



Learning About a Saint: St. Seraphim of Sarov

(Commemorated on January 2)

On January 2, we commemorate the life of St. Seraphim of Sarov. This beloved saint's humility and kindness to both people and animals provide an excellent example for all of us. His name day falls right after the beginning of the new calendar year. We are writing this blog post a whole month before his commemoration, in order to allow time for us to learn about him and teach our children about his life before any of us make our New Year's resolutions. Emulating his life – even just one aspect of his holy way of living – would be an excellent New Year's resolution for any Orthodox Christian.

St. Seraphim, first named Prochor Moshnin, was born in in Kursk, Russia, in 1759, to devout parents who took him to church and taught him the things of God. At an early age, miracles began to happen in Prochor's life. For example, when he was only 7 years old, he once fell from the bell tower (which was 3 or 4 stories tall) of the Kursk Cathedral. He should have been seriously injured, but God worked a miracle, and he was unharmed. When he was 10, he became very ill. One night, the Mother of God appeared to him and told him that he would soon be healed. A few days later, a wonder-working icon of the Theotokos was processing through Kursk when rain suddenly began to pour down from the clouds. The procession took a shortcut through Prochor's family's yard. His mother carried her sick boy outside to venerate the icon as it passed, and he recovered from his illness that very day.

Throughout the early years of his life, Prochor studied the scriptures and attended church. At age 19, he went to live in a monastery so that he could become a monk. At the monastery, he worked hard and prayed hard. Years later, at age 27, he was tonsured as the monk "Seraphim," and a few years after that, he was ordained to the priesthood.

After he became a priest, St. Seraphim served God in a variety of ways. He served as the priest for the monastery in Diveyevo; he lived for a while in solitude in the forest; he prayed on a rock for 1,000 days/nights; and much more. Throughout these experiences, he welcomed all visitors, whether they were children, adults, or animals. All the while, he worked at praying the Jesus Prayer. Sometimes when he prayed, he shone with holy light because of how close he was to God.

When the Abbot of Sarov asked St. Seraphim to go back to the monastery to help the pilgrims who came there, he obeyed. The pilgrims who came to see St. Seraphim were greeted with, "Christ is risen!" and he called everyone, "My Joy." God often revealed to him what the pilgrims' struggles were, even before they told him about the troubles they were having. Each pilgrim left their meeting with St. Seraphim feeling happy and full of the hope of the resurrection of Christ.

The Theotokos appeared to St. Seraphim 12 times over the course of his lifetime. One of the last times she appeared, he was working at the monastery when he saw her walking around the outskirts of the property. When he saw her, he understood that she was protecting the monastery, and that whoever followed her footsteps in that path would be blessed. He and the nuns spent years digging a canal where she had walked so that pilgrims could also walk there, praying to the Theotokos, and be blessed. To this

day, they do. And they are. St. Seraphim reposed in the Lord a few days after the canal was completed. There are many accounts of miracles through his prayers, since his repose in the Lord.

St. Seraphim of Sarov, intercede for us and for our salvation!

Before teaching your Sunday Church School students about St. Seraphim of Sarov, you may want to do some of your own research, and find more stories from his life. Here are a few suggestions:

- *Read more about the life of St. Seraphim of Sarov, find his troparion and kontakion, and read many of his quotes here: http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/seraphim_e.htm
- *Find a detailed telling of the story of the life of St. Seraphim of Sarov, complete with icons and paintings (and even some photos of the still-standing buildings!) here: <http://www.symeon-anthony.info/StSeraphimSarov/StSeraphimSarov.htm>
- *Share a book about his life with your students. For example, this one: <http://www.stnectorpress.com/st-seraphim-of-sarov-childrens/>
- *Here is the life of St. Seraphim of Sarov, written in child-friendly language which you could read with your Sunday Church School students or print copies to send home for the students to share with their family: <http://www.serfes.org/lives/stseraphin.htm>
- *Younger children will enjoy listening to Katherine Bolger Hyde's short story, "Friend of the Holy Spirit: St. Seraphim of Sarov," as read by Dr. Chrissi Hart, here: http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/grapevine/readings_from_under_the_grapevine_program_41
- *Older children will enjoy watching this English-subtitled Russian cartoon illustrating the life of St. Seraphim and reading the English subtitles. (Note: the translation is a little rough in some places.) <https://dotsub.com/view/a606618f-801a-4d24-99c3-6788e73645c8>
- *If you teach a teen Sunday Church School class, you may want to use these resources in your discussion of St. Seraphim of Sarov's life:
 - Read what one person is learning from the life of St. Seraphim of Sarov while writing a musical tribute to the saint's life: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/81028.htm>
 - Hear another person's story of St. Seraphim's interaction with his life: http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/frederica/a_visit_from_st_seraphim
 - Read one pilgrim's account of her visits to the Holy Trinity-Diveyevo Women's Monastery, including some miracles she experienced in this holy place where St. Seraphim spent so much of his time, here: <http://www.manastir-lepavina.org/duhovnik/index.php?read=2363>
 - Listen to a homily on St. Seraphim, given by a priest who was given St. Seraphim's name, here: http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/redeemingtime/st_seraphim_of_sarov
- *Find suggestions for celebrating St. Seraphim of Sarov's name day here: <http://www.charmingthebirdsfromthetrees.com/2013/07/festal-learning-basket-saint-seraphim.html?m=1> and here: <http://www.creativehandscreativeminds.com/2014/01/st-seraphim-of-sarov.html?spref=pi>
- *Together with your class, pray the Akathist (or even just part of it) to St. Seraphim of Sarov: <https://akathisthymns.wordpress.com/seraphim/>

- *For you to ponder (or to discuss with older Sunday Church School students): “God is fire, warming and igniting the heart and inward parts. So, if we feel coldness in our hearts, which is from the devil (for the devil is cold), then let us call the Lord: He, in coming, will warm our heart with perfect love, not only towards Himself, but to our neighbors as well. And the coldness of the despiser of good will run from the face of His warmth.” ~ St. Seraphim of Sarov
- *For you to ponder (or to discuss with older Sunday Church School students): “True hope seeks the one Kingdom of God and is sure that everything necessary for this mortal life will surely be given. The heart cannot have peace until it acquires this hope. This hope pacifies it fully and brings joy to it.” ~ St. Seraphim of Sarov
- *For you to ponder (or to discuss with older Sunday Church School students): “When the evil spirit of sorrow seizes the soul, then, by filling it with bitterness and unpleasantness, it does not allow it to pray with necessary diligence; it disrupts the attention necessary for reading spiritual writings, deprives it of humility and good nature in the treatment of others and breeds aversion to any discussion. For the sorrowful soul, by becoming as if insane and frenzied, can neither accept kind advice calmly, nor answer posed questions meekly. It runs from people as if from the perpetrators of its embarrassment, not understanding that the reason for its illness — is within it. Sorrow is the worm of the heart, gnawing at the mother that bore it.” ~ St. Seraphim of Sarov
- *For you to ponder (or to discuss with older Sunday Church School students): “The true goal of our Christian life consists of acquiring God’s Holy Spirit. Fasting and vigil, prayer, mercy, and every other good deed performed for Christ — are means for acquiring the Holy Spirit of God. Only deeds performed for Christ give us the fruits of the Holy Spirit.” ~ St. Seraphim of Sarov