

I SPY IN MY LITTLE ICON



By Kim Fritzges



St. John the Short

Our icon of St John the Short is an 11th century mosaic icon from Hosios Loukas, an ancient monastery in Distomo, Greece. We see him holding a cross in his right hand and his left hand open and raised to us. This is called the “palm of the righteous”, which means the saint shown has lived a holy and righteous life with a pure heart. The inscription reads St. John the Short.

St John the Short, also known as St John Kolobos, (Greek for short or stunted), was born in Thebes, Egypt around the year 339 and was an Egyptian Desert Father. His family was poor but very devout. When he was eighteen years old St John left the family to follow a monastic life.

He went to the remote desert wilderness called Skete where Abba Bemwa/Pambo lived. He became his disciple and learned great obedience. In his first lesson he was instructed to place a dry stick into the ground and water it daily. John followed this obedience and watered this dry stick every day walking for miles through the parched desert to the river to get the water. He never complained or questioned Abba Bemwa/Pambo, but followed his direction with a joyful heart even though it seemed worthless to water a dry stick daily. After three years, one day the stick started to sprout leaves and then fruit, it grew into a tree! It is called the Tree of Obedience.

Our coloring page shows John watering the Tree of Obedience in the dry desert, and it is growing with green leaves and fruit that he has gathered in a basket.

John lived in a cave near the Tree and spent his days fasting and in prayer. He would eat only one meal a day consisting of vegetables and bread. Around 395 the Skete was invaded by Berbers and John fled across the Nile River. He was a great teacher, bringing many souls to Christ. St John was a very kind and loving teacher often giving away his own food that he bought with money he made from weaving baskets.

St. John lived to be seventy years old, when he died his servant had a vision of him being taken to Heaven by a group of angels and saints. His relics are at the Monastery of St Macarius the Great located in the Wadi El Natrun Desert in Egypt.

St John is remembered in the Divine Liturgy of St Basil during the Commemoration of the Saints. His feast day in the Eastern Orthodox Church is November 9 and in the Coptic Orthodox Church is October 17.