



**Saint Joasaph of Belgorod
Whom the Holy Church Celebrates
On September 4 and December 10**

Saint Joasaph of Belgorod was born on September 8, 1705 of an illustrious family of Ukraine and was given the name Joachim. His paternal ancestors had been colonels of the Priluk Cossack regiment, and his mother was the daughter of a hetman, Daniel Apostol. The sister and brother of his pious father, Andrew Gorlenko, had even received the monastic schema. As an eight-year-old boy, Joachim was sent for spiritual

Note: The following account of the life of St. Joasaph of Belgorod first appeared in Russian in Pravoslavnaya Zhizn, 1954, No. 12.

instruction to the Kiev-Brotherhood Moghila Academy, where his father and uncle had once been students.

Kiev, the mother of Ukrainian cities, with the Laura of the Caves and the other monasteries and Churches, bestowed much upon the intelligent Joachim who, receptive to everything good, strengthened all the good which had been inculcated in him by his God-loving family. Throughout constant prayerful contact with the great holy places of the cradle of Ukrainian Christianity, the decision to consecrate himself to God ripened in him early. Having reached the age of 18, he revealed his good intention to his parents but he unexpectedly met opposition on their part. The struggle between the fulfillment of the will of his beloved parents and the striving towards monasticism which had increasingly taken possession of him was not easy for him. Finally, Joachim reached the decision to abandon the Academy and hide in the shelter of the ancient Mezhygorsky Monastery near Kiev. On 27 October, 1725 he received the monastic tonsure and was given the name Ilarion. Only then did he, through a faithful servant, give word to his parents, from whom he received the long-awaited blessing.

He was tonsured in the mantia on 21 November, 1727 in the Kiev-Brotherhood Monastery, where, during the years of learning, he had nurtured the thought to go along the narrow way of salvation. He was named Joasaph, in token, evidently, of the renunciation of worldly honours and glory, manifested by the holy monks who bore the same name—the Crown Prince of India, at the dawn of Christianity, and the prince of Zaozersk, in the middle of the fifteenth century.

His ordination to the rank of hierodeacon and appointment as teacher of the lower class of the Academy followed in 1728 and five years later the duties of ecclesiarch of the Brotherhood Monastery were added. He was ordained a hieromonk on 8 November 1734, and included among the clergy of the ancient St. Sophia Cathedral. In a year he became a member of the Spiritual Consistory.

By this time the character of the now thirty-year old priestmonk had become fully manifest. Strict asceticism in spiritual life was united in him with prominent administrative capabilities. Distinguishing himself by goodness, expressed especially in kindheartedness, he maintained great strictness in everything that resulted in transgressions against the Church.

Appreciated by the spiritual authorities, he was elevated on June 24, 1737, to the responsibility of the Holy Savior-Transfiguration Monastery, near the city of Luben, Poltava province. Here Abbot Joasaph exerted great efforts to elevate monastic life to its

necessary height. In this monastery, where rested the relics of Saint Athanasius Patellaris, the Patriarch of Constantinople who reposed there in 1654, he felt, prayerfully venerating him, the grace-given help of this saint of God, which remained with him to the end of his earthly life.

The need to collect money for the repair of the monastery catholicon made a journey by Abbot Joasaph to both capitals necessary. Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, who was always zealous for the Church, donated 2,000 rubles to him. The sermon which he delivered on November 28, 1742, in the palace church, pleased the sovereign very much. From that time she did not forget him. During the Tsaritsa's sojourn in Kiev, the abbot of Mgarsky was summoned there. On 14 September, 1744 by the wish of the Empress, he was elevated to the rank of Archimandrite.

In January of 1745, Archimandrite Joasaph was appointed to the responsible position of superior of the Trinity—St. Sergius Lavra, with the direction of the Mgarsky Monastery left to him as well. Shortly, a fire destroyed a significant part of the Lavra. Only its holy objects did not suffer damage. The new superior had to direct special effort toward the quickest restoration of the damaged buildings.

His appointment to the Bishopric of Belgorod followed even before the completion of the work. From the four candidates whom the Synod presented, Empress Elizabeth chose the last one on the list. The consecration of Archimandrite Joasaph to the Episcopacy took place on June 2, 1748, in the Cathedral of S.S. Peter and Paul, in the presence of the Sovereign. The first liturgy in Belgorod he celebrated on the 6th of August.

The vast Belgorod Diocese, established in 1667, encompassed the flock which later became part of the Kursk, Kharkov, and partly the Chernigov dioceses. There were then 1,060 churches in it. This area, in its most significant part, was called Slobodskaya Ukraina. It was inhabited in the 16th Century by people who had been settled there in order to defend the state from the raids of the Crimean Tatars. Latter it was settled by exiles from the Ukraine who could not bear the Polish-Latin yoke.

From the middle of the 18th Century they were joined by Serbs, Wallachians and other immigrants from the Balkans. It was not easy to administer this heterogeneous flock. Coarse morals and manners, superstitions, witchcraft and the like were entrenched among them. Not only the simple people were ignorant, but also many of the clergy.

The new archpastor set about to bring order with firm persistence, paying particular attention to raising the standards of the clergy in all matters. Feeble in health, Vladika Joasaph toured the diocese several times a year, carefully studying the conditions in each place, seeing that there be proper iconography, encouraging some and punishing the transgressors against piety. Having sent the clergy a book on the Mysteries of the Church, he tested the priests' knowledge of them and sending the negligent ones to complete their training in Belgorod.

During one of his journeys, Vladika Joasaph stopped at the home of a priest who was absent at the time. Before falling asleep, he suddenly sensed an extraordinary foreboding. He could not fall asleep. He then began to examine what was in the room. To his horror, Vladika found on a shelf, amidst plates and dishes, the Holy Gifts wrapped in paper. The holy bishop prayed ardently all night, beseeching the Lord to avert terrible punishment from the negligent pastor. On his own part, he deprived the latter of the priestly office. After this, Vladika required even more strictly the keeping of the reserved Holy Gifts on the holy table and the bearing of them to the ill in a chalice by a priest in vestments, with the procession of a candle and a small bell. For the keeping of the holy chrism, the holy bishop supplied the churches with vessels of glass and with boxes.

The holy bishop once saw in an icon of the Mother of God, located in a pile of refuse which was thrown into the corner of a church porch. A voice also resounded, "Look what the celebrants of this church have done with my Icon. This Icon of mine has been designated to be a fountain of grace for this village and for the whole country but they have thrown it into the garbage." Following this, making a tour of the parishes, Vladika Joasaph searched everywhere in the churches for a porch which resembled the one he had seen in his dream. He found one like it in the Ascension Church of the suburb "Zamostje" of the town of Isium. In it was located a large icon of the Mother of God, which served as a partition for the place where the charcoal for the censer was kept. The holy bishop fell down before the Icon and shedding tears profusely, he cried out, "O Sovereign Lady of Heaven, forgive the negligence of thy servants, for they know not what they do." Having reprimanded the rector severely, he ordered that the Icon be put in a suitable place in the church at once, saying, "The grace of God greatly abounds in this Icon; through it the Most Holy Sovereign Lady manifests the particular significance of her intercession for this village and for the whole country." During the course of his three-day sojourn in Isium, the holy bishop came to pray in the morning and in the

evening before this icon, which received the name “Peschanskaya,” and which from this time was especially revered in that region.

After his accession to the cathedra, St. Joasaph soon assembled the pastors of the city and the surrounding area. He was astounded by one decrepit old priest. Having detained him and learned that he had reached the age of 130, Vladika said, you see before you a pastor, like a father standing before his son. Tell me, is your conscience not disgraced by some terrible sin which binds you and does not allow you to die? Your prolonged life persuades me, as an archpastor, to cleanse your soul through repentance, to reconcile you with those whom you have offended, and with the authority given me, to forgive and release sin itself, in accordance with the words of the Prayer of Forgiveness (see below): “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (*cf.* Jn. 20:23).

The elder, who considered his long life as a special kindness of God, was stunned by the words of the holy bishop, and answered “I don’t know; I can’t remember.” The attentive gaze of the holy bishop, radiating kindness and unending love, made the elder shudder. The distant past awoke in him. Wailing, he threw himself down at the feet of Vladika and recounted the following:

More than 70 years ago, as a parish priest, having celebrated the Divine Liturgy, he was about to go home. Unexpectedly he received an order from the local land-owner to serve a second liturgy for him. The church, however, had only one holy table. His attempts to prove that this was against Church canons were in vain. The willful and stupid tyrant turned to threats. Frightened, the priest went up to serve the liturgy at the same holy table. Suddenly a mysterious and threatening voice resounded, “Stop, what are you doing?” He shuddered but his fear of the land-owner proved to be greater than his fear of God. Recovering from his consternation, he gave the exclamation, “Blessed is the Kingdom,” and for the second time he heard an even more threatening warning, “Do not dare, for if you dare to do this, you shall be cursed.” In a burst of madness, he cried out, “Be cursed yourself,” and continued to liturgize.

After this the old church was destroyed, and where it had once stood was an open field which had only recently been plowed.

“Unfortunate one, what have you done!” the holy bishop exclaimed with horror. “You cursed the Angel of God, the guardian of that holy place. You are both bound by the curse even until now. That is the reason for your longevity.”

Following this, St. Joasaph ordered that a temporary church be placed on the same place where the former church had stood. In his presence the old man celebrated there the Divine Liturgy. After it was completed, the holy bishop called the old man to himself and ordered him to read “Now lettest Thy servant depart in peace, O Lord.” He then blessed him, and read the Prayer of Absolution (see below) over him. Standing on his knees before the holy bishop, supported by a deacon, the decrepit old elder, having made peace with the Angel who guarded the holy altar and with his own conscience, looked silently with eyes filled with tears upon the good Vladika, and extended to him his old, exhausted arms.

St. Joasaph gazed at him meekly and with love. Stooping down to the pastor, saved from perdition, he embraced him. The heads of the elder reclined on the shoulder of the holy bishop, and at peace with himself and forgiven by God, he breathed his last breath. The funeral office for the reposed priest was chanted for the reposed priest by the Vladika right on the location of the former church and here too he was buried.

The holy bishop battled with superstitions which had remained entrenched within his flock. He ordered that the priests teach the people at the end of the Liturgy how to make the sign of the cross properly and to learn the prayers, “Holy God,” “Our Father,” “Virgin Mother of God,” the Symbol of Faith and the Fiftieth Psalm. He continued, “Beginning with the small children and on to the aged, say the prayers to them from memory, that they might repeat them with the priest until they are deeply established in their memory.”

Requiring much from the pastors and being strict with them, Vladika Joasaph always showed concern for their needs and did not allow the clergy to be mistreated. When the administrator of the holdings of Prince Yussoufov allowed himself to expel the village churchman, Vladika ordered the cleric to return and threatened to seal the church if anyone should prevent him from doing so. To the land-owner in St. Petersburg, he wrote a firm letter, requiring retribution for the sufferer.

Noticing the crop failures, which befell the diocese at that time, a punishment from God for the non-observance, he required the clergy to see to it that the fasts be observed. Having learned that the commander of the local division, Count P. S. Saltikoff, had meat on the table during Great Lent, the holy bishop insistently requested him to cease this temptation. The general replied to him sharply that, although he lived in Belgorod, he did not count himself a member of his flock, and hence was not obliged

to heed his orders. Vladika continued to prove to him his error. The count gave heed to his persuasions and with tears repented.

Exercising charity towards the imprisoned in general, the holy bishop sent dinners to the disgraced General B. I. Passek who was held in prison. By this gesture, he evoked the great displeasure, addressed to him personally, of the governor. Vladika replied to him that he would treat him in the same way when he would be in the same sad position. The worried governor requested that he explain what he had said. The holy bishop then accused him of a whole series of unlawful acts and convinced him to repent. The governor begged forgiveness from him and promised to correct himself.

Saint Joasaph gave out to the poor all the finds which were received from the rich diocese. Before great Feastdays he entrusted his cell-attendant with taking clothing and money to the needy. He was directed to place the gifts at a window or a doorstep, knock on the wall in order to attract the attention of the owner, and quickly to hide so as not to be recognized. If the cell-attendant happened to be ill, Vladika, in the apparel of a commoner, carried this out himself. In order to do this, it was necessary to sneak unnoticed past the gate-keeper of the episcopal residence.

Once, before the Feast of the Nativity, the gate-keeper called out to Vladika as he attempted to sneak in, unrecognized. The holy bishop hoped to succeed in darting past imperceptibly. The gate-keeper, however, seized him in the darkness and attempted to question him. An attempt to break free did not succeed at once. Vladika received several powerful blows over the back and with difficulty reached home. After this he was ill. The gate keeper was rewarded by him for his diligence.

The holy bishop knew of his approaching end. He intensified his labors in prayer. During the Divine Liturgy he wept a great deal. His cell-attendant found him constantly in prayer. At the hourly chiming of the clock, Vladyka Joasaph said the following prayer:

“Blessed be the day and hour in which my Lord Jesus Christ was born for my sake, endured crucifixion, and suffered death. O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, in the hour of my death receive the spirit of Thy servant who doth wander about, by the prayers of Thy Most Pure Mother and all Thy Saints, for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen.”

He advised that this prayer be said by others as well.

In May of 1754, Saint Joasaph, having celebrated the Divine Liturgy, asked the flock to forgive him his sins and forgave all those who had offended him. The townspeople accompanied him to the hill at the foot of which lies Belgorod. Stepping out of the carriage, the holy bishop blessed the city.

Saint Joasaph wished to visit his native places before his death. His father, who usually lived in a small cell in the forest not far from the city, awaited him in Priluki. He was prepared to say a customary word of esteem for his son the bishop, but he did not wish to relinquish his own merit as father either. When his son started to get out of the carriage, Andrew Gorlenko approached him and, as though dropping his cane and picking it up, bowed down to the feet of his son. The holy bishop, understanding the intention of his father, with tears fell down before him and picked up the cane. The two of them talked over many things, and more than once Vladyka visited his father in the cell in the forest.

Vladyka also included a visit to the Mgarsky monastery which was nearby, where with joy he became assured of the completion of what had been undertaken in his time. With ardent prayer he fell before the relics of Saint Athanasius, for which by that time there had been constructed a sarcophagus.

Having become ill, he stopped in the settlement of Graivoron (the future city of a district of Kursk province), where a small monastery was located, built by him with a home for the bishop. His condition deteriorated. Notified of his ailment, his mother, brother, and sister arrived to visit him. Bidding farewell to his cell-attendants, he foretold to them the main events lying ahead of them.

Having prepared himself for death with Holy Unction, confession, and communion of the Holy Mysteries, Saint Joasaph reposed on December 10, 1754 having attained the age of 49 at 4:20 in the afternoon. At the hour of his death, the abbot of the Khotmizhsky monastery close to Graivoron saw the holy bishop in his sleep, indicating to him the rising sun and saying, "As bright as this sun, so radiantly have I in this hour become before the throne of God." Andrew Gorlenko heard on the evening of December 10 a voice saying, "Your son, the holy bishop, has passed away."

Great was the sorrow of the residents of Belgorod, who came to meet the relics of Saint Joasaph on the same hill on which he had bid farewell to them half a year before. At times the plaintive voices of the poor drowned out the chanting of the hymns.

For the funeral of the holy bishop the Synod allowed 300 rubles to be taken from the reserve funds of the bishop's residence. At his death there remained only 70-80 kopecks.

From December to February 23 of 1755, the body of the holy bishop, not undergoing corruption in the least, remained in the open casket, in expectation of the arrival of a bishop for the burial. Foul weather hindered his arrival. It was not even known whom the synod would send. Saint Joasaph appeared in dreams to three persons to saying, "Kozlovich is holding up the burial." Indeed, the Vladyka of Pereyaslavl and Borisoglebsk, John, who in the world bore this surname, arrived. Saint Joasaph was buried in the vault of Holy Trinity Cathedral. Within two years following his repose, the clergy of the cathedral discovered the incorruption of his relics. The miracles which proceeded from them were numerous.

In December, 1910 the Most Holy Synod willed to number among the saints the Holy Bishop Joasaph of Belgorod. In his most devoted address concerning this on December 10, the Royal Martyr Saint Tsar Nicholas II said, "Through the grace-bearing intercession of Saint Joasaph, may the devotion of the Orthodoxy of our forefathers be strengthened in the Russian State, to the good of the whole Russian people. I accept the proposals of the Most Holy Synod with sincere compunction and with full sympathy."

Postscript to the Life of Saint Joasaph.

For many years Empress Alexandra Feodorovna had wished to visit the Shrine of Saint Joasaph of Belgorod but the opportunity had not presented itself. Then while returning from a visit to the Tsar at Army Headquarters during the war, she decided to make an unscheduled stop in Belgorod. One of the ladies-in-waiting gives the following account:

The Empress stopped on her way from Kharkoff for a couple of hours at Belgorod. There was a monastery there—a well-known place of pilgrimage—which she wished to visit. She wanted no one disturbed on her account, as the train passed Belgorod in the evening. No one in the town knew of her arrival. With her daughters, General Ressine, Mme. Vyrouboff and myself, she set off in the very worst possible buggy over muddy, bumpy roads in the pitch darkness to the monastery. Great was the Empresses' disappointment to find the whole monastery brilliantly lighted and the sleepy Archbishop in full vestments preceded by equally sleepy monks bearing lighted tapers! Someone had evidently raised the alarm. The Empress was led in procession from her humble conveyance, the Archbishop respectfully holding her arm, to the church, where a solemn moleben was chanted. Her mischievous daughters were much amused at their

mother's "unobtrusive" visit, but most of all at the appearance of the conveyance, drawn up with great dignity for our departure!



Troparion Tone 3

O Holy Hierarch, beloved of Christ God, thou wast a rule of faith and a model of mercy to the people. By vigil, fasting and prayer, thou didst shine forth as a most radiant bearer of light and wast glorified by God. With thy body resting in incorruption, in spirit standing before the throne of God, thou dost gush forth with most glorious miracles. Pray to Christ our God that He confirm our land in Orthodoxy and piety, and save our souls.

Troparion Tone 2

From childhood thou wast an extraordinary man of prayer, divinely-chosen hierarch of Christ Joasaph, to all dost thou manifest a rule of faith and a model of mercy by thy pious life, and to those who with faith come to Thee dost thou gush forth abundant healings. Pray to Christ God that He confirm in the Russian nation right faith, peace, and piety, and save our souls.

Kontakion Tone 8

Who can confess the multiplicity of thy life's labors? Who can enumerate the multiform mercies of God which thou didst manifest? Knowing well thy boldness before the Most Pure Theotokos and our all-generous Christ, in compunction of heart we call unto thee: do not deprive even us of thy help and intercession, O holy Hierarch of Christ and Wonderworker Joasaph.



PRAYER OF ABSOLUTION

O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, both Shepherd and Lamb, who takest away the sins of the world; who takest away the sins of the world; who didst remit the loan unto the two debtors, and didst vouchsafe to the woman who was a sinner the remission of her sins: Do Thou, the same Lord, loose, remit, forgive the sins, transgressions and iniquities, whether voluntary or involuntary, whether of willfulness or of ignorance, which have been committed unto guilt and disobedience by this Thy servant.

And if he, bearing flesh and dwelling in the world, in that he is human, have in any way been beguiled of the devil; if in word or deed, whether wittingly or unwittingly, they have sinned, either contemning the word of a priest, or falling under his anathema, or have broken their oath: do Thou the same master, in that Thou art good and cherisheth not ill will, graciously grant unto these Thy servants the word of absolution, remitting unto them their anathema and curse, according to Thy great mercy.

Yea, O Lord and Master, who lovest mankind, hear Thou us who make our petitions unto Thy goodness on behalf of these Thy servants, and disregard Thou all their errors, inasmuch as Thou art exceedingly merciful; and loose them from punishment eternal. For thou hast said, O Master:

Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be
bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall
loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

For Thou alone without sin, and unto Thee do we send up glory, with Thy Father which is without beginning and Thine All-holy and good and life-creating Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages.

AMEN.



IN WISDOM HAST THOU MADE THEM ALL