

The Ancient Faith in Its Historical and Living Traditions
Explained Through...

A Guided Journey Through the 2026 Lenten and Pascal Seasons
of the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church

5. Sanctification of Matter, Uncreated Light, Uncreated Energies of God

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Prayer Before Reading Scripture

Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our minds that we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments, so that having conquered all sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the light of our souls and bodies, and to You we give glory together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all holy, good, and life giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

2

What Happened Last Two Sundays

- Commemorated "The Triumph of Orthodoxy" regarding Holy Images (843 AD)
 - End of 2nd and final iconoclastic period
 - Read the 843 AD Synodikon of Orthodoxy
 - <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2010/02/synodicon-of-orthodoxy.html>
- Commemorated Gregory Palamas
 - a Second Triumph of Orthodox (1351 AD)
 - Knowledge of God through His uncreated energies
- These are interconnected

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The Sanctification of Matter In Scripture

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Sanctification of Matter: in the Holy Scriptures

The Divine Energies

- Essence vs. Energies: God is unknowable in His essence (ousia) but reveals Himself through His uncreated energies (energeia).
- The Transfiguration: Christ's face shining like the sun (Matthew 17:1-9) is the manifestation of the "Uncreated Light."
- The Burning Bush: The fire in the bush (Exodus 3) is the Divine Energy that permeates matter without consuming it.
- Theosis: Believers become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) by participating in these energies.

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Sanctification of Matter: in the Holy Scriptures

Icons and the Incarnation

- The Image of God: Christ is the "icon (eikon) of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).
- The Incarnation Logic: Because the Word became flesh (John 1:14), the invisible God became visible and, therefore, can be depicted.
- Commanded Images: God commanded the making of golden Cherubim (Exodus 25) and the Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21).
- Veneration vs. Idolatry: Icons are "windows to heaven" used for honor (proskynesis), not the worship due to God alone (latreia).

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Sanctification of Matter: in the Holy Scriptures

Relics and Holy Matter

- The Body as Temple: The Holy Spirit dwells in the physical body (1 Corinthians 6:19), sanctifying the flesh.
- Elisha's Bones: A dead man was resurrected upon touching the bones of the prophet (2 Kings 13:21).
- The Hem of the Garment: Grace was transmitted through Christ's clothing to heal the hemorrhaging woman (Matthew 9:20).
- Apostolic Relics: Shadows (Acts 5:15) and handkerchiefs (Acts 19:11-12) served as conduits for God's healing power.

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The Sanctification of Matter In Baptism

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The Cosmic Nature of Water

(Fr. Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*)

- “Man...is reborn as much from Spirit as from cosmic matter, inasmuch as the water represents this matter in a liquid state, as a reservoir and womb for every form of organized existence.
- Baptism has a cosmic significance. It means that matter itself, brought back to the condition of spiritual mobility, becomes a milieu for the creator Spirit, who is free and ever new in all His acts.
- The water of baptism...has...been made spiritual for the sake of human rebirth and the reestablishment of humanity’s relationship with God.”

Sanctification of Matter

Christ's baptism and ours....



Christ is Blessing the Waters of the Jordan



He is Jesus, the Author of life. He has come to loose the condemnation of first- created Adam. Being God, and thus not needing to be purified, in the Jordan He **purifies the one who had fallen**. He put to death the enmity, and therefore He grants the peace that passes all understanding.

(Theophany, Ode 5, Canon 1)

In the Service of Holy Baptism, the Priest Prays...

You hallowed the streams of Jordan, sending down from the Heavens Your Holy Spirit, and crushed the heads of dragons that lurked therein.

Do You yourself, O loving King, be present now also through the descent of Your Holy Spirit and hallow this water.

And give to it the Grace of Redemption, the Blessing of Jordan. Make it a fountain of incorruption, a gift of sanctification, a loosing of sins, a healing of sicknesses, a destruction of demons, unapproachable by hostile powers, filled with angelic might; and let them that take counsel together against Your creature flee there from, for I have called upon Your Name, O Lord, which is wonderful, and glorious, and terrible unto adversaries.

Sanctification of Matter: in the Holy Scriptures Relics and Holy Matter

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The Second Triumph of Orthodoxy

Hesychastic Theology of Uncreated Light and Uncreated Energies of God St. Gregory Palamas

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The Hesychast Controversy shakes Byzantine society



Gregory Palamas
(Theologian & Monk of Mount Athos)

VS



Barlaam & Akindynos
& Nikephoros Gregoras



The Catalyst: Initially a dispute over the ascetical prayer practices of Athonite monks.



The Deeper Stakes: Quickly evolved into a profound philosophical debate over the fundamental nature of God, divine simplicity, and whether humans can truly experience the divine.



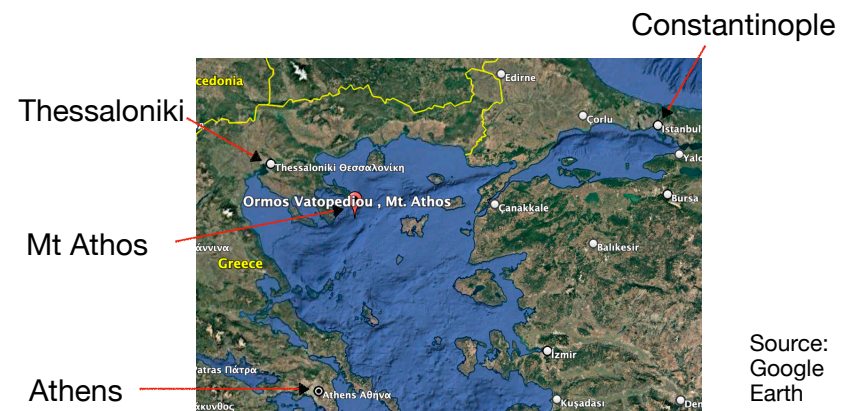
The Accusation: Palamas's opponents claimed his doctrines were innovative and heretical; Palamas argued they were the organic continuation of biblical and patristic tradition.

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Mt Athos



Source:
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Mt Athos



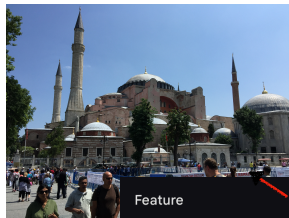
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Mt Athos



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Feature	Hagia Sophia (Constantinople)	Hagia Sophia (Thessaloniki)
Role in 1341	The Official Seat of the Council. Barlaam was formally condemned here.	The Pastoral Base . Palamas preached his famous "Hesychast" sermons here.
Connection to Palamas	Where his theology was made Imperial Law .	Where he served as Archbishop and defended the city from zealots.
Current Status	A mosque (reconverted in 2020).	An active Orthodox Church and UNESCO World Heritage site.

The Role of the Two "Agia Sophia" Churches

Metropolis Cathedral of Thessaloniki - St Gregory Palamas



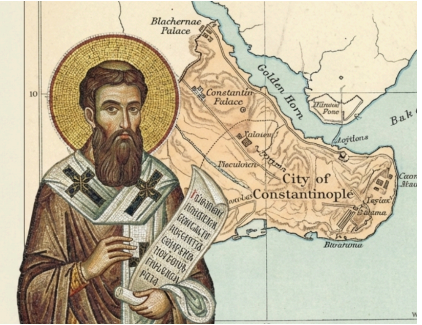
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Saturday
Great
Vespers
before
Sunday of
St Gregory
Palamas



Gregory Palamas at Blachernae: The 1351 Confession of Faith

Deconstructing the definitive theological
victory of late Byzantium



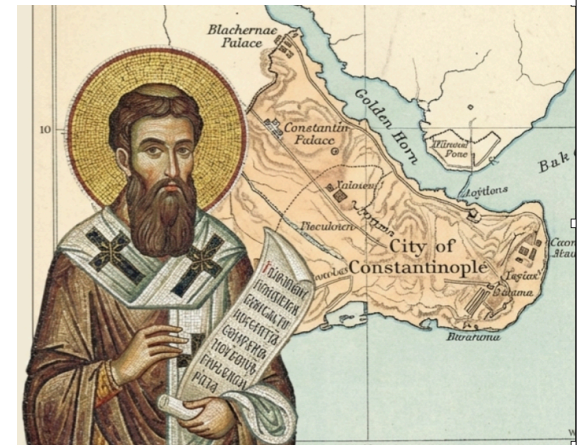
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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith

- Aristeides Papadakis, "Gregory Palamas at the Council of Blachernae (1351)," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 10, no. 4 (Winter 1969): 333–342. [accessed 3/6/2026](<https://grbs.library.duke.edu/article/viewFile/10431/4357>)
- His was the first translation into English
- Greek title of the confession:
 - The Confession of Faith of the Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, Gregory Palamas, Read Before the Divine and Holy Synod, So That It Could Be Heard Clearly By All, and Confirmed and Venerated By All as Being on All Points Most Orthodox

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- Confession of the Orthodox Faith
- Likely
 - Written while in prison 1343-1344
 - Read publicly at 1347 elevation as Archbishop of Thessaloniki
- Definitely read at 2nd session of 1351 Synod at Blachernae Palace, Constantinople
- Gregory said his Confession possesses a theological precision rarely in his other works.



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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith

From Gregory Palamas at the Council of Blachernae, 1351. Aristeides Papadakis

"In the second session of the Council, Palamas maintained that much of his polemical writing in defense of the hesychast position was not necessarily a model of theological nicety and thoroughness of expression. What was of greater moment—he argued—was the truth embodied in his work, rather than the theological formulations. Be this as it may, he did have a confession of faith, which because of its nature possessed exactitude and precision in expression."

(p. 335)

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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith

From Gregory Palamas at the Council of Blachernae, 1351. Aristeides Papadakis

"The emperor then requested Palamas to read this confession to the assembly, at which point many of Palamas' opponents left the room. Those who remained, however, expressed their approval of the confession, and indeed hoped that it would be with such a confession that the good archbishop would appear on the last day before the judgement seat of Christ; the second session ended on this note."

(p. 335)

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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith

The Holy Trinity and the Uncaused Father

- Absolute Unity: God is a perfect Unity in Trinity, undivided and unconfused.
- The Father's Unique Role: The Father is the sole uncaused foundation of the Godhead.
- Equality of Persons: While the Father is the causative principle, He is identical and equal with the Son and Spirit in all other respects.
- Key Quote: "THERE IS ONE GOD before all things... a Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, united without confusion and divided without separation... he [the Father] alone is the author, foundation and source of the Godhead"

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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith

The Procession of the Holy Spirit

- Rejection of the Filioque: The Holy Spirit proceeds solely from the Father, not by generation, but by procession.
- Manifestation Through the Son: While originating from the Father, the Spirit is sent and made known through the Son.
- Key Quote: "Wherefore, he is sent not only from the Son, but from the Father, and through the Son, and is manifested through himself".

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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith

The Essence and Energies of God

- Inaccessible Essence: God's inner nature or "superessential essence" is entirely unrevealed and incommunicable.
- Communicable Energies: God unites with humanity through His grace, power, and operations.
- Divine Simplicity: Possessing multiple powers or hypostases does not destroy God's simple, unified nature.
- Key Quote: "...without being deprived of his simplicity either as a result of the divisibility and distinction of the hypostases or as a result of the divisibility and multiplicity of the powers and operations"

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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith

The Veneration of Holy Images (Icons)

- Relative Veneration: Worship is directed to the original person depicted, not the material of the image itself.
- The Incarnate Son: Veneration of Christ's image is rooted in the reality that He was incarnate in the flesh for us.
- Images of the Saints: We venerate the saints' images as an expression of our genuine love for them and for God.
- Key Quote: "Moreover, we venerate relatively (referring this veneration to the original) the holy image of the representation of the Son of God, who was incarnate for us... We also venerate the images of all the saints in recognition of our love for them and for God... in this act of veneration we direct our thoughts to the representations of the images".

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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith

The Relics of the Saints

- Sanctifying Grace: The grace of God does not abandon the physical bodies of the saints after they die.
- The Analogy of Christ's Tomb: Just as Christ's divinity remained with His dead body in the tomb, grace remains in the holy bones of the saints.
- Key Quote: "We venerate the very relics of the saints since the sanctifying grace does not vanish from their most holy bones, just as the Godhead was not divided from the Lord's body during the three-day death"

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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith

The Cross, Holy Places, and Sacred Utensils

- Divine Trophies: The wood of the cross and the symbols of Christ's passion are venerated as trophies of victory against the enemy.
- The Dwelling of God: Veneration extends to holy churches, locations, and sacred utensils because of God's presence in them.
- Holy Words: The words "divinely handed down" to the Church are also worthy of veneration.
- Key Quote: "Similarly, we venerate the honorable wood of the cross and all the symbols of his passion as being truly the divine trophies against the common enemy of our race; we venerate the saving image of the venerable cross, the holy churches and locations, the sacred utensils and the words divinely handed down, inasmuch as God dwells in them"

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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith The Nature and Origin of Evil

- No Divine Essence: Evil is not a created substance or an independent entity.
- A Deviation of Reason: Evil originates solely from rational beings misusing their God-given free will.
- Key Quote: "We do not acknowledge evil according to essence, nor is its origin other than the deviation of reason, that is, the misuse of our God-given free will".

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St Gregory Palamas Confession of Orthodox Faith The Uncreated Light and Final Victory

- Condemnation of Opponents: Palamas rejoices in the local councils that condemned Barlaam and Akindynos.
- Uncreated Grace: Opponents falsely taught that God's grace, operations, and the light of the age to come were created entities.
- The Hesychast Triumph: Palamas affirms that everything issuing naturally from God, including the divine light, is uncreated.
- Key Quote: "...those who piously believe that the most sacred light is uncreated and every power and operation is divine-since nothing which issues naturally from God is created"

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Triumph for Hesychastic Tradition Transfiguration

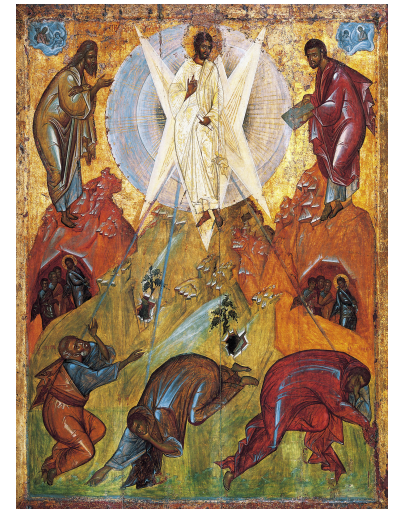
- Sealing of Orthodox Identity
- Enduring Validity
- The Ultimate Paradox



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Theophanes the Greek Transfiguration

Transfiguration by Feofan Grek from Spaso-Preobrazhensky Cathedral in Pereslavl-Zalessky (15th c, Tretyakov gallery)



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Questions? Comments?