



Streams in the Desert: Learning from the Desert Fathers and Mothers

**Presented by
Jon Stotts**

Sundays in Lent
9:45am-10:45am
West Wing of the Parish Center



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⁹And it came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. ¹⁰And as he was coming up out of the water, he immediately saw the heavens being ripped apart and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him; ¹¹and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are my beloved son; in you I have taken delight."

¹²And immediately the Spirit cast him out into the wilderness, ¹³and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tested by Satan; and he was with the wild animals; and the angels were serving him.

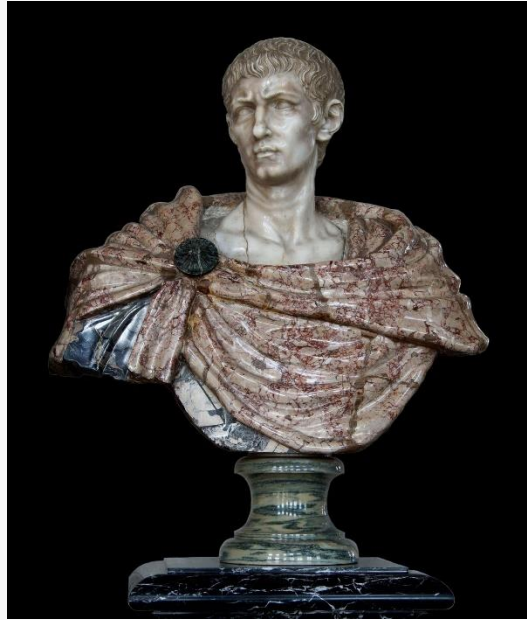
(Mark 1:9-13)

Streams in the Desert – An Overview

- ▶ Session 1 –Who are the Desert Fathers and Mothers?
- ▶ Session 2 – Dead Or Alive? Empire, Church, and the Desert
- ▶ Session 3 – A Ballad of Love and Hate: God, Neighbor, and Self in Desert Spirituality
- ▶ Session 4 – Fighting with Demons: Thoughts and Desires in the Spiritual Life
- ▶ Session 5 – Becoming Like Fire: What It Means to Be Saved



Diocletian – 284 -



(Junior) Emperor Constantine

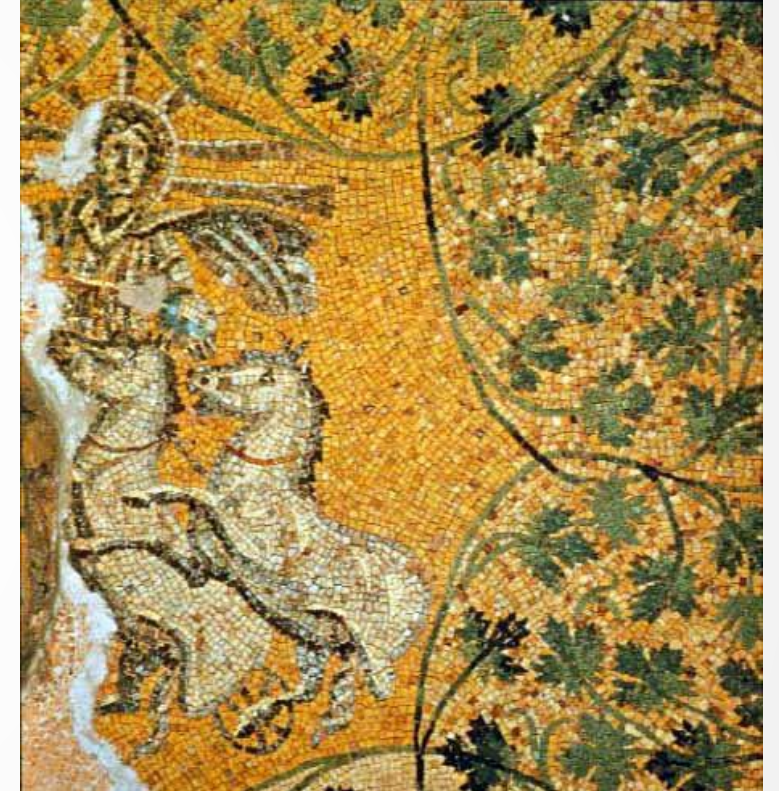


Constantine – 272 - 337

Constantine's Empire




Constantine's Arch



Sol Invictus (or Jesus?) in
the Vatican Necropolis


Constantine's conversion is the beginning, not the end



 *The Spread of Christianity. Christian churches appeared first in the major cities of the Empire and spread only gradually into the countryside, in part due to the establishment of monasteries.*

So what?



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Some Desert Fathers

- **Anthony the Great (251-356)**
- Macarius the Egyptian (300-390)
- John the Dwarf (339-409)
- Moses the Black (332-407)
- Poemen (?~450?)

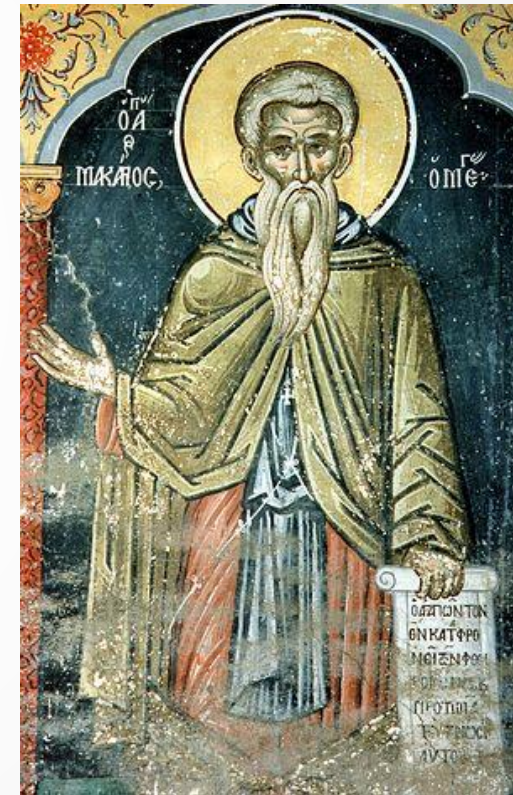
Our life and our death is with our neighbour. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalise our brother, we have sinned against Christ.'



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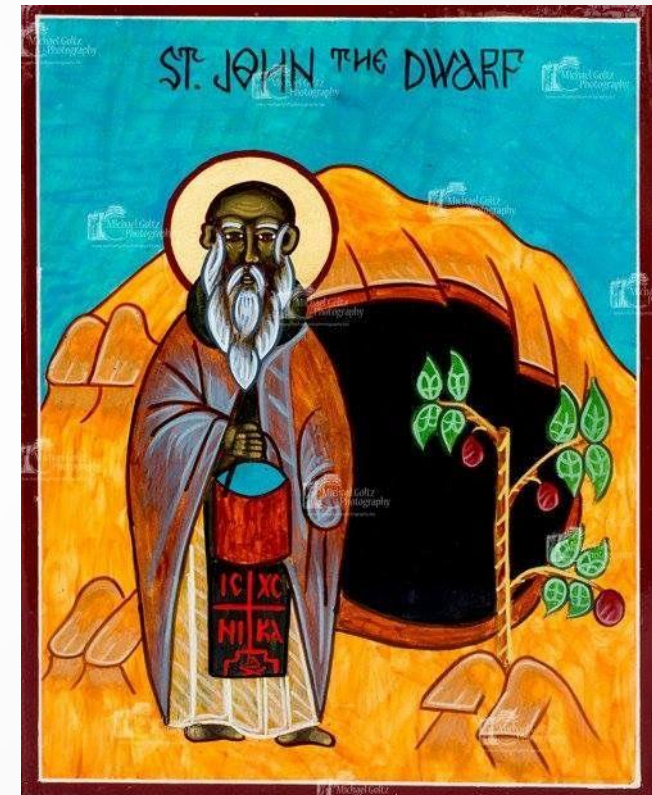
Abba Paphnutius, the disciple of Abba Macarius, said, "I asked my Father to say a word to me and he replied, "Do no evil to anyone, and do not judge anyone. Observe this and you will be saved."



Some Desert Fathers

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A house is not built by beginning at the top and working down. You must begin with the foundations in order to reach the top.' They said to him, 'What does this saying mean?' He said, 'The foundation is our neighbour, whom we must win, and that is the place to begin. For all the commandments of Christ depend on this one.'



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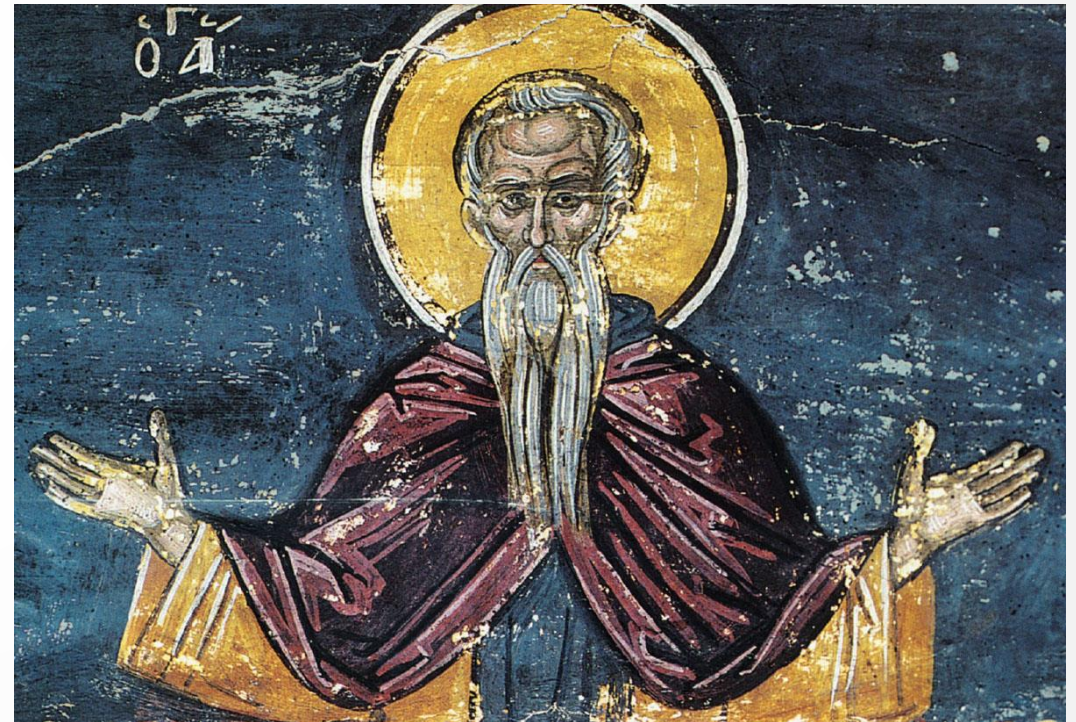
A brother came to Scetis to visit Abba Moses and asked him for a word. The old man said to him, 'Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.'



Some Desert Fathers

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A brother questioned Abba Poemen saying, 'If I see my brother committing a sin, is it right to conceal it?' The old man said to him, 'At the very moment when we hide our brother's fault, God hides our own and at the moment when we reveal our brother's fault, God reveals ours too.'



Desert Mothers / Ammas

- Theodora
- Sarah
- Syncletica



[Amma Theodora] said that neither asceticism, nor vigils nor any kind of suffering are able to save, only true humility can do that. There was an anchorite who was able to banish the demons; and he asked them, 'What makes you go away? Is it fasting?' They replied, 'We do not eat or drink.' 'Is it vigils?' They replied, 'We do not sleep.' 'Is it separation from the world?' 'We live in the deserts.' 'What power sends you away then?' They said, 'Nothing can overcome us, but only humility.' 'Do you see how humility is victorious over the demons?'

Poemen (?~450?)

John the Dwarf (339-409)

Moses the Black (332-407)

Macarius the Egyptian (300-390)

Anthony the Great (251-356)

271
Anthony
heads to
the
desert

312
Constantine
becomes sole
western
emperor

320
Pachomius
establishes
first
monastic
community

356-357
Anthony
dies;
Athanasius
writes his
Life

386 Augustine
converts after
learning about
Anthony

407 Scetis
destroyed by
Berber tribes

303 Diocletian
persecution
begins

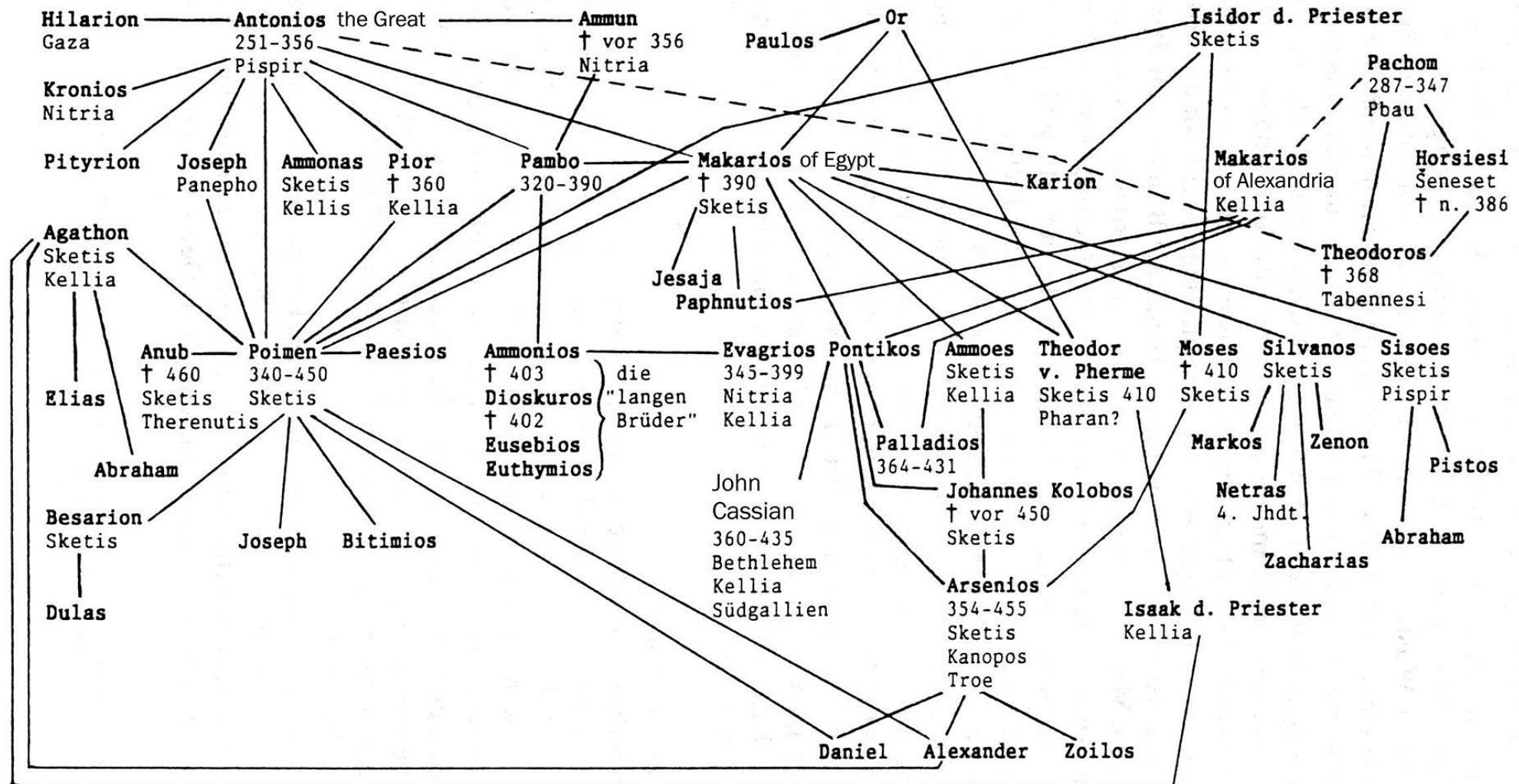
313 Edict of
Milan;
persecution
over

324-325
Constantine
becomes sole
emperor; calls
council of
Nicea

380 Emperor
Theodosius
makes
Christianity
the official
religion of the
empire

391 Temple of
Sarapis in
Alexandria
destroyed by
Christians

The Most Important Desert Fathers and Their Interrelationships



Modified from: Christoph Joest, "Das frühe ägyptische Wüstenmönchtum: Gestalt und Gestalten",
Zu den Quellen die Spiritualität der Wüstenväter und des heiligen Benedikt,
ed. by J. Kaffanke (Freiburg: Katholische Akademie der Erzdiözese Freiburg, 1997), p. 13.

Quellen: B. Miller (Hg.), Weisung der Väter. Apophthegmata Patrum, auch Gerontikon oder Alphabeticum genannt (Sophia 6), 2. Aufl., Trier 1980
G. Bunge, Évagre le Pontique et les deux Macaire, Irénikon 56 (1983) 215-227.323-360

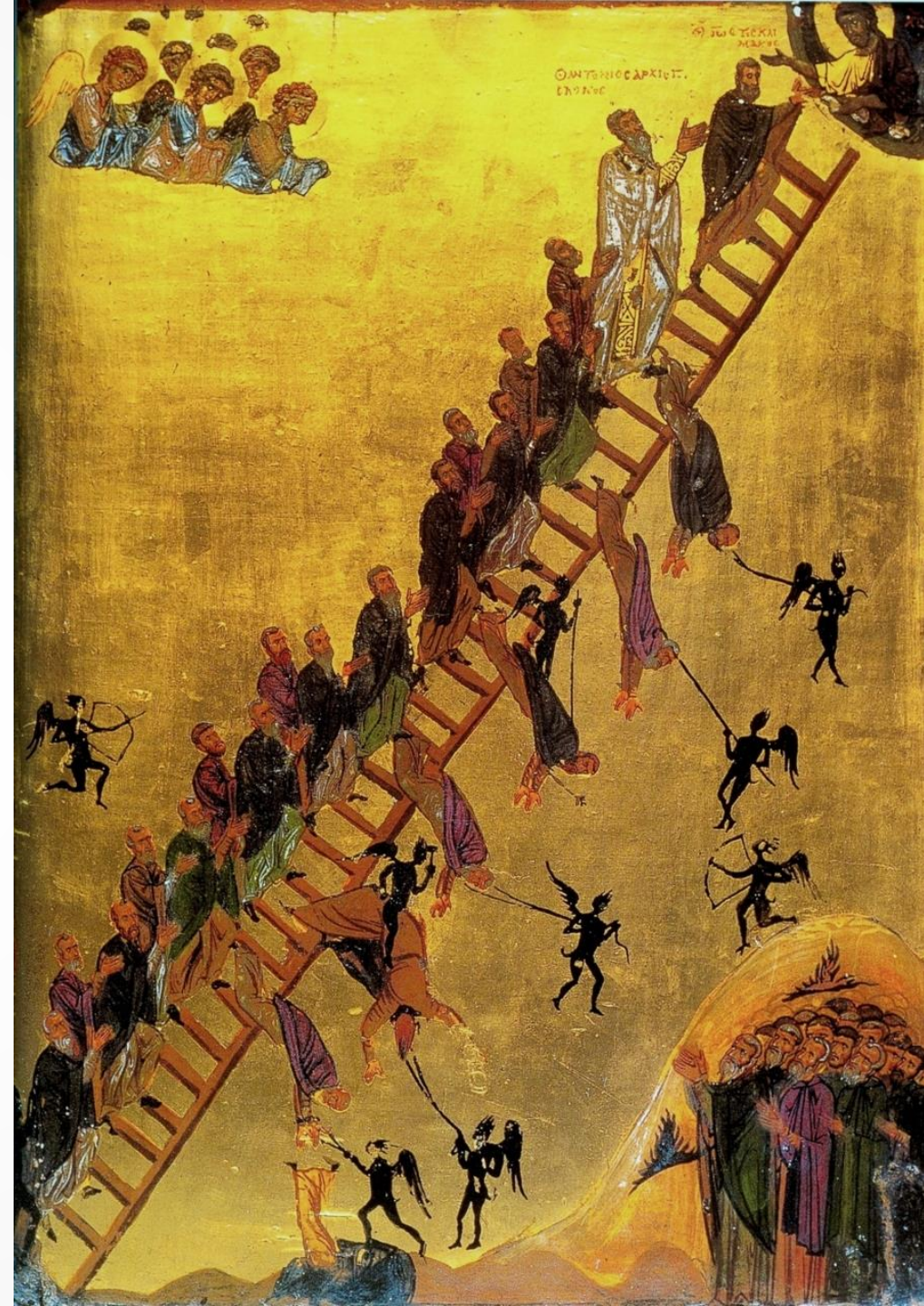
Desert Spirituality

Perspectives

- Renunciation of world/society
- Renunciation of education/philosophy
- Renunciation of empire

Themes

- Renunciation
- Humility
- Silence
- Hospitality
- Inversion of social norms
- Voluntary social death
- Spiritual transformation
- Pursuit of the divine



Next Week

A Ballad of Love and Hate:
God, Neighbor, and Self in Desert Spirituality

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