

March 20

Sarapion of Thmuis (4th cent.) monk and pastor

On March 20, the ancient Alexandrian Sinaxarion commemorates Sarapion, an ascetic of the Egyptian desert who became bishop of Thmuis.

One of the leading figures of the 4th-century Coptic Church, he was a monk of the inner desert and a confidant of Antony, who left him, in a highly symbolic way, one of his leather tunics. Sarapion agreed to be ordained bishop so that he could help defend the church's faith, which was seriously threatened by the Arians and even more so by the Manicheans. To reduce the Manicheans' credibility, he wrote a treatise on the dignity and importance of the Old Testament for Christian faith, whose pages reveal both his sharp intelligence and his attachment to Scripture.

As a polemicist, Sarapion was calm and level-headed. He was friends with Athanasius, whom he defended against his adversaries on several occasions. Sarapion was also instrumental in helping the factions of the fourth-century Church work towards a peaceful resolution of their differences.

He died in exile under the emperor Constantine, and for this reason Jerome calls him a confessor of the faith.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Cuthbert (7th cent.), bishop of Lindisfarne, missionary

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (11 baramhat/maggabit):

Basil of Cherson (3rd-4th cent.), martyr (Coptic Orthodox Church)

Serapion, bishop of Thmuis (Coptic Catholic Church)

Alef (5th-6th cent.), monk (Ethiopian Church)

LUTHERANS:

Albert of Prussia (d. 1568), supporter of the Reformation

MARONITES:

Photini the Samaritan and companions (1st cent.)

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

20 monks of St Sava (d. ca. 797), martyrs