



St. Philopater Mercurius

St. Philopater was born in the year 225 A.D. of pagan parents. He was named **Philopater** [a Greek name which literally means (*Lover of the Father*)]

Gordianus, his father, of Scythian origin, was miraculously rescued from the jaws of death through the intervention of an angel; an event that prompted him to seek conversion to Christianity. Thus, Gordianus and his family were baptized by the local bishop and were given new names : Gordianus was named **Noah**, and his wife **Kibotos** – a Greek name meaning : Ark or Saffina (in Arabic). These names were chosen (**Noah and Ark**) to signify that God has saved them from the seas of darkness.

From then on, the saint's family followed God's commandments and preached His word without any blemish and gave alms abundantly to the poor. Their sole aim in life was bringing up their son Philopater according to the true Christian belief. Thus, from his earliest childhood, Philopater learned that he must always live as befits a child of God.

In the third century, all military personnel were held in the highest esteem and occupied the top strata of the multi-layered social structure of the mighty Roman empire. It was to the military that the emperors looked for their support, and the military conquests were what added wealth and glory to the empire.

Reaching the age of seventeen, Philopater had already joined the Roman army. *[Intrepid on the field, a bold and efficient leader of men in the campaigns, he was sought in the social circles of Rome. He was also the best swordsman in his regiment, in battle he was a tactician that*

assured victory in every encounter with the enemy. He Carried out his duties in exemplary manner, and was the delight of the high command of his regiment.] Bravery and military powers, soon led Philopater to be promoted to the rank of command and given the name «*Mercurius*».

His warlike stance belied the Christian spirit within him. He was a true believer in Jesus Christ.

Mercurius is the name of the planet that refers to good luck and glory



At the time when Decius (249 – 251 A.D.) and Valerianus were reigning in the great city of Rome, they promulgated a decree to compel everyone, all over the empire, to offer sacrifices and pour out libations to the gods. They summoned all the nobles of senatorial rank and set before them the terms which they had worked out concerning this ordinance. The emperors found out that the nobles carried the same opinion as theirs. Thus, a decree was drafted; it ran as follows :

«Decius and Valerianus, the pious emperors with absolute power, and all the nobles of senatorial rank in Rome, write unto those who dwell in every place, and we consider that it is incumbent upon us to make you to know the things that seem good in our sight.

Now for a very long time past, we have been sure that it is the gods of our fathers who maintain our own kingdom, and who graciously bestow benefits upon every one who is under our dominion. Moreover, it is through their means that we enjoy victory over all nations, and not this only, but they also supply us with crops and fruit in very good abundance.

For these reasons, we and all the men of senatorial rank have, with great readiness, drawn up a general ordinance which is to compel everyone, in every place, both freemen and bondmen, soldiers and rustics, to bring sacrifices to the gods, pour out libations to them and to make prayers and supplications unto them.

If there be any man who shall shew himself disobedient to us and to our ordinance, we shall deliver him over to death penalty by the sword, or we shall give him to be the food for wild beasts and birds of prey; and Christians especially shall be liable to death sentences of this kind. And those who shall hearken to our ordinance, shall continue to live in a state of happiness and receive very great honour at our hands.»

When this imperial edict was published, not only was the city of Rome troubled and filled with quake and fear, but also all the other cities, because the general order had been dispatched to them and the governors compelled the citizens to do all that was written in the edict in a cruel manner.

Soon after the edict was promulgated, war broke out between the barbarians and the Romans. Decius ordered all regiments from all over the empire to come and fight against the barbarians. Among the regiments called up by the Romans was the famous '*Martusian*' regiment which had served formerly in Armenia and which was commanded by a tribune whose name was 'Sardonicus' or 'Saturninus'.

Decius went to the battlefield, but Valerianus stayed in Rome directing the affairs of the kingdom. The two armies fought fiercely against each other.

One day, at the peak of battle, *Mercurius*, a commander in the Martusian regiment then, had a *vision*.

He saw a man wearing a gorgeously brilliant apparel and surrounded by light. Holding a drawn sword in his right hand, the man said :

«O Mercurius, servant of Jesus Christ, fear not, nor be cast down, for I have been sent to help you and lead you to victory. Take this sword from my hand and go to fight the barbarians and when you overcome and conquer them, remember the Lord, your God.»

Mercurius thought that his visitor was one of the imperial officers. After recovering from his surprise, he held the sword in his hand and felt the *Holy Spirit* and *Godly power* overwhelm him. Thus, at the height of the conflict, Mercurius dashed with his sword into the midst of the barbarians. He displayed wonderful courage, mowing the enemy down like grass. He attacked with such violence that he was able to slay their king, his company and many others. His sword was so drenched with blood that he lost his grip on it and his arm fell

powerless by his side. The success of Mercurius so terrified the barbarians that they broke down and fled and **victory** lay with the **Romans**.

Thereafter, Mercurius was given a triumphant reception by all the Roman armies. When Decius learned of Mercurius' bravery, he sent for him and [made him **supreme commander of all the Roman's army**.] Decius bestowed upon him honours, decorations and money. A large amount of this money, Mercurius gave to his soldiers and felt very grateful to God for his success.

Mercurius then was only **twenty five** years old when he received that high military appointment and was soon swept into a swirl of pomp in his honour throughout the city.

On their way back to Rome, Decius held festivals in every city he passed through and the hero Mercurius became preoccupied by his new life of supreme commander.

One night, the angel of the Lord who had appeared to Mercurius in the battlefield appeared to him during sleep and addressed him saying:



«I am the angel of the Lord who met you during the war and gave you the victorious sword with which you have conquered the enemy and asked you to remember the Lord your God after victory. Now, I tell you, do not be afraid or troubled by the king's decree; God has sent me to you to tell you that you shall suffer greatly for His name and you shall receive a crown of victory in heaven. I will strengthen you until you fulfil your testimony. Your patience and good fight of faith will be heard of in every quarter and God's name will be glorified in you.»

After these words, the angel disappeared.

The hero Mercurius was greatly affected by God's great care and encouragement. he has received from God. This brought about many recollections that made Mercurius ponder over the words of his father, Noah, regarding Jesus Christ and faith in Him. Hence, he fervently prayed with tears

and humbleness confessing his weakness and trusting his powerful God. He raised his prayers saying :

«Look upon me, my God and my Lord. Strengthen me and preserve me in Your Holy Name until the last breath of my life.»

Then he started to blame himself for being so ungrateful towards God's loving kindness :

«Woe to me, sinful as I am. Like a fruitless tree, I have nothing to count upon except God's mercy.»

In reflection, he started to think of the heavenly rewards God has promised to His children who abide by His commandments. Mercurius longed with his whole heart to be in God's presence and become one of the heavenly King's soldiers, saying :

«Blessed is he who receives that great honour and acquires infinite glory, eternal happiness and everlasting victory.»

Mercurius spent all night long in prayer and spiritual ecstasy. His prayers were scarcely ended, when Decius sent two messengers to summon him into his presence to counsel with him in matters related to the army and the state. Mercurius apologized and said : *«My body has no strength.»* That day, the emperor accepted his apology and held his peace.



Next day likewise, the messengers were sent. When Mercurius came before the emperor. Decius rose up in warm welcome and in sight of kings, rulers, princes and the crowd and said :

«Welcome, dear Mercurius, the triumphant prince, courageous hero of Rome, great conqueror of barbarians.»

After counselling with his commander, Decius addressed him saying :

«Let us go , O Mercurius, to the great temple of Artemis and carry incense and offer sacrifice to our idols. They have helped us in our war and achieved victory for us.»

The hero Mercurius gave no answer.

Soon, the emperor and his company, rose up heading to the idols. Quietly, Mercurius withdrew and disappeared from the great crowd that followed the emperor.

The devil, in animosity towards all good, seized the opportunity. Noticing the absence of Mercurius at the feast of honouring the Roman gods, an officer of Mercurius' regiment, in jealousy of the supreme commander and eager to seize any chance to discredit him, hastened to inform Decius wishing to stir up anger in the emperor's breast against him :

«O great and powerful emperor, victorious and pious, and chosen by the gods to rule over the whole empire, allow me to speak :

The man whom your mighty right hand has exalted and whom you have made most honourable in the kingdom of the Romans, has not, in accordance to your command, come with us to the temple of the great goddess Artemis to offer sacrifice.»

«And who is this person ?» asked the emperor.

The slanderer answered :

«It's Mercurius, to whom you ascribed victory and greatness yesterday and the day before, and whom you have promoted to the highest of ranks and distinguished with the great honour of being appointed as the supreme commander of the Roman army. Mercurius has not only made himself disobedient to your majesty, but also has persuaded many to cease worshiping the gods, and if your majesty makes inquiries, you will find full proof of what I say.»

Having great admiration for Mercurius' courage and honesty, Decius refused to believe in his disloyalty to the gods until he should see absolute proof with his own eyes. For that, he rebuked the officer saying :

«Is there any disagreement between you and him that led you to say this ? However, I will not believe you until I find out the truth by myself, face to face with Mercurius. Keep silent now and do not utter another word against the great man. If your accusations stem from jealousy or hatred, know that you shall receive severe punishment. If what you

have said is true, then you shall receive many blessings from our gods and will be greatly honoured by the emperors.»

That said, Decius ordered that Mercurius be brought to his presence. Upon his arrival, Decius addressed him saying :

«Mercurius, was it not I who bestowed upon you this great honour and promotion ? Did I not make you supreme general over all governors because of your intelligence and the victory which the gods bestowed upon us in the war ? Why should you change this great affection into bitter hatred ? Is it true that you refused to worship the gods who gave you victory in the war ?!»

Then, the truly noble soldier of Christ, the hero Mercurius, replied gently, yet firmly and bravely :

«Let this honour be unto you, for even though I did go out to war and fight, yet it was not I who conquered but God who has been gracious unto me in Christ. Furthermore, take back thine honour about which you have spoken, for 'naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return'» (Job 1:21)

Having said these words, the brave Mercurius stripped off his military cloak and took off his golden belt and threw them at the emperor's feet and cried out:

«I am a Christian. Hear, all ye, I am a Christian. Here are all your titles and dignities, take them back for they will perish with every vanity in the world.»

Stupefied, Decius stared into the face of Mercurius for a long time. He marvelled at the youthful beauty of Mercurius as the blessed man was of a most goodly presence; his countenance was very handsome and his complexion was red and white. His body was adorned with both, beauty and strength. The looks of many were directed after him and the people admired him.

Decius was greatly perplexed because he loved Mercurius and tried to persuade him with all possible means so as not to lose him, being such a courageous hero. But Mercurius did not waver and refused to yield to the emperor's words and said:

«I will never stop worshiping my Master Jesus Christ because of temporary dignities, but by His grace, I will remain faithful to Him until death.»

Hearing these words, Decius was extremely furious and ordered his soldiers to cast Mercurius in prison, saying:

«Let now, the man who does not appreciate honour obtain some experience of disgrace.»

So, to prison they took Christ's martyr, who rejoiced in spirit and glorified God that he has been «counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name.» (Acts 5:41)

While Mercurius prayed and sang praises in prison, the angel of the Lord appeared and encouraged him saying:

«Rejoice, Mercurius, and do not fear the tortures of this tyrant. Trust in the Christ God, to whom you have testified openly, for He will save you from every tribulation.»

The angel disappeared and Mercurius was greatly strengthened by his words.

On the following day, Decius, took his seat at the tribune and sent messengers for the saint. When Mercurius stood before him, he tried to persuade him, once by coaxing, another time by threats. The saint remained unmoved and replied:

«I do not fear the tortures and am not worried by death because Jesus, our Lord, taught us in His Holy Scriptures, saying:

“Do not to be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more they can do. But I will show you of whom to be afr aid; of him who after he has killed has the power to throw into hell.” (Luke 12:4-5)

You have no power except over my body; you can do with it whatever you please.»

Despite the straight forward replies on the saint's part, Decius still hoped to be able to persuade him to change his mind. He kept on giving him more advice:

“Go, Mercurius, and offer incense to the good gods, so that your soul may live, and I will make you second to me in the kingdom.”

The saint replied :

“Your majesty, the king, your gods are the ones about whom our master King David said in his psalms :

*‘Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of men’s hands.
they have mouths, but they speak not;
eyes have they, but they see not;
they have ears, but they hear not;
noses have they, but they smell not
Let them that make them become like them;
and every one that trusts in them.’ “ (Ps. 115:4-8)*

Despite all this, Decius did not despair but said :

“Mercurius, you know that I love you and that I do not want to put you to torture; this is why I ask you, as I have asked you several times before, to go and raise incense to the gods so that your soul lives.”

The saint daringly replied :

“Being tortured for the name of Christ is a great honour for me. I have voluntarily taken off all your perishable honours and dignities. As a Christian all I care for is to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

My master, the king, I have told you that I will never take your advice. Save yourself the trouble and do not repeat this request to me. I am now ready not only to suffer but also to die for His Holy Name. Therefore, whatever you want to do, do and do not hesitate.”

The emperor asked :

“Tell me about your family and native land.”

In reply, Saint Mercurius said:

“If you wish to know about my family and native city, I will tell you. As to my earthly father, he was a native of Scythia and was called Gordianus. He served as a commander in the Martusian regiment. He is a follower of the true God, Jesus Christ, my Heavenly Father. Thus, my native city is the heavenly new Jerusalem, the city of the Great King, the King of kings.”

Decius said :

“And who gave you the name of Mercurius ?

Was it your parents or some of your soldiers ?”

Saint Mercurius answered :

“My father used to call me ‘Philopater’, but when I joined the army and became an officer, the captain of my company called me ‘Mercurius’.”

Then the emperor said :

“Mercurius, hear what I have to tell you and think well before you reply. Will you do according to our ordinance which we have published all over the empire for every man, and bow down to the gods, and take again your former rank and honour in the army or not ? Answer me and know that you have been brought here now for this purpose.”

The saint answered :

“I have come to this place to conquer you and your father Satan, through whom all evil exists. And when I do, a crown will be set upon my head by the true Master, my Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, whatsoever you wish to do to me, do quickly, and do not tarry. For I have upon me the whole armour of God, and the shield of faith, by means of which I will overcome all your designs and crafty arts towards me.”

When Decius ran out of tricks to make Mercurius yield and having realized his failure to make him change his mind and worship idols, he furiously cried out:

“How dare you, Mercurius, utter such words and disobey my orders?”

Immediately, the emperor, filled with wrath, gave orders to his soldiers to strip the clothes from Mercurius and fix four posts on the ground between which he is to be tied at the height of one cubit from the ground. Further still, the emperor commanded them to strike him all over his body with long sharp nails instead of scourges.

Decius stood watching the saint’s patience and endurance and mocked him in the midst of his bitter torture saying :

“Now, Mercurius, where are the armours you have spoken about? Where is your courage and your great power in war ? Where is your God to save you from Decius?”

The saint gave no reply to the words of the devil, but instead looked up to heaven and said:

“My Lord Jesus, help me.”

Afterwards, Decius ordered them to tear off his flesh with sharp blades and scatter red hot coal under his body to burn him alive. But, gradually, the flames were extinguished by the flowing blood of the righteous man. The holy saint endured all these pains calmly and with great bravery by the power of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Lest he should die quickly, Decius finally ordered that he be released and taken to prison where he should be strictly watched.

When the soldiers lifted him up, the saint was half dead, but there was still a little breath of life left in him, although the emperor thought that he was undoubtedly going to die that night.

Mercurius, nearly dying from the many tortures he had been through, was taken and put in a dark prison. But our beloved God never abandons His children who put their faith in Him. God, the merciful Father, gives them all encouragement and comforts them in their great trials :

“Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known my name.

He shall call upon me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.”

(Ps 91:14-15)

While Mercurius was in this state, suddenly a strong light filled the prison and the angel of the Lord appeared and addressed him saying:



‘Grace and peace be yours, O valiant fighter ! Have courage, for God has not forgotten you. He will support you to overcome this king and reveal the truth about his idols. Do not fear torture “for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” ‘ (2 Cor. 4:17)

Having spoken those words, the angel healed all his wounds and made him so sound and whole that he rose up and stood and glorified God who has not abandoned him.

The next day, Decius ordered that Mercurius be led again before him. Extremely astonished to see the saint completely sound, the emperor rashly said:

“When you were taken away from here, last night, you were nearly dying. How is it that I see you fit and healthy? How is it now that you are able to walk? Are there no wounds on your body at all?”

Decius commanded his spearbearers to make a thorough examination of Mercurius’ body. Having done so, they told the emperor:

“We swear by your might, o pious emperor, that his whole body is sound, and that there is no diseased spot on it; it looks like one whose body has never been touched by a finger.”

Decius said :

“He will definitely say that Christ has healed him. Did you not take a physician into prison to treat him?”

The soldiers answered :

“We swear by your glorious majesty, who rules the whole empire, that assuredly, no physician treated him; moreover, we thought that he would die. Now, in what way he has maintained his life, or in what way he has been healed, we know not.”

The king cried out at them :

“You know now what the magic of Christians is like! How is it that yesterday he was only fit for burial, and yet today he is standing up well and whole?”

Decius was filled with wrath and said to Mercurius :

“Who was it who healed you ?”

Saint Mercurius replied :

“It was my Lord, Jesus Christ, the true physician of our souls and bodies who healed me. The dealers in magical drugs and users of enchantments and worshippers of idols are strangers unto Him. He will bind them in bonds which can never be loosed, and will deliver them over unto the eternal fire, because they do not recognize the true God who created them.”

The emperor's anger towards the saint increased and he shouted at him saying :

“Now, I am going to put an end to your life by means of severe torture; let me see if the Christ in whom you believe, will heal you.”

The saint said :

‘I believe in my Lord, Jesus Christ. It is true that you have power over my body, but you have no power over my soul, and all your punishments will not make me renounce my faith, for our God said :

'Fear not those who can kill the body, but cannot kill your souls; but fear you rather Him that has the power to destroy both soul and body in hell.' “ (Math. 10:28)

Then, the emperor commanded the soldiers to bring a red hot iron instrument and thrust it under his members, and then apply blazing torches to his sides.

When they had done this, instead of the expected smoke, **a strong sweet odour** spread from the saint's body and everyone in that place could smell it. And although Mercurius was suffering from the most agonizing tortures, he neither uttered a groan nor dropped a tear.

And now Decius said to Mercurius :

“Where is your physician ? Let him come and heal you. You have even said that he also has the power to raise you if you died.”

“Do whatsoever pleaseth you. You have power over my body, but concerning my soul, God is its master. And even if you destroy my body, my soul shall live, for it is incorruptible.”

These were the words of the saint.

Then, the emperor ordered the soldiers to hang Mercurius upon a tree head downwards and a large stone to be tied to his neck in order that it might cause him to suffocate and die quickly. But as the power of God and His grace dwelt in the martyr, he was able to endure the severity of this torture for a long time counting on the promise that **“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”** (Rom. 8:18)

Decius, finally losing his patience, ordered that Mercurius be put in prison till the next day.

Despite the deathly tortures, the martyr spent all night in prayer. While praying, a great light shone all over the prison and immediately, all the chains with which he was bound fell off. Amid all this glory, the angel of the Lord appeared and addressed him saying :

“O beloved of Christ, have courage and win. Do not worry about these temporary tortures.”

The angel stretched out his hand and wiped all Mercurius' wounds. Immediately, he was healed and free from any trace of torture. Giving him peace, the angel disappeared. At once, the saint stood up and continued his fervent prayer glorifying God who consoled him in the hour of suffering.

The next day, seeing Mercurius sound and whole, the prison guards were amazed and informed their chief officer, who went to the emperor and told him that Mercurius' body was well, as if nothing had happened. Decius was aroused with anger when he learned that Mercurius was still alive and all his wounds were healed.

The saint was brought in front of Decius, who said :

“Have pity on your youthful body, Mercurius; offer sacrifices to the good gods and you will be relieved from this torture.”

But the martyr was resolved not to comply to his wishes and took all those tortures valiantly and no kind of torture had affected him. Seeing this, Decius, commanded the soldiers to flog Mercurius with a leather whip which carried four thongs until the ground became saturated with his blood.

Our noble saint, like a diamond, was able to bear this torture bravely. His soul soared in heavenly words :

“I give thanks to You, my Lord Jesus Christ, that You have held me worthy to suffer for Your Holy Name.”

Seeing that Mercurius would never waver and that many of the soldiers and the crowd had become attached to the saint and even publicly declared their belief in Mercurius' God and also preferred Jesus to life. Decius passed a sentence of death and ordered that he be slain by sword; he read out :

“Inasmuch as Prince Mercurius, the supreme commander of the Roman army, has disobeyed the emperor's edict, blasphemed the gods and refused to recant, I command that he be taken to the city of Caesarea in Cappadocia to be beheaded with the sword.”

Those who were appointed to carry Mercurius away, lifted him up and set him upon a beast and tied him on it because his body, like a dead body, swayed

about on all sides. After a few days of travel, they reached the city of Caesarea in Cappadocia where they dismounted Mercurius.

Arriving at the spot of execution, the saint asked to be left for a while to pray. While praying, a great light shone and he saw the Lord Jesus Christ, in glory, together with his archangels and angels, in front of him. *The Lord Jesus, with sweet gentleness, addressed him saying :*

*“Peace be to you, my beloved Mercurius.
Your prayers and pleadings have ascended before me as good incense.*

Come and rest with me in my Kingdom, for you have struggled well and kept your faith and finished your course.

Come now to receive the crown of glory which has been appointed to you.

You were sincere and testified to My Name before kings and princes regardless of sufferings.

I will let your name be known in every part of the world and great miracles will be performed in churches that bear your name.

Whoever writes down the story of your testimony and suffering, I will write his name in the book of eternal life.

He who prepares your body for burial on earth, I will give him a celestial body on the day of judgement.

Whoever builds a church dedicated to your name, I will make him abide in the heavenly new Jerusalem. I will let Michael the archangel be a keeper forever over churches that bear your name and keeper over all who come to it on the day of your commemoration to listen to the story of your suffering and take

your blessings. I tell you, Mercurius, I will endow on them mercy and forgiveness and accept your pleas for them.

And he who makes offerings (bread, wine, incense or candles) on the day of your commemoration, I will forgive him for all his sins.

Whoever cares to make a feast for the poor on the day of your commemoration, I will make him deserve to attend in my heavenly feast.

I will save whoever calls me in your name from all his suffering.

o every barren woman who asks me in your name, I will give children and to every woman in labour of birth who asks me in your name, I will relieve her quickly.

Whoever gives your name for his child, I will bless, keep and preserve him all the days of his life on earth.”

With these words, the Lord Jesus blessed the saint and disappeared.

With a heart overflowed with peace and joy, Mercurius spoke to those who were appointed to execute him and said :

“Do what you have been commanded to do quickly for the Lord, who invites everyone to repentance, shall make you worthy of His grace for He is rich and shows grace unto those who go to Him with a gift and without envy.”

After saying so, the hero Mercurius offered his head to the headsman and was beheaded.

Thus, Mercurius departed from this world as a glorious martyr and this at three o'clock on the twenty fifth day of Hatour in the Coptic calendar and the fourth of December in the year of our Lord 250 A.D..

After the martyr was beheaded, a great miracle took place : his body became as white as snow and exhaled a sweet odour like the choicest of incense and aromatic herbs. This led many to believe in Jesus Christ.

May the blessings and appeals of this martyr saint be with us.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit for ever and ever, Amen.



References :

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