

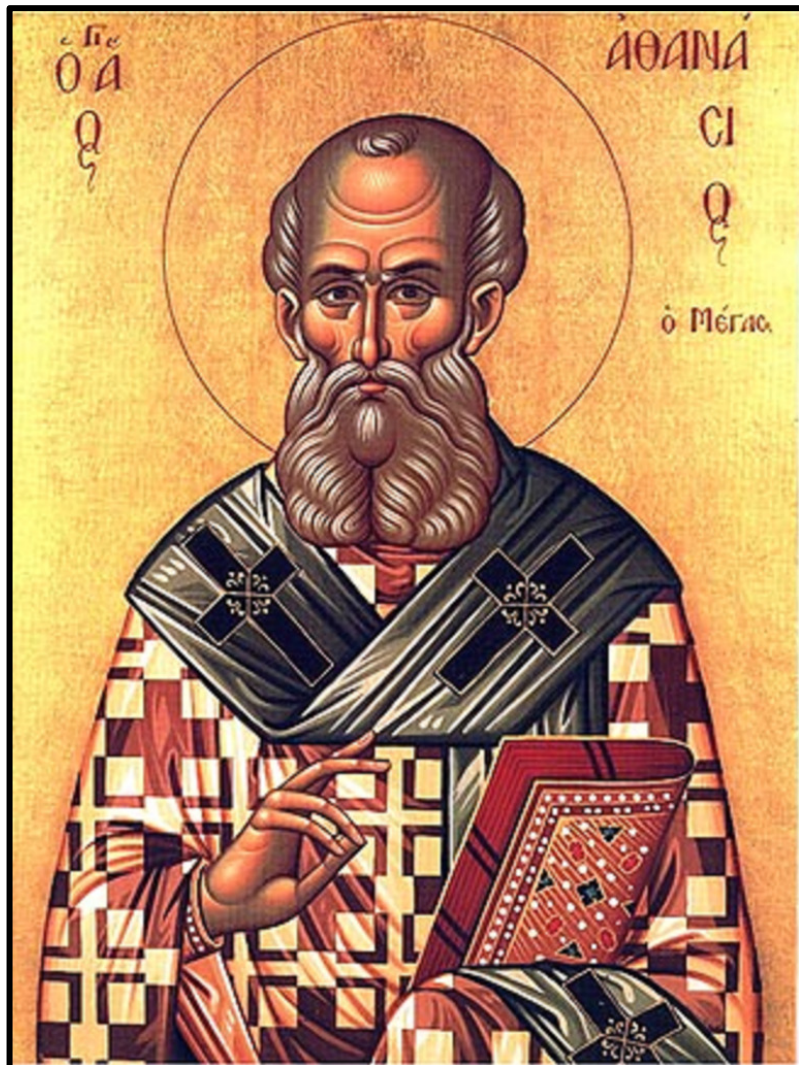


KATOOMBA

— BAPTIST CHURCH —

CHRIST'S CHURCH THROUGH THE AGES

LESSON 22: ATHANASIUS THE GREAT (PART 1)



'ATHANASIUS CONTRA MUNDUM'

BIOGRAPHY

- Born c. A.D. 298 in Alexandria, Egypt.
- Born into a Christian family, he was fluent in Greek and Coptic, meaning that, although he may have been ethnically Greek, it is more likely that he was ethnically Egyptian.
- His family appears to have been wealthy enough to provide him with a high-quality Alexandrian education in theology, philosophy, and other subjects.
- Following the appointment of Alexander of Alexandria as Archbishop in A.D. 311, Athanasius was invited to become his secretary.

“The Bishop Alexander invited Athanasius to be his commensal and secretary. He had been well educated, and was versed in grammar and rhetoric, and had already, while still a young man, and before reaching the episcopate, given proof to those who dwelt with him of his wisdom and acumen.”
(Sozomen: II, xvii)

- In A.D. 318 (a year prior to his ordination as a Deacon in Alexandria), Athanasius published his first theological works in the form of a two-part series:
 - *Contra Gentes* (‘Against the Heathens’)
 - *De Incarnatione* (‘On the Incarnation’)
- As a Deacon of Alexandria, and Patriarch Alexander’s close ally, Athanasius was an instrumental figure at the First Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325.
- About five months after the First Ecumenical Council, Patriarch Alexander was on his deathbed; Athanasius had fled the city, fearing that the clergy and congregants would elect him as the new Archbishop.
- Fortunately for the Church – he was!

“On the death of Alexander, five months after the termination of the Council of Nicaea, Athanasius was unanimously elected to fill the vacant see. He was most unwilling to accept the dignity, for he clearly foresaw the difficulties in which it would involve him. The clergy and people were determined to have him as their bishop, Patriarch of Alexandria, and refused to accept any excuses. He at length consented to accept a responsibility that he sought in vain to escape, and was consecrated in 326, when he was about thirty years of age.” (Gilmartin, 1890)

- Athanasius’ episcopate formally began on 9 May 328.
- His tenure as Archbishop (Patriarch) of Alexandria stretched over a 45-year period – 17-years of which were spent in five exiles, ordered by four Emperors:
 - A.D. 336
 - A.D. 338
 - A.D. 356
 - A.D. 362
 - A.D. 364
- Historical records indicate that the driving basis for these exiles was the political and ecclesiastical schemes of the Arians (e.g. Council of Tyre in A.D. 335).
- His final exile lasted only a few weeks – after which, Athanasius returned to Alexandria to begin repairing much of the damage done during his exiles.
- During the final years of his ministry, he resumed writing and preaching with diligence and boldness.
- He once again emphasised the biblical view of the Incarnation, as articulated at Nicaea.
- Athanasius died peacefully in his bed on 2 May 373, surrounded by clergy, family, and his faithful supporters.