

ashamed.

Since no bishop's residence was offered him, Gregory went to live with some relatives and choose the small church of St. Anastatia outside the city for his parish. There he began to preach. Gregory was a powerful speaker. Only a few came at first, but those few were astonished and impressed. His congregation increased, and his sermons on the Trinity drew great audiences. The Arians were dismayed as they saw the old faith being restored to the city. They did everything they could to interfere with his work. They insulted and ill treated him and defiled his church, but Gregory's influence grew. It was not long before he won the esteem of the best scholars and thinkers in the city.

It happened about this time that St. Jerome, probably the most learned scholar of his age, was returning from the desert of Syria where he had been living for some time as a solitary. Having heard of Gregory's eloquence and learning, he stopped in Constantinople to learn all he could from so holy a man. Nor was he disappointed. It was a meeting of two great minds and two great saints, for Jerome, who was to become one of the most distinguished doctors of the Western Church, was even then a champion of religious liberty, and a fearless opponent of Arianism; and Gregory Nazianzen would be known in time as one of the "Three Torches of the East." Jerome greatly admired the Eastern Fathers, and his statue in St. Peter's in Rome shows him together with St. Augustine (whose conversion he completed after it was begun by St. Antony of Egypt), St. Athanasius and St. John Chrysostom holding up St. Peter's chair. St. Gregory Nazianzen should have been with them for he was their equal.

In the year 380 Emperor Theodosius issued an edict that all Byzantine subjects should observe the Catholic faith as professed by the Pope of Rome and the Archbishop of Alexandria. Angry and baffled, the Arians left the city. The following year the emperor called the second ecumenical council for the purpose of strengthening the Christian faith, reaffirming the doctrines denied by the Arians, and fortifying the position of the Christians in Constantinople who, under Gregory's influence, had multiplied and became strong and faithful. Now, at the wish of the

council over which he had presided and at the urgent persuasion of Emperor Theodosius, Gregory accepted the post of patriarch of Constantinople. He was solemnly consecrated in the beautiful cathedral of the Holy Wisdom, but again peace was denied him. In spite of the emperor's edict there was still a significant number of Arian sympathizers in the city to stir up trouble. The validity of Gregory's election was questioned, and other charges were brought against him.

Gregory was tired of fighting, He had not wanted to go to Constantinople in the first place. He had not wanted to be a bishop. He had kept the faith burning in Constantinople in that city's darkest hours. Now he just wanted to find some quiet place in which to end his days. He preached a very touching farewell sermon and left the city gladly to return to Cappadocia.

For the rest of his life Gregory led the kind of life that he had always wanted. He wore a monk's habit and sandals, spent most of his time reading, writing, and studying, and had a small garden which gave him much satisfaction., In spite of the fact that his health was always precarious, he imposed on himself many acts of penance and mortification, such as never having a fire in his room no matter how cold it was. He left a great treasury of writings in prose and poetry which are highly regarded, not only for their theological importance, but because Gregory was a true master of style. He was a man of great virtue and keen intellect, eloquent of speech and persuasive in writing, but he had the humble heart of a monk.

#### **The Evangelization Station**

Hudson, Florida, USA

E-mail: [evangelization@earthlink.net](mailto:evangelization@earthlink.net)

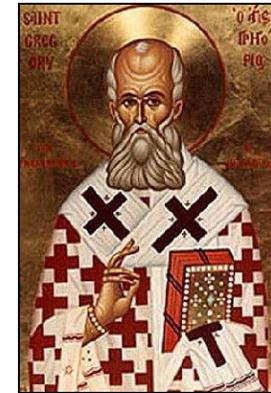
[www.evangelizationstation.com](http://www.evangelizationstation.com)

Pamphlet 664

## ***St. Gregory of Nazianzus***

(c. 329 – 25 January 389 or 390)

Gregory is a saint in both Eastern and Western Christianity. In the Roman Catholic Church, he is numbered among the Doctors of the Church; in Eastern Orthodoxy and the Eastern Catholic Churches he is revered as one of the Three Holy Hierarchs, along with Basil the Great and John Chrysostom.



*Icon of St. Gregory the Theologian*

Gregory Nazianzen was a reserved and thoughtful man, sensitive, poetic, shy, and inclined to solitude. He would have liked nothing better than to retire to some desert place and remain there all his life, fasting, praying, and serving God as a monk or a hermit. Instead, he was constantly being pushed into the middle of arguments and controversies and forced into a public life, which he hated. He spent a large part of his life in the midst of bitter conflict.

From the time they went to school together, Gregory looked up to his friend Basil as one who was capable of knowing and understanding everything that there was for man to know. Yet he himself is regarded as one of the great intellects of the early centuries. He is surnamed Theologian; and he is honored as one of the greatest of the Greek Fathers.

Gregory Nazianzen was born in the little village of Arianus in Cappadocia, which can be found on the old maps up north of Palestine along the Black Sea. His family must have moved shortly afterward

to Nazianzus because Gregory always bore that name. Names like Gregory and Basil were so common that those who bore them often had to add the name of their home towns for identification. It would save a great deal of confusion if we knew their family names, but they used a different system in those days.

Gregory's parents were Gregory the Elder and Nonna, a very good Christian woman, who probably prayed her pagan husband into the Church and even beyond, for he soon became a priest and later a bishop. In the Eastern Church, a man already married could be ordained, although he could not marry after his ordination. When a married man became a priest, quite frequently the couple would separate, and the wife would enter some community of holy women. It is probable that Gregory and Nonna did separate, at least after their two sons were well grown. We do know for certain that both of them became saints.

The two boys attended the schools in Caesarea in Cappadocia, then a center of learning, where the long friendship of Basil and Gregory began. The two younger boys in each family—Basil's brother, Gregory Nyssa and young Caesarius of Nazianzus—were probably classmates, too. Caesarius studied medicine and became court physician in Constantinople under Constantius II. When he died, Gregory of Nyssa preached his funeral sermon. All four of the boys became saints.

Rhetoric (the effective use of language) and oratory (skill in public speaking) were Gregory's favorite subjects. He had an inclination to the law as a profession, and the best law schools were supposed to be in Alexandria or Palestine. He and Basil were loath to part, but they consoled each other with the promise that they would surely meet again in Athens. Basil, who was planning rather vaguely to be a master or teacher of rhetoric, was going to Constantinople for the next step in his training. Both boys considered themselves Christians and led strict Christian lives, but neither had yet been baptized.

The common practice at that time of deferring baptism until late in life probably sprang from the conviction that baptism would wash away all sins committed previous to that event, whereas those committed after baptism might not be forgiven so

easily and would certainly incur heavy penance. If they waited until almost the last minute, many people reasoned, they need not be so strict with themselves and the long-deferred sacrament would take them right to heaven. It was a dangerous practice, eventually suppressed, but remembering the very severe penances imposed on the early Christians, it is easy to understand their point of view.

When Gregory and Basil left Athens they were both about thirty years of age. Basil, came under the influence of his sister Macrina and was baptized not long after they reached home. It is believed that Gregory had some sort of a deep religious experience and was probably baptized at about the same time. He decided to give up the idea of practicing law and returned to Nazianzus where his father, now a bishop, needed his help.

At this point, Basil started a monastery on the river Iris and sent for his friend to join him. Gregory's father protested. He was getting old and the work of the diocese was too much for him. When he saw how eager his son was, however, he finally consented—but for a limited time only. Gregory spent two happy and fruitful years with Basil, planning and building the monastery and working out a rule. Then his father called him back.

Gregory did not want to leave the monastery at all. He was born to be a monk. The life suited him. However, when his father insisted upon ordaining him a priest he was shocked, angry, and desperate. He did not feel worthy to be a priest, and he just couldn't face the problems he could easily foresee. He ran away from the unhappy situation and went back to Basil's community. For ten weeks he prayed and struggled with temptation, but from the first he knew that he would have to return. Later, he wrote a beautiful treatise on the priesthood by way of apology for his reluctance to enter that state.

In 370 Basil, who had also had to give up his happy life as a monk, had been made metropolitan of Caesarea. Now he was having trouble with Emperor Valens. He needed good, solid, dependable bishops in a number of key areas, and he had already made his own brother, Gregory, bishop of Nyssa in spite of his protests. He had been keeping his eye on Gregory Nazianzen for some time, too. Gregory's father had

gone a little too far in conciliating the Arians and had thereby offended the monks of the neighborhood. Gregory Nazianzen, however, had been very successful in restoring peace to the troubled province. Basil therefore made him a bishop of Sasima, a miserable, unhealthful, out-of-the-way place, but nevertheless important. He did it without his friend's consent, and Gregory was deeply hurt as well as angry. He absolutely refused to go near the place, and from that time on their friendship was never the same. Gregory wanted to be a monk, but had to stay with his aged father, now nearly 100 years old, and he acted as coadjutor (assistant bishop) in Nazianzus as long as his father lived. After the old bishop's death, Gregory's health broke down entirely. He retired to Seleucia in a near-by province that climbed the slopes of the Taurus Mountains. There for five years he succeeded in living the kind of quiet, secluded life that suited him, but this interval of peace was not to last.

The death of Emperor Valens was a great blessing to the Christians. The new emperor, Theodosius, was a Christian, and an era of peace began. The Church of Constantinople, however, was in very bad condition. A heretic named Arius had been teaching that Jesus, the Son of God did not always exist, but was created by—and is therefore distinct from—God the Father. This theory was condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325, as Jesus proclaimed, "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). Arianism had made tremendous inroads there because it had for so long been supported by the emperors. There were actually only a few Catholics left in the city and they were disorganized. They sent for Gregory Nazianzen to come to the capital city and restore order.

Gregory was naturally very reluctant to go. He knew well that he would have to face confusion, argument, even violence, and he disliked intensely the corruption that he knew had become a part of life in the capital. When he finally did go, because he believed that he must, he was not welcomed by the people. They were accustomed to great splendor in both Church and State, and here was a man, bald and poorly dressed, bent with illness, and looking little indeed like a bishop. They felt cheated and a little