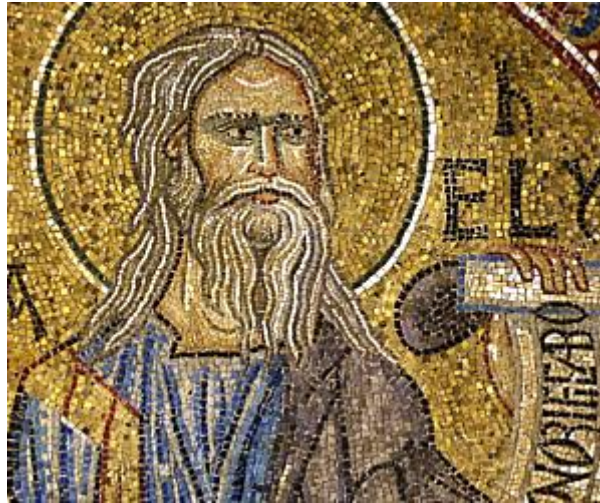
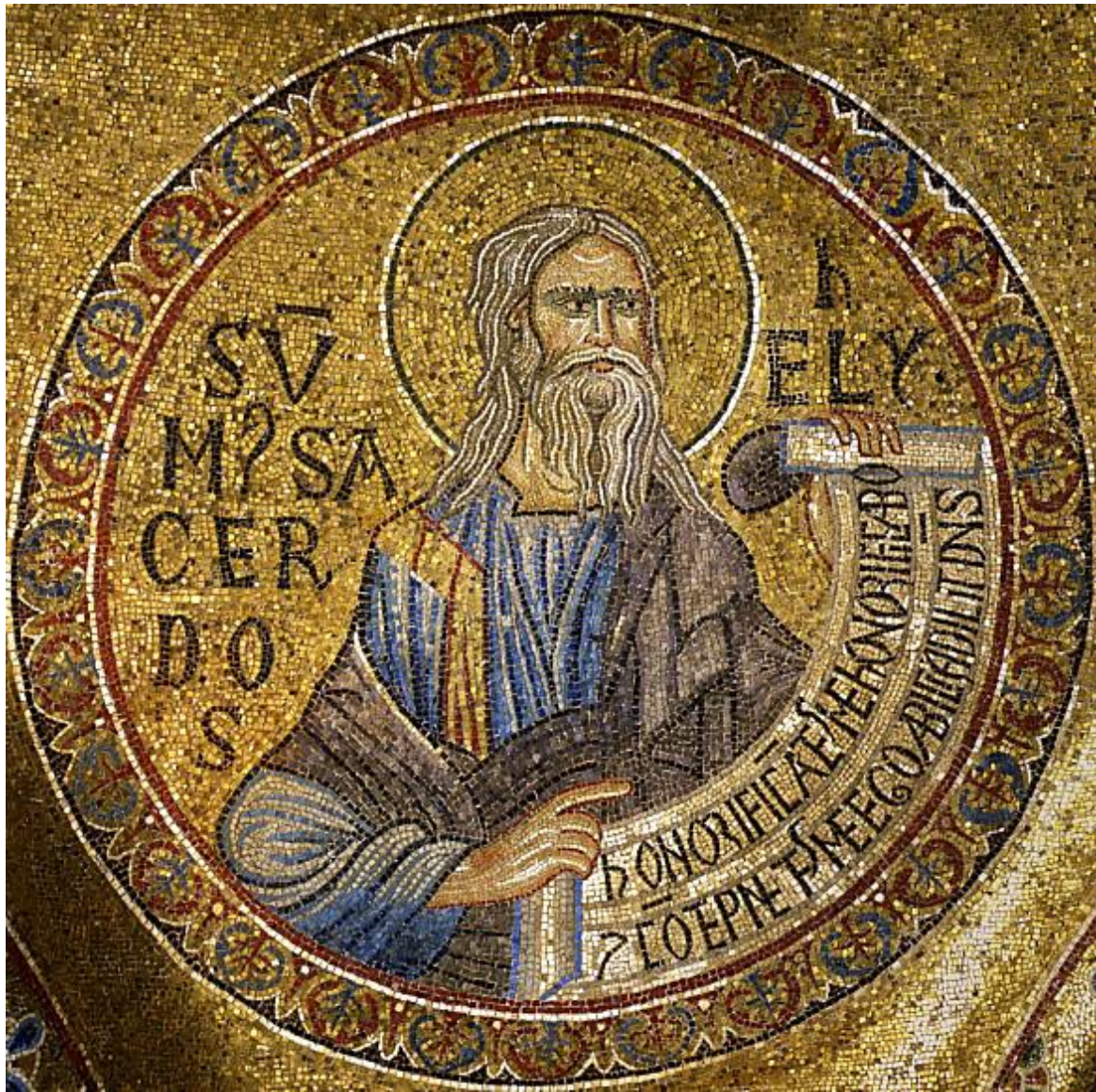


Prophet Elijah, the gift of God (Savva Alexandrou)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Saint Gregory Palamas, speaking in general about the prophets, as also the Fathers of the Church, notes: “God raised up the Prophets and the Fathers unto our guidance and He showed signs and wonders to us through them, so that He could correctly lead us up to faith.”



Prophet Elijah, mosaic from San Marco Cathedral, Venezia, 12th Century

The Prophets, as also the Fathers of the church, are essentially God's gift to men, because they lead us to true faith and furthermore through the miracles they do, they experientially certify God's presence among us.

One such gift of God to man was also the Prophet Elijah the Tishbite who was called thus, because he hailed from the city Tishbe of the area of Gilead and belonged to the tribe of Naphtaliim. He lived during the time of King Ahab and queen Jezebel. Jezebel, an idolatrous and simultaneously dynamic woman, is essentially governing the Israeli people in the name of her husband who was weak in terms of his character. This resulted in idolatry being imposed in the whole kingdom of Israel. It is mentioned characteristically in the Third Book of Kings: “³³ And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. And Ahabdid evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all the Kings of Israel who were before him for his

soul to be annihilated. ". So the worship of the false God Baal is imposed, whereas simultaneously Ahab constructs the statue of the false goddess Astarte in a sacred idol worshipping forest. Immorality prevails everywhere and the falling of morals. One would say that in the specific case the position of Saint Symeon the New Theologian prevails who says characteristically: "people ended up in such ignorance of God and his divine commandments, that the honor which they ought to have rendered to God they rendered to visible creation and having deified these lewd passions they also worshipped them". So, complete spiritual darkness.

In this condition the Prophet Elijah appears, who bearing divine zeal orders a complete drought to occur, which resulted in a plague ensuing in the whole country. It is characteristically mentioned: ""As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

A fearful thing, he not only orders so that not a drop of rain fall, but he declares that only with his own commandment will it rain. In the specific case, the Prophet Elijah gives us the dimension of the ontological and not simply of the moral dimension of the saint. The Saint is God by position and action. So, for precisely this reason, and according to the theology of Saint Maximus the Confessor: "as many as God [does], thus also the person deified by grace without identification in essence".

Precisely through this prism and from this dimension the Prophet Elijah acts, in order to chasten the people of his age, who unfortunately in their vast majority were swayed into idolatry and into immorality. The sacred Chrysostom says characteristically about this: "therefore a harsh famine and a plague more bitter than everything occurred and this the Great Elijah brought as some fearful petitioner calling so that the fellows servants, cursing the Master, would be chastened".

The sacred Chrysostom stresses also that in the whole life of the Prophet Elijah, divine providence is evident. In the beginning he is nourished by Crows and afterwards by a widow in Zarephath of Sidon. In this way, the sacred Father says, God shows His love to the person of the Prophet. First irrational nature serves him and afterwards rational nature. He also again says "so for this reason previously through the Crows He nourished only him himself saying. If I prepared irrational nature to offer you hospitality, how much more so will the rational one be convinced for this".

Furthermore, his presence at Zarephath of Sidon according to the sacred

Chrysostom predepicts the honor which Christ would receive by the gentiles and His rejection by the Jews. He says characteristically: “therefore when you see Christ being dragged away by them on the one hand, while being received by the gentiles, on the other hand, from above learning the types, do not wonder at the truth of the matter.” So in Zarephath of Sidon a widow nourishes him miraculously with her orphans. He furthermore resurrects also one of her children who died from the dead. Finally when in a miraculous manner he asks them to light the one of sacrifice in honor of the true God, he expresses the grievous ascertainment: “I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord,”. Only in contradiction with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Astarte and nevertheless in the end, he triumphs over evil and through the miracle he proclaims the presence of the true God.

Wondrous also was the end of his earthly life. As is familiar, the Prophet Elijah did not die, but he ascended to the heavens. The narration of his ascent is amazing, as this is described in the Fourth Book of Kings: “¹¹ And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven”.

According to the Fathers of the church the prophet Elijah is a type of Christ. Was Elijah a Prophet and Judge? Christ is also the same. Did Christ defeat death? Elijah also ascended. Was Christ sent to the gentiles, did he fast for 40 days? The Prophet Elijah also did the same.

Furthermore according to Saint Gregory Palamas, he was the model of vigilance and asceticism. In one of his homilies “concerning fasting” he will say: “Elijah prepurified by fasting became a seer of God”. Finally this same Father of our Church, in a homily of his on “the Transfiguration of the Savior” mentions that: “Moses and Elijah appear to the Lord who of all people exercised fasting and prayer showing thus how these accompany and support one another”.*

For all these above reasons the Church honoring his memory chants: “the incarnate angel, the peak of the prophets, the second forerunner of the Coming of Christ, Elijah the glorious, from above having sent grace to Elisha, he chases away illnesses and cleanses lepers. Therefore also to those who honor him he springs forth healings”.

Source: “Paraklisi”, magazine of the Metropolis of Limassol, Vol. 13, July-August 2013, pp. 7-8