

April 1

Melitone of Sardis (2nd cent.) pastor

Today several early Eastern and Western calendars commemorate Melitone, bishop of Sardis.

We have very few facts about his life. Policratus of Ephesus was impressed by his voluntary celibacy, which was very rare in the second century, and called him "a eunuch who lived entirely in the Holy Spirit." According to Eusebius, Melitone was bishop of Sardis and travelled to the Holy Land to gather accurate information on the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures.

A defender of the practice of celebrating the the Christian Easter on the fourteenth of Nisan, Melitone is known in particular for his series of homilies On Easter, which strongly influenced later liturgies. In these homilies he revisits the events of salvation history using largely typological exegesis, and sees the paschal mystery of Christ, the Lamb slain for the salvation of believers, as the climax and focal point of human and cosmic history. Combining vivid poetic and prophetic language with striking theological depth, Melitone places all of humanity in relationship to Christ, through whose passover all believers have passed from death to life.

His homilies, which inevitably bear traces of the fierce second-century polemics between Church and synagogue, inspired several kontakia of the Byzantine liturgy and, in the Latin Church, the Good Friday Improvers and the Easter Exsultet.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Frederick Denison Maurice (d. 1872), presbyter, teacher of the faith

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (23 baramhat/maggabit):

Daniel (6th cent. BC), prophet

LUTHERANS:

Amalie Sieveking (d. 1859), benefactress in Hamburg

MARONITES:

Mary of Egypt (d. 522)

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Mary of Egypt, nun

Abraham of Kazan (d. 1229), martyr (Bulgarian Church)