer of 900 he took a third wife, Eudocia Baiana, a Phrygian. At her death he married the beautiful Zoe Carbonopaisa, who bore him a son, Constantine. The Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus for bade the emperor to enter the church. Pope Sergius III recognized the marriage. Leo replaced Nicholas Mysticus with Patriarch Euthymius.

SYMEON OF BULGARIA: Constantine was only six at the death of his father, Leo. Symeon of Bulgaria seized power and declared himself co-emperor with the lad, Constantine VII. Revolution followed and Romanus Lecapenus seized power securing the marriage of his daughter and Constantine VII.

THE BOGOMILS: In the early 900's a priest, Bobomil led a Bulgarian movement against the Byzantine government and church. Some of his doctrines were drawn from the Paulicians. The Good God ruled the invisible, spiritual world. His elder son, Satanael, revolted and created the material universe. A younger son, Jesus, came as a Docetic appearance to end the creative power of Satanael. The Bogomils rejected the empire, the organized church, the hierarchy, buildings, baptism, the Eucharist, all outward worship and ritual. They practiced strict ascetic lives. They were strong foes of wealth and power. They were very missionary and spread through the empire but were especially strong in Bulgaria and Macedonia.

ROMANUS LECAPENUS AND CONSTANTINE VII PORPHYROGENITUS:

Romanus Lecapenus became co-emperor with Constantine VII and then made his sons, Christopher, Stephen, and Constantine, co-emperors with precedence over Constantine VII. Romanus proved a great statesman and with his general John Curcuas greatly extended the territory of the empire and weakened the power of the great land holders. Romanus' own sonsusted and exiled their father but failed to establish themselves in power. Constantine VII when nearly forty at last became emperor. He successfully carried on the wars against the Arabs, further strengthened the central government, and carried on lively diplomatic relations. He encouraged missionary work in Russia. The young Russian Princess Olga visited Constantinople.

NICEPHORUS PHOCAS: Constantine VII died in 959 and his son, Romanus II left the control of the empire to the general Nicephorus Phocas who became emperor in 963. He was successful against enemies within and without the empire until he was murdered by a young general who had become the lover of the emperor's wife.

JOHN TZIMISCES (963-76) became emperor by murdering Nicephorus Phocas. He proved a very successful warrior and statesman reestablishing Byzantine power over the Balkans, Asia Minor, Phoenicia, Palestine, and Syria.

BASIL II: The son of Romanus II was eighteen at the death of John Tzimisces. A man of iron determination he put down trouble in the Balkans, established peaceful
relations with the Russians, established the central power over the powerful aristocratic landholders, established empire control in Southern Italy and Sicily, Armenia and Asia Minor. The Byzantine Empire had reached its greatest height at his death in December 1025.