



Main Church *Iconography*

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The First and Second Finding of the Venerable Head of the Holy Glorious Prophet and Forerunner John the Baptist

February 24

After the Beheading of the Holy Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John, his body was buried by his disciples in Sebaste, and his venerable head was hidden by Herodias in an unclean place. Saint Joanna, the wife of King Herod's steward

Chuza (Luke 8:3), secretly took the holy head and placed it into a vessel and buried it in one Herod's properties on the Mount of Olives.



After many years, the property passed into the hands of a government

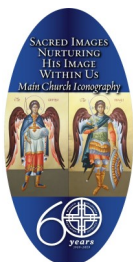
official who later became a monk named Innocent. He decided to build a church and a cell on the property. When he started to dig the foundation, the vessel with the venerable head of John the Baptist was unearthed. From the signs of grace that emanated from the relic, Innocent recognized its great holiness and thus occurred the First Finding of the Venerable Head of Saint John

the Baptist. He preserved the honorable head with great piety, but fearful that the holy relic would be defiled by unbelievers, prior to his own death, he hid the sacred relic in the same place where he initially unearthed it. Upon Innocent's death the church fell into ruin and was ultimately destroyed.

Constantine the Great legalized Christianity in 312 AD. Around this time the holy Forerunner appeared twice to two monks journeying to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage, revealing the location of his venerable head. The monks unearthed the holy relic and placed it into a sack made of camel-hair and proceeded home.

Along the way the monks encountered a potter and gave him the precious relic to carry. Not knowing what he was carrying, the potter continued on his way. The holy Forerunner appeared to him and ordered him to flee from the careless and lazy monks. Once at home the potter preserved the venerable relic with reverence. Before his death he placed it in a water jug and gave it to his sister.

For some time the venerable head was preserved by devout Christians, until the Arian priest, Eustathius came to possess it. He tricked many sick people who had been cured by the holy relic to think that they were healed by him because he was an Arian. When this blasphemy was revealed, Eustathius fled. He buried the holy relic in a cave near Emesa and intended to use it in the future to perpetuate falsehoods once again. God, however, did not permit this. Pious monks settled in the cave whereupon a monastery was built. In 452 AD Saint John the Baptist appeared to the Archimandrite of the monastery, Marcellus, and indicated where his precious head was hidden. This revelation came to be celebrated as The Second Finding of the Honorable Head of the Holy, Glorious Prophet and Forerunner John the Baptist. The holy relic was eventually transferred to Constantinople.



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