Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessalonika

*On November 8th (October 26th by the old calendar) the Church commemorates the **Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessalonika.***

St. Demetrius was brought up as a Christian from early childhood by his pious parents, but secretly, because his father was the military governor of Thessalonika at a time when the cruel Roman Emperors were in the process of persecuting Christians (end of 3rd / beginning of 4th centuries A.D.). After the death of his father, St. Demetrius was appointed ruler of the entire province and received an order from Emperor Maximian to rid Thessalonika of Christians. However, when St. Demetrius returned to his native city, he began to preach Christ and convert pagans to the Christian faith. Then the incensed Maximian came to Thessalonika himself, threw St. Demetrius into prison, and began to persecute the Christians.

Maximian had a famous wrestler named Lius, who wrestled with Christians for the Emperor's amusement and threw them down from a great height onto spears below, causing them painful death. Among the Christians there was a youth named Nestor, a friend of St. Demetrius. Seeing the Christians so mortified, Nestor was unable to bear it and decided to challenge the Emperor's wrestler himself. But first Nestor went to visit St. Demetrius in prison and receive his blessing to combat Lius. Then, loudly confessing Christ and glorifying St. Demetrius, Nestor began to wrestle with Lius and vanquished him, and then threw him down onto those same spears. The Thessalonians, seeing such an unexpected and glorious victory, started shouting loudly: "Great is the God of Demetrius!" The Emperor was incensed by the death of his favorite, Lius, and immediately ordered St. Nestor to be beheaded and St. Demetrius to be pierced with spears. The holy martyr Nestor is commemorated on the following day after St. Demetrius.

Later aromatic myrrh began to flow from the incorrupt relics of St. Demetrius, which performed many miracles. Moreover, the saint miraculously saved his native city of Thessalonika many times from various disasters. Thus, for example, in the 6th century Thessalonika was attacked by the Avars, who appeared at the city walls with a huge army which far exceeded the city's defense force. Ten days before the enemy's arrival, St. Demetrius appeared to the Thessalonian archbishop in a dream and warned him of the grave danger that threatened the city. The Thessalonians then rushed to the church and began to pray earnestly to their heavenly intercessor. When the enemy forces came and began to scale the walls, everyone saw St. Demetrius appear on top of the wall as an armed warrior who pierced the first enemy soldier with a spear and threw him off the wall, and as the latter fell, he took down with him all the other attackers. The enemy was overcome with fear and retreated. However, afterwards they continued their siege of the city, while the Thessalonians, having few means of defending their city, continued praying earnestly to St. Demetrius, placing all their hope in his aid. On the seventh day of the siege, without any apparent reason the enemy suddenly began a chaotic retreat, leaving behind all their tents and weapons. Some of the enemy soldiers were captured and told the following story: "From the very first day of the siege we saw you with such a great army of defenders, that we realized your forces were far superior to ours, and we thought that your army was concealed behind the city walls. Yesterday this great host suddenly rushed upon us, and so we ran away." The amazed Thessalonians asked: "And who led our army?" "We saw, – replied the enemy, – a fiery and shining warrior in glittering armor, sitting on a white horse." Hearing this, the Thessalonians immediately realized who had routed the enemy. In this manner St. Demetrius saved his city.

Soon after the enemy retreated from Thessalonika, a new disaster struck the city. During the siege, the enemy had wasted the city's entire grain reserves, so that the inhabitants began suffering from famine, and many died. Seeing his native city suffering from famine, St. Demetrius appeared several time to various ships sailing the nearby seas with cargoes of grain, and ordered them to carry this grain to Thessalonika, thereby saving the city from famine.