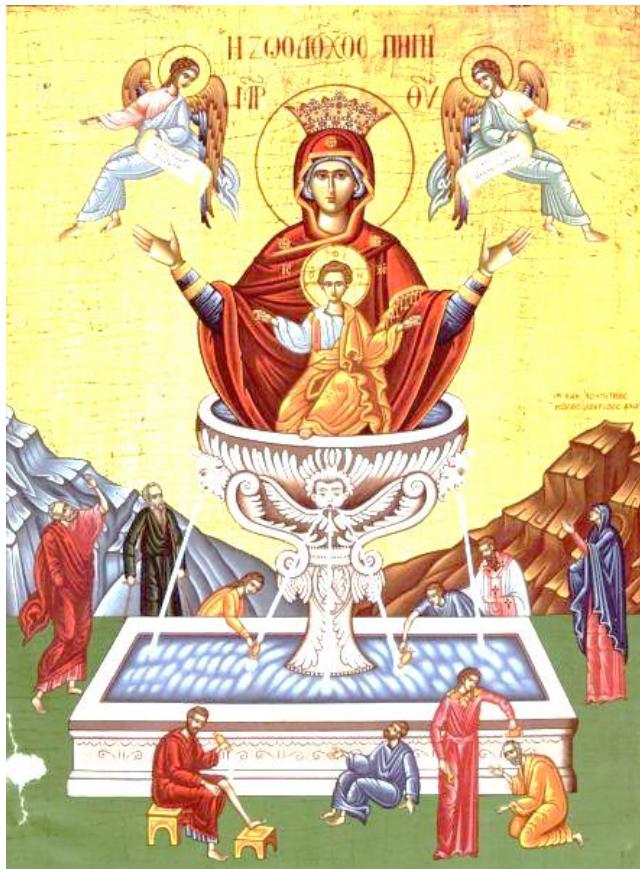




# PARISH BULLETIN

HOLY ARCHANGEL MICHAEL'S ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

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## Holy Mother from Vlacherne (Blachernae)

Saint Mary of Blachernae is an Eastern Orthodox church in Istanbul. The little edifice, built in 1867, got the same dedication as the shrine erected in this place in the fifth century which, until its destruction in 1434, was one of the most important sanctuaries of Greek Orthodoxy.

In 450, Empress Aelia Pulcheria started to build a church near a fountain of holy water situated outside the walls of Theodosius II at the foot of the sixth hill of Constantinople. After her death in 453, the shrine was completed by her husband, Emperor Marcian.

Emperor Leo I erected near the church two other buildings: a parekklesion, named Ayía Sorós ("holy reliquary"), since it hosted the holy mantle and robe of the Virgin brought from Palestine in 473, and the 'Ayion Loúsma ("sacred bath") edifice, which enclosed the fountain.

During the first quarter of the 6th century, Emperors Justin I and Justinian I restored and enlarged the church. The name of Blachernae may come from old name of Romanians (Vlach, Blac, etc.) and from a small colony of Vlachos.

Saint Mary hosted a famous icon of the Virgin, named after the church Vlachernítissa. It was painted on wood and reverted with gold and silver. This icon and the relics of the Virgin kept in the parekklesion were considered by the Byzantines as most powerful talismans, useful during a war or in case of natural disasters.



The first proof of the power of these objects came in 626. During that year Constantinople was besieged by the combined armies of the Avars and the Persians, while Emperor Heraclius was away, fighting the Persians in Mesopotamia. The son of the Emperor, Constantine, together with Patriarch Sergius and Patrician Bonus carried in procession along the ramparts the icon of the Blachernitissa. Sometime later the fleet of the Avars was destroyed. The Khan of the Avars afterwards said that he had been frightened by the vision of a young woman adorned with jewels scouring the walls.

After the end of the siege, the Byzantines learned with joy that the building of the church, which at that time lay outside the Walls, was the only one not to have been plundered by the invaders. When the victorious Heraclius came back to Constantinople, bringing back the True Cross which had been captured by the Persians in Jerusalem, the Patriarch received him at Saint Mary...

The protection of the Virgin of the Blachernae was also credited with the Byzantine victories during the Arab siege of 717-718, and in 860, during the invasion

of the Rus'. In this occasion, the Veil of the Virgin (mafórion), which by that time had joined the other relics in the church, was shortly plunged in the sea to invoke the protection of God on the fleet. Some days later the Rus' fleet was destroyed. In 926 too, during the war against Simeon of Bulgaria, the potency of the relics of the Virgin helped convince the Bulgarian Tsar to negotiate with the Byzantines instead of assaulting the City.

On August 15, 944, the church received other two important objects: the letter written by King Abgar V of Edessa to Jesus and the Mandylion. Both relics were then moved to the Church of the Virgin of the Pharos.

St. Mary, being a center of the veneration of the Images, played also an important role in the religious fights of the Byzantines. During the Iconoclastic, the final session of the Council of Hieria, where the cult of the images was condemned, took place in the church. As a consequence of that decision, Emperor Constantine V ordered the mosaics of the interior destroyed, and substituted them with others representing natural scenes with trees, birds and animals. On that occasion the Icon of the Blachernitissa was also hidden under a layer of silvery mortar. In 843, with the end of Iconoclasm, the Feast of Orthodoxy was celebrated for the first time in the church of Blachernae with an Agrypnía ("holy Vigil"), which occurred on the first Sunday of Lent.

The Blachernitissa was discovered again during restoration works executed during the reign of Romanos III Argyros, and became again one of the most venerated icons of Constantinople.

The Church of Saint Mary was completely destroyed during a fire in 1070, and was rebuilt by Romanos IV Diogenes and Michael VII Doukas respecting the old plan.

According to Anna Komnene, the so-called "habitual miracle" occurred in the church before the Icon of the Virgin Blachernitissa. On Friday after sunset, when the church was empty, the veil which covered the icon moved up slowly, revealing the face of the Virgin, while 24 hours later it fell again slowly. Anyway, the miracle did not occur regularly, and ceased completely after the Latin conquest of the City.

After the Latin invasion of 1204, the church was occupied by the Latin clergy and placed directly under the Holy See. Already before the end of the Latin Empire, John III Doukas Vatatzes redeemed the church and many monasteries for the Orthodox clergy in exchange for money.

On February 29, 1434, some noble children who were hunting pigeons on the roof of the church accidentally started a fire, which destroyed the whole complex and the surrounding quarter. The area was largely neglected during the Ottoman period. In 1867, the Guild of the Orthodox furriers bought the parcel around the holy fountain, and build there a small church.

On the right of the church lied the parekklísion of the Ayía Sorós, which contained the dress and robe of the Virgin. The veil and a part of her belt (now at Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos), were later also kept there. On its right was kept the casket – adorned with gold and silver – which contained the relics. They were rescued from the Latin occupation,

and after the restoration of the Empire were kept in the church, but were all destroyed during the fire of 1434.

The small church which today encloses the Hagiasma has a trapezoidal plan with sloping roof, and is adorned with icons and frescoes. It is oriented in northwest-southeast direction. The holy fountain, which is believed to have healing powers, is always a favourite destination for Orthodox and Muslim pilgrims, who pour in the pool coins and hair pins. The pilgrim can also ritually wash his eyes at a line of faucets. Above them a modern palindrome inscription says: "Nípson anomímata mi mónan ópsin" (Greek: "Wash the sins not only the eyes"). The water falls into an underground gallery, which according to a tradition links the Hagiasma with that in Balıklı. The church is run by an episkopos and two papades. Each Friday morning the Akathist Hymn, composed by Patriarch Sergius during the Siege of 626, is sung there.

.....Andrew was a Scythian – from the people who once inhabited southern Ukraine – or perhaps a Slav, but either way he had been captured in a raid and enslaved as a little boy. Though he had a good education courtesy of his master, he took on himself the very difficult charisma of a fool for Christ's sake. In this, a person fakes madness and wild behavior and when treated cruelly by others, accepts that in atonement for the suffering of Jesus in His Passion. But these fools were always people with deep spiritual insight and often the gift of prophecy, which he revealed to his confessor at Hagia Sophia and to his disciple, Epiphanius. The miracle happens in the Blachernae Church, where the robes said to be those of Our Lady

were kept. The emperor, imperial family, and citizens are packed into the church during a service to Mary, imploring her intercession to save the city. But only Andrew and Epiphanius see Mary enter the dome, attended by angels, John the Baptist, and saints. She extends her veil out over the people and bows her head in prayer to God, then they all depart, and the crisis ends with the withdrawal of the enemy.

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**Source:** Wikipedia

and <https://frchriszugger.com/page/4/>



## Liturgical Schedule

<b>Wednesday</b> <i>September, 28</i>	<b>6:00 pm</b>	<b>Paraclysis of Theotokos</b>
<b>Friday</b> <i>September, 30</i>	<b>8.30 am 6.00 pm</b>	<b>Divine Liturgy Vespers with Litya for Protection Theotokos</b>
<b>Saturday</b> <i>October, 1</i>	<b>8:00 am 6:00 pm</b>	<b>Divine Liturgy – Protection Theotokos Vespers</b>
<b>Sunday</b> <i>October, 2</i>	<b>8:00 am 8:15 am 9:30 am</b>	<b>Church opens Orthros Divine Liturgy → Sunday ...</b>



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