

March 26

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John of Dalyatha (7th-8th cent.) monk

On the fourth Sunday of Lent, the Assyrian Church commemorates John of Dalyatha, one of the greatest mystics in Christian history.

John, also called Sabas or 'Old Man,' was born in the second half of the seventh century in the village of Ardamust, northwest of Mossul, Syria. He was initiated into the study of Scripture at the village school, and he often visited the monastery of Apnimaran. Around the year 700 he became a monk at the monastery of Mar Yozadaq. Seven years later he began to live alone on the mountain of Dalyatha, perhaps near Ararat. During his years in solitude, John deepened his spiritual life and trained himself in the art of contemplation, learning to discern the extremely close bond between the creation and its Creator and nourishing his spirit in a daily encounter with nature and its symbols. Despite his distance from others, he never lost the touches of profound humanity that characterize all of his teachings.

When several disciples came to join him, John began to put the fruit of his vast inner experience into writing. He was influenced by the works of Evagrius, Macarius, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Gregory of Nyssa, but he insists even more radically than his masters that charity and love are the highest degree of Christian life.

John died on an unknown date, in the solitude where he had learned not to escape the world but to love every creature.

A READING

*My eyes are burned by your beauty
and the earth I was walking on has been torn from under my feet;
my intelligence is overwhelmed by the marvel that is in you
and I now recognize myself as one who is not.
A flame has been lit in my bones
and streams have welled up to bathe all of my flesh,
so that it may not be consumed.
O purifying furnace, in which the Artefice has cleansed his creature!
O robe of light, you who have stripped us of our will
so that we might clothe ourselves, now, in fire!
Lord, let me give your children what is holy,
I will not give it to the dogs.
Glory to you! How wonderful are your thoughts!
Blessed are those who love you,
for they are radiant with your beauty
and you give them the gift of yourself.
This is the early resurrection of those who have died in Christ.*

From the *Letters* of John of Dalyatha

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Harriet Monsell di Clewer (d. 1883), founder of the community of St John the Baptist

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (17 baramhat/maggabit):

Lazarus, the friend of Jesus (Coptic Orthodox Church)

LUTERANS:

Ludger (d. 809), missionary and bishop in Westphalia

Karl Schlau (d. 1919), witness to the point of bloodshed in Latvia

MARONITES:

Gabriel, archangel

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Sinaxis of the archangel Gabriel

Montanus and Maxima of Sirmio (d. ca. 304), martyrs (Romanian Church)

EAST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:

John of Dalyatha, monk (Chaldean and Assyrian Churches)