

ABBA BEJIMI THE HERMIT

Abba Bejimi was born of poor christian parents in the town of Fisha, under the bishopric of Masil. When he was twelve years old, he was shepherding his father's flock in the field, when the angel of the Lord appeared to him as a young boy saying, "Would you like to come and be a monk with me, so that we may spend the rest of our lives worshipping God instead of caring for these animals? Three days from now, three monks are coming to take me with them back to their monastery, and if you like you can come too!" The heart of the young boy Bejimi rejoiced exceedingly, for monasticism was his heart's desire, so he said to his new friend, "Yes, please take me with you!" Three days later, three monks were walking through the field when they sighted Bejimi. The angel drew close to them and said, "It is good to take with you this enlightened pillar who will be a shining light in the world, for he is a chosen one of God. He will return to this place in his last days and God will perform many miracles through him, until the day he completes his journey on earth." Realising that it was the angel of the Lord who was revealing these words to them, the elder of the monks approached the young saint Bejimi and asked, "Would you like to come with us? But I warn you, the journey is long and tiresome." Bejimi answered them, "I shall eagerly follow you." Excitedly, he walked with them until they reached Mount Nitria, and there he rested with them a few days. Then they continued walking within the wilderness of Sheheet for a further seventy miles. Along the way the monks taught the young Bejimi the rites and traditions of monasticism, and through their example they taught him humility, prayer, fasting, vigils, handiwork and memorising spiritual books. The saint increased daily in spirituality, humility and patience and abiding in the fear of God. The three monastic fathers rejoiced in Bejimi's virtues and good deeds and in his love and dedication in partaking of the holy church sacraments. When he had lived for seven years in obedience and christian love towards the three monastic fathers, they clothed him in the 'eskeem' of monasticism. Bejimi was a person who had a beautiful, pleasant appearance, and because of his warm smile and gentleness, they called him the "son of peace." He lived for fifteen years in complete obedience towards the three fathers, until their departure to the Heavenly Kingdom. During the years in which he dwelt with the monastic fathers, they prophesied to him that he would one day become a great spiritual leader. After their departure, Bejimi remained alone in that place for a further two years; thus he dwelt within the wilderness of Sheheet for twenty four years. His fame spread throughout all the land, and many people and monastic fathers came to see him from all the surrounding regions to receive his blessings. When he found that he was consuming a lot of his time in meeting with people and guiding them spiritually, he became frightened from vain glory and the praise of men, and the evil effect it could have on his heart. So he began meditating on the day of his departure from this world, and the moment of Judgement, and began blaming himself saying, "What can I do if God has need of me this night? How can I stand before God and justify all the deeds I have done in my life?" He then got up and walked within the wilderness of Sheheet for three days and nights. He took nothing with him except for a palm branch on which he leaned for support. He ate nothing during these three days, and then suddenly devils appeared to him as ferocious beasts, wanting to attack him and eat him, however, they were not able to even approach the saint. So Bejimi said to them, "If my Lord Jesus Christ has given me over to you, then it would not be necessary for all of you to be here, for only one of you would have the strength to kill me, but if the Lord has not given you authority over me, then keep away from me!" and having said this, he made the sign of the cross, and at once they vanished like smoke. After this incidence, the saint continued walking within the wilderness. He prayed along the way and felt happy that God was beside him and supporting him. After two day of journeying through the wilderness of Sheheet, he came to a small valley

filled with beautiful palm trees and a pond of fresh water. He rejoiced when he saw the many animals drinking happily from the pond. Abba Bejimi then continued walking for a further twenty miles until he found a small cave situated on the side of a high mountain. This was to be his home for the next twenty four years, during which time he lived in strict ascetism, fervent prayer and worship, humility and lowliness of heart; always remembering the Lord's words, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). 188 During the first three years of living in this cave, he ate and drank only once every six days. He ate from the fruits of the palm trees which fell to the ground, and drank fresh spring water. He never stored food or drink in his cave. Daily he would pray fifty psalms and read from the books of Moses and the prophets. He prostrated four hundred times in the morning, and at night he would kneel and once again pray fifty psalm, together with praising and prayer, reading from many Old Testament books as well as from the Gospels and Epistles. After three years, his clothes wore out, so he remembered the example of Abba Paula the First Hermit, and weaved for himself a tunic of palms. During these three years, he experienced severe spiritual struggle, so the angel of the Lord appeared to him as a hunter and provided Abba Bejimi with heavenly food; just as the angel had once provided to Elijah the prophet. Having dwelt in the wilderness for twenty four years, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Archangel Michael and the twelve apostles appeared to Bejimi, and the wilderness was flooded with a brilliant light. The Lord said to the saint, "Peace be with you My chosen one! Because of your love for Me and the sufferings you have endured for Me, a church shall be built in your name..." He then blessed Bejimi and said, "Arise and go to your home town, for there I shall perform many miracles through you, and idol worshippers shall return to the True Faith. There you shall remain for ten years, before completing your life on earth and coming to live with Me in My Heavenly Kingdom forever." Our beloved Lord gave Abba Bejimi His peace and blessing before departing from him. The Archangel Michael then placed the saintly father on a cloud which carried 189 him to a high mountain, three miles from his home town. There Bejimi built a small cave and lived within it in strict ascetism and worship. He was a righteous example to all those who saw him. A few days later, the angel of the Lord carried him safely to the region of Pharan in Palestine; for it was corrupted by many heresies, but because of the strength of Abba Bejimi's spiritual teachings, and the grace bestowed upon him by the Holy Spirit, he defeated all apostasies. God also granted him the gift of performing miracles, healing the sick and casting out evil spirits. Abba Bejimi spent five years in the region of Pharan, praying and struggling to bring the lost sheep back into the flock. After the Lord helped him accomplish this, the angel carried him back to the cave near his home town. There he also lived for five years, healing the sick and encouraging many to return to the True Faith. As a result, his fame spread throughout the entire region. It has been mentioned that Abba Shenouda the Archimandrite saw a vision one night : he lifted up his eyes towards heaven and there he saw a magnificent throne situated upon a pillar of light, and on the throne sat a crown of glittering diamonds. When he asked one of the angels, "Whom does this throne belong to?" the angel replied, "It is for the saintly father Bejimi the hermit, of Fisha in the diocese of Maseal." After this revelation, Abba Shenouda eagerly wanted to see the saint, so he ventured through the wilderness until he found him. The blessed father Abba Bejimi knew by the Spirit who Abba Shenouda was, and so they warmly greeted one another. They spent the entire night praising and praying together, after which they spoke about the many great wonders of God. Abba Shenouda remained with the saint a few days before returning to his monastery. The Lord revealed to Abba Bejimi the hour of his departure, so he called his disciple to him and gave him a sign by which the hour of his deliverance would be known. It was seven o'clock in the morning on the first day of Kiakh, when the saintly father Abba Bejimi was struck by a severe fever, but in all his pain, he was comforted by a group of saints who came to visit him. On the eleventh day of the

blessed month of Kiakh, the holy father Abba Bejimi released his spirit, and a host of angels carried him to the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved him dearly. He was seventy years old when he passed away. He lived for twelve years in Fisha, seven years in Sheheet with the monastic fathers, seventeen years clothed in the 'eskeem' of monasticism and living in the wilderness of Sheheet, twenty four years wandering within the inner wilderness, five years in Pharan and five years in a cave near his home town Fisha. In the Monastery of Abba Macarius the Great is a church bearing the name of "The Hermit Fathers." Within its sanctuary is an icon of Abba Bejimi, the blessed hermit father. Our church celebrates his feast each year on the eleventh day of Kiakh. He is also mentioned in the daily 'Tasbeha'. "Pray to the Lord on our behalf my fathers...Abba Apollo, Abba Abib and Abba Bejimi; may the Lord forgive us our sins."