



## The Season of **Epiphany**

*Saint Stephen's welcomes everyone who wishes to follow Christ, worship together, grow in faith and share God's love through service to others.*

### **FEAST OF SARAH, THEODORA, AND SYNCLETICA OF EGYPT**

**Desert Mothers** is a neologism, coined in feminist theology in analogy to Desert Fathers, for the *ammās* or female Christian ascetics living in the desert of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria in the 4th and 5th centuries AD.<sup>[1]</sup> They typically lived in the monastic communities that began forming during that time, though sometimes they lived as hermits. Other women from that era who influenced the early ascetic or monastic tradition while living outside the desert are also described as Desert Mothers.<sup>[2]</sup>



The Desert Fathers are much more well known because most of the early lives of the saints "were written by men for a male monastic audience"<sup>[3]</sup>—the occasional stories about the Desert Mothers come from the early Desert Fathers and their biographers. Many desert women had leadership roles within the Christian community. The *Apophthegmata Patrum*, or *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, includes forty-seven sayings that are actually attributed to the Desert Mothers. There are several chapters dedicated to the Desert Mothers in the *Lausiac History* by Palladius, who mentions 2,975 women living in the desert.<sup>[3]</sup> Other sources include the various stories told over the years about the lives of saints

#### **Welcome and Announcements:**

Wed. 5 January 9:30am, 2022



## **Opening Acclamation:**

**Presider** Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
**People** **And blessed be his kingdom, now and forever. Amen**

**Presider** *Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## **Gloria/Glory to God**

Hymnal 1982 # S280

**Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King,  
almighty God and Father,  
we worship you, we give you thanks,  
we praise you for your glory.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,  
Lord God, Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world:  
have mercy on us;  
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer.  
For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High,  
Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

## **The Collect of the Day:**

**Presider** The Lord be with you  
**People** **And also with you.**  
**Presider** Let us pray

**All:** Fix our hearts on You, O God, in pure devotion, that aided by the example of your servants Sarah, Theodora, and Syncretica, the vain pursuits of this world may have no hold upon us, and that by the consuming fire of your Spirit, we may be changed into the image and likeness of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom with you and the same Spirit be all honor and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

## **The Word of God**     *(Please be seated)*

**The Old Testament:** A reading from **Proverbs 9:1-6**

Wisdom has built her house,  
she has hewn her seven pillars.  
She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine,  
she has also set her table.  
She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls  
from the highest places in the town,  
“You that are simple, turn in here!”  
To those without sense she says,  
“Come, eat of my bread  
and drink of the wine I have mixed.  
Lay aside immaturity, and live,  
and walk in the way of insight.”

*Lector:* The Word of the Lord

*People:* **Thanks be to God.**

**Psalm 119:65-72**

*Bonitatem fecisti*     *(Read aloud in unison)*

**65 O Lord, you have dealt graciously with your servant, \*  
according to your word.**

**66 Teach me discernment and knowledge, \*  
for I have believed in your commandments.**

**67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, \*  
but now I keep your word.**

**68 You are good and you bring forth good; \*  
instruct me in your statutes.**

**69 The proud have smeared me with lies, \*  
but I will keep your commandments with my whole heart.**

**70 Their heart is gross and fat, \*  
but my delight is in your law.**

**71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted, \*  
that I might learn your statutes.**

**72 The law of your mouth is dearer to me \*  
than thousands in gold and silver.**

**Gospel Lesson:**

Reader: The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to  
**Mark 12:18-27**

**People: Glory to you, Lord Christ**

Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus and asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that 'if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.' There were seven brothers; the first married and, when he died, left no children; and the second married her and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; none of the seven left children. Last of all the woman herself died. In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had married her."

Jesus said to them, "Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is God not of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong."

Reader        The Gospel of the Lord  
**People        Praise to you, Lord Christ**

**Homily**

**Nicene Creed:** *Traditional Version (Said aloud by all, in unison)*

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.**

**We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.**

**We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.**

**We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

## Prayers of the People

Leader: *Let us pray to God, who came among us in the birth of Jesus:*

*Gracious God, as a star rose, and drew people from great distances to Bethlehem that they might greet the Christ-child; Draw us, your Church, and all of your people to you – that we might be the Church and the People who you call us to be. Lord, in your mercy,*

**People: Hear our prayer.**

Leader: *As you gave Mary your Holy Spirit, filling her with the delight of your Presence; Fill us with your Spirit, and renew our lives. Lord, in your mercy,*

**Hear our prayer.**

Leader: *As Gentiles streamed to Jesus' Light, and Kings to the brightness of his rising; Draw our nation, our President, and all in authority, to His brightness. Lord, in your mercy,*

**Hear our prayer.**

Leader: *As angels sang 'glorias' to you and proclaimed peace on earth, and goodwill among all peoples; Bring us your peace, and bring an end to and terror and strife. Lord, in your mercy,*

**Hear our prayer.**

Leader: *As shepherds were drawn away from their flocks by night; Draw those who do not know you yet to the knowledge and love of you. Lord, in your mercy,*

**Hear our prayer.**

Leader: *As Jesus was born in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn; Be especially present with those who have no where to lay their head, those who are vulnerable, and those who are hungry. Lord, in your mercy,*

**Hear our prayer.**

Leader: *As the Holy Family gathered together in Bethlehem, and traveled together to far off lands; Bless all families, especially the families of our parish, and protect those who travel. Lord, in your mercy,*

**Hear our prayer.**

Leader: *As your son came to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of Life Eternal; Give to the departed eternal rest and let Light perpetual shine on them. Lord, in your mercy,*

**Hear our prayer.**

Leader: *Let us pray for our own needs and those of others, (people add their own prayers either silently or aloud). Lord, in your mercy*  
**Hear our prayer.**

**Presider:** *O Lord our God, may the Light and Hope of this night and this Christmas season, and of your Son's Incarnation, reassure our hearts that you are among us, that you hear our prayers, and that you will be with us always, even to the end of the age. In the name of Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Prince of Peace, we pray. Amen.*

### **Exchange of the Peace**

Presider *May the peace of Christ be always with you*

All **And also with you.**

*The Ministers and People exchange socially distant signs of peace (peace sign, namaste, virtual hug)*

### **Offertory**

Presider: *Through Christ let us continually offer to God the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his Name.*

# Holy Communion

The Great Thanksgiving

Rite II Prayer B BCP p. 372

Presider *The Lord be with you.*

People **And also with you.**

Presider *Lift up your hearts.*

People **We lift them to the Lord.**

Presider *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

People **It is right to give God thanks and praise.**

*Presider: It is truly right to glorify you, Father, and to give you thanks; for you alone are God, living and true, dwelling in light inaccessible from before time and forever.*

**People:**

**Fountain of life and source of all goodness, you made all things and fill them with your blessing; you created them to rejoice in the splendor of your radiance.**

*Countless throngs of angels stand before you to serve you night and day; and, beholding the glory of your presence, they offer you unceasing praise. Joining with them, and giving voice to every creature under heaven, we acclaim you, and glorify your Name, as we sing (say),*

*Celebrant and People*

*Hymnal 1982 #S130*

All:

**Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might (x2),  
heaven and earth are full, full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest. (x2)**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest (x2).**

*Presider continues: We acclaim you, holy Lord, glorious in power. Your mighty works reveal your wisdom and love.*

**You formed us in your own image, giving the whole world into our care, so that, in obedience to you, our Creator, we might rule and serve all your creatures.**

*When our disobedience took us far from you, you did not abandon us to the power of death. In your mercy you came to our help, so that in seeking you we might find you.*

**Again and again you called us into covenant with you, and through**



**the prophets you taught us to hope for salvation.**

*Father, you loved the world so much that in the fullness of time you sent your only Son to be our Savior. Incarnate by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, he lived as one of us, yet without sin.*

**To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation; to prisoners, freedom; to the sorrowful, joy. To fulfill your purpose he gave himself up to death; and, rising from the grave, destroyed death, and made the whole creation new.**

*And, that we might live no longer for ourselves, but for him who died and rose for us, he sent the Holy Spirit, his own first gift for those who believe, to complete his work in the world, and to bring to fulfillment the sanctification of all.*

**When the hour had come for him to be glorified by you, his heavenly Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.**

*At supper with them he took bread, and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."*

*After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."*

*Father, we now celebrate this memorial of our redemption.*

*Recalling Christ's death and his descent among the dead, proclaiming his resurrection and ascension to your right hand, awaiting his coming in glory; and offering to you, from the gifts you have given us, this bread and this cup, we praise you and we bless you.*

**We praise you, we bless you, we give thanks to you, and we pray to you, O Lord our God.**

*Lord, we pray, that in your goodness and mercy, your Holy Spirit may descend upon us (+) and upon these gifts (+), sanctifying them and showing them to be holy gifts for your holy people, the bread of life and the cup of salvation, the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ.*

**Grant that all who share this bread and cup may become one body and one spirit, a living sacrifice in Christ, to the praise of your Name.**

*Remember, Lord, your one holy catholic and apostolic Church, redeemed by the blood of your Christ.*

**Reveal its unity, guard its faith, and preserve it in peace.**

*And grant that we may find our inheritance with the Blessed Virgin Mary, with Matriarchs, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs, and all the saints who have found favor with you in ages past.*

**We praise you in union with them and give you glory through your**

## **Son Jesus Christ our Lord.**

*Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, all honor and glory are yours, Almighty God and Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. AMEN.*

And now as Jesus taught us, we pray:

### **Lord's Prayer:**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

### **The Breaking of the Bread**

**Fraction:** *(In silence the Presider breaks the bread)*

*All Sing*

*Hymnal 1982 #S154:*

*Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia  
Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us,  
Therefore let us keep the feast,  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia*

### **Invitation to Communion:**

Presider: *The gifts of God for the people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in your hearts by faith and with thanksgiving.*

*(Everyone is invited to come forward and receive communion or a blessing).*

### **Recognition of a Birthday, Anniversary, Healing, Gratitude**

**Post Communion Prayer** *The people stand as they are able.*

Presider: Let us pray:

*Presider and People*

**Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the World in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### **Blessing**

Presider: *May you be filled with the wonder of Mary, the obedience of Joseph, the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the determination of the magi, and the peace of the Christ child. And may Almighty God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever. Amen*

## Dismissal

Presider: *Let us go forth in the peace and spirit of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia!*

People **Thanks be to God. Alleluia, Alleluia, (Alleluia!)**

of that era, traditionally called *vitae* ("life").<sup>[4]</sup> The lives of twelve female desert saints are described in Book I of *Vitae Patrum* (*Lives of the Fathers*).<sup>[5]</sup>

### Notable examples

The Desert Mothers were known as *ammās* ("spiritual mothers"), comparable to the Desert Fathers (*abbas*), due to the respect they earned as spiritual teachers and directors.<sup>[6]</sup> One of the most well known Desert Mothers was [Amma Syncletica of Alexandria](#), who had twenty-seven sayings attributed to her in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. Two other *ammās*, [Theodora of](#)

Continued from Pg.1 [Alexandria](#) and [Amma Sarah of the Desert](#), also had sayings in that book. Desert Mothers described in the *Lausiac History* include [Melania the Elder](#), [Melania the Younger](#), [Olympias](#), [Saint Paula](#) and her daughter [Eustochium](#), and several women whom the author does not name.<sup>[7]</sup>

According to written accounts, Amma Syncletica might have been born around AD 270, since she is said to have lived to her eighties in about AD 350, to wealthy parents in Alexandria and was well educated, including an early study of the writings of Desert Father [Evagrius Ponticus](#). After the death of her parents, she sold everything she had and gave the money to the poor. Moving outside the city with her blind sister, she lived as a hermit among the tombs outside of Alexandria. Gradually a community of women ascetics grew up around her, who she served as their spiritual mother. Even though she was an ascetic and hermit, Syncletica taught moderation, and that asceticism was not an end in itself.<sup>[8]</sup>

Theodora of Alexandria was the *amma* of a monastic community of women near Alexandria. Prior to that, she had fled to the desert disguised as a man and joined a community of monks. She was sought out by many of the Desert Fathers for advice—reportedly [Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria](#) came to her for counsel.<sup>[9]</sup>

Sarah of the Desert's sayings indicate that she was a hermit living by a river for sixty years. Her sharp replies to some of the old men who challenged her show a distinctly strong personality.<sup>[7]</sup> According to one story, two male anchorites visited her in the desert and decided, "Let's humiliate this old woman." They said to her, "Be careful not to become conceited thinking to yourself: "Look how anchorites are coming to see me, a mere woman." She replied, "According to nature I am a woman, but not according to my thoughts."<sup>[10]</sup>

Melania the Elder, the daughter of a Roman official, became widowed at a young age and moved to Alexandria, and then to the [Nitrian Desert](#). She met several of the Desert Fathers, following them in their travels and ministering to them using her own money. At one point she was thrown into prison for supporting them, after several of the Fa-

[Continued online](#)

