

## The Septuagint and Symeon the God-Receiver

Long ago, during the reign of the Egyptian ruler Ptolemy II Philadelphus, many people worked really hard to fill the Library of Alexandria with every book that existed in the world.

Back then, books were written on scrolls. Scrolls are made using a special process that turn papyrus plants into a type of paper. It took a long time to create a scroll. Someone had to make the paper. Then someone had to carefully write the words (without making any mistakes) and then let the ink dry. This process could take weeks or months to finish.

It wasn't until the 1400's that the printing press was invented. Before this time, only a church or the very rich could afford to have their own Bible. After the invention of the printing press, it was easier to make several copies of a book at one time. That's when families were first able to save up and buy their own Bible.

In the 3rd century B.C., Ptolemy wanted to have the biggest collection of books (scrolls) in the entire world, so badly, that when ships came to visit Alexandria from other countries, their ships would be searched for books. If they had any with them, the books were taken to the Library of Alexandria to be added to their collection. Sometimes the owner would get a copy of their book back, but they had to wait a long time for it because it had to be copied entirely by hand! Other times, the owners would get some money for their book, but they lost all the valuable information in their book.

One of the important books at the Library of Alexandria was the Jewish Law (the first 5 books of the Old Testament) in Hebrew. The problem was that most people didn't speak Hebrew anymore. At this time, they spoke Greek because Alexander the Great had recently conquered most of that area.

Ptolemy knew it was extremely important to translate this book into the language that most people understood. This is why he asked the Jewish High Priest to send his best scholars to translate the first five books of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek.

The High Priest sent six men from each of the twelve tribes of Israel to translate the text. (6 men x 12 tribes = 72 men)

These 72 men worked for 72 days to complete this huge project. Saint Symeon was one of those 72 men who translated these books of the Bible from Hebrew to Greek. This translation of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint. Septuagint means "70", which is the rounded number of how many men worked to translate it.

When Saint Symeon was translating the Old Testament and read, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a Son," (Is 7:14) he was going to scratch it out and write, "a young woman" instead, but an angel stopped his arm and told him that it was indeed correct and to leave it how it was already written. The angel also told Saint Symeon that he would not die until he held the child.

Saint Symeon was 360 years old when the Theotokos and Saint Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple. He was overjoyed to see Jesus! He held the baby and said, "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which you prepared before the face of all people, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." (Luke 2 25-32)

We use this prayer, that was said by Saint Symeon so long ago, in many of our church services today. One of the places you'll see it is in our Divine Liturgy books. Towards the end of the service, the priest says, "Let us depart in peace! Let us pray to the Lord." This is a shortened version of what Saint Symeon said as he held baby Jesus in the Temple. In other services, you'll hear the entire prayer.