

soul in Heaven! You would decide in this mortal life to bear any sorrows, persecutions and slander with gratitude. If this very cell of ours was filled with worms, and these worms were to eat our flesh for our entire life on earth, we should agree to it with total desire, in order not to lose, by any chance, that heavenly joy which God has prepared for those who love Him."

The miraculous transfiguration of the *starets'* face was described by a close admirer and follower of St. Seraphim — Motovilov. This happened during the winter, on a cloudy day. Motovilov was sitting on a stump in the woods; St. Seraphim was squatting across from him and telling his pupil the meaning of a Christian life, explaining for what we Christians live on earth.

"It is necessary that the Holy Spirit enter our heart. Everything good that we do, that we do for Christ, is given to us by the Holy Spirit, but prayer most of all, which is always available to us," he said.

"Father," answered Motovilov, "how can I see the grace of the Holy Spirit? How can I know if He is with me or not?"

St. Seraphim began to give him examples from the lives of the saints and apostles, but Motovilov still did not understand. The elder then firmly took him by the shoulder and said to him, "We are both now, my dear fellow, in the Holy Spirit." It was as if Motovilov's eyes had been opened, for he saw that the face of the elder was brighter than the sun. In his heart Motovilov felt joy and peace, in his body a warmth as if it were summer, and a fragrance began to spread around them. Motovilov was terrified by the unusual change, but especially by the fact that the face of the *starets* shone like the sun. But St. Seraphim said to him, "Do not fear, dear fellow. You would not even be able to see me if you yourself were not in

the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Thank the Lord for His mercy toward us."

Thus Motovilov understood, in mind and heart, what the descent of the Holy Spirit and His transfiguration of a person meant.

The days of the commemoration of St. Seraphim are August 1 and January 15 (July 19 and January 2 by the church calendar).

Troparion of St. Seraphim, Tone 4

Thou didst love Christ from thy youth, O blessed one,/ and longing to work for Him alone thou didst struggle in the wilderness with constant prayer and labour./ With penitent heart and great love for Christ thou wast favoured by the Mother of God./ Wherefore we cry to thee:/ Save us by thy prayers, O Seraphim our righteous Father.

Kontakion of St. Seraphim, Tone 2

Having left the beauty of the world and what is corrupt in it, O Saint,/ thou didst settle in Sarov Monastery./ And having lived there an angelic life,/ thou wast for many the way to salvation./ Wherefore Christ has glorified thee, O Father Seraphim,/ and has enriched thee with the gift of healing and miracles./ And so we cry to thee:/ Rejoice, O Seraphim, our righteous Father.

A message from:

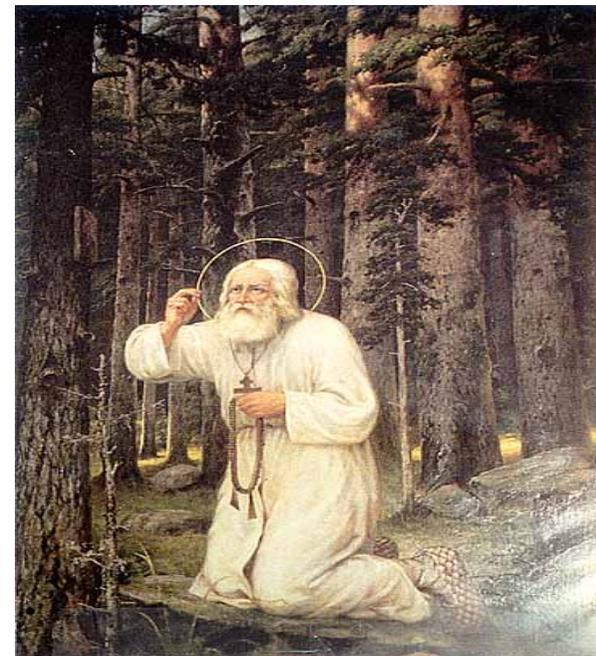
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St. Seraphim of Sarov



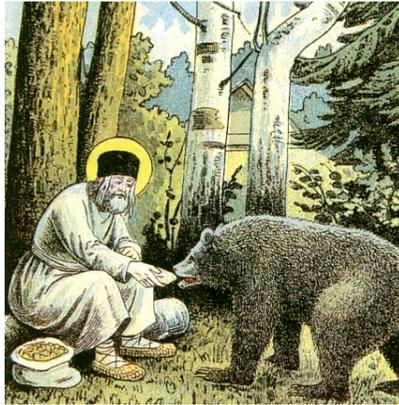
St. Seraphim (Prokhor Moshnin) was born in 1759 to a merchant family in Kursk. At the age of 10, he became seriously ill. During the course of his illness, he saw the Mother of God in his sleep, who promised to heal him. Several days later there was a religious procession in Kursk with the locally revered miracle-working icon of the Mother of God. Due to bad weather, the procession took an abbreviated route past the house of the Moshnin family. After his mother put Prokhor up to the miracle-working image, he recovered rapidly. While at a young age, he needed to help his parents with their shop, but business had little appeal for him. Young Prokhor loved to read the lives of the saints, to attend church and to withdraw into seclusion for prayer.

At the age of 18, Prokhor firmly decided to become a monk. His mother blessed him with a large copper crucifix, which he wore over his clothing all his life. After this, he entered the Sarov monastery as a novice.

From day one in the monastery, exceptional abstinence from food and slumber were the distinguishing features of his life. He ate once a day, and little. On Wednesdays and Fridays he ate nothing. After asking the blessing of his *starets* (a spiritual elder), he began to withdraw often into the forest for prayer and religious contemplation. He became severely ill again soon after, and was forced to spend most of the course of the next three years lying down.

Prokhor was again healed by the Most Holy Virgin Mary, who appeared to him accompanied by several saints. Pointing to him, the Holy Virgin said to St. John the Theologian, "He is of our lineage." Then touching his side with her staff, she healed him.

His taking of the monastic vows occurred in 1786, when he was 27 years old. He was given the name **Seraphim**, which in Hebrew means "fiery," or "burning." He was soon made a hierodeacon (a deacon-monk). He justified his name by his extraordinarily burning prayer. He spent all of his time, save for the very shortest of rests, in church. Through such prayer and the labours of religious services, Seraphim became worthy to see angels, both serving and singing in church. During the liturgy on Holy Thursday, he saw the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in the form of the Son of man, proceeding into the Church with the Heavenly host and blessing those praying. The saint could not speak for a long time after being struck by this vision.



In 1793, St. Seraphim was ordained a hieromonk (a priest-monk) after which he served every day and received Holy Communion for a year. St. Seraphim then began to withdraw into his "farther hermitage" — a forest wilderness about five kilometres from Sarov Monastery. He achieved great perfection at this time. Wild animals — bears, rabbits, wolves, foxes and others — came to the hut of the ascetic. The *staritsa* (eldress) of the Diveevo monastery, Matrona Plescheeva, witnessed how St. Seraphim fed a bear that had come to him out of his hand. She said, "The face of the great *starets* was particularly miraculous. It was joyous and bright, as that of an angel."

While living in this little hermitage of his, St. Seraphim once suffered greatly at the hands of robbers. Although he was physically very strong and was holding an axe at the time, St. Seraphim did not resist them. In answer to their threats and their demands for money, he lay his axe down on the ground, crossed his arms on his chest and obediently gave himself up to them. They began to beat him on the head with the handle of his own axe. Blood began to pour out of his mouth and ears, and he fell unconscious. After that they began to hit him with a log, trampled him under foot, and dragged him along the ground. They

stopped beating him only when they had decided that he had died. The only treasure which the robbers found in his cell was the icon of the Mother of God of Deep Emotion (*Ymileniye*), before which he always prayed. When, after some time, the robbers were caught and brought to justice, the holy monk interceded on their behalf before the judge. After the beating, St. Seraphim remained hunched over for the rest of his life.

Soon after this began the "pillar" period of the life of St. Seraphim, when he spent his days on a rock near his little hermitage, and nights in the thick of the forest. He prayed with his arms raised to heaven, almost without respite. This feat of his continued for a thousand days.

Because of a special vision of the Mother of God he was given toward the end of his life, St. Seraphim took upon himself the feat of becoming an elder. He began to admit everyone who came to him for advice and direction. Many thousands of people from all walks of life and conditions began to visit the elder now, who enriched them from his spiritual treasures, which he had acquired by many years of efforts. Everyone saw St. Seraphim as meek, joyful, pensively sincere. He greeted all with the words: "My joy!" To many he advised: **"Acquire a peaceful spirit, and around you thousands will be saved."**

No matter who came to him, the *starets* bowed to the ground before all, and, in blessing, kissed their hands. He did not need the visitors to tell about themselves, as he could see what each had on their soul. He also said, "Cheerfulness is not a sin. It drives away weariness, for from weariness there is sometimes dejection, and there is nothing worse than that."

"Oh, if you only knew," he once said to a monk, "what joy, what sweetness awaits a righteous