

The Greedy Guardian

Once upon a time there lived two townsmen: Ivan and Sergei. They were both married and great friends. One day Ivan became very ill and, feeling that he would never recover, invited his neighbour Sergei to his home. He made him the guardian of his very young son, Zachary, and gave him custody of his estate, consisting of one thousand pieces of silver and one hundred pieces of gold. He begged him to give this property to the son when he came of age. Ivan did this secretly, without any witnesses, trusting in his many year of friendship with Sergei. The he quickly passed away.

When young Zachary became eighteen years of age, he wished to take charge of his fortune, so he asked Sergei to return his father's legacy to him. But Sergei, forgetting his friend's trust and coveting the inheritance of the orphan, replied, "I don't know what you want from me. Your father never left you anything."

In vain did Zachary beg and beseech him, knowing that his father had had a great deal of money. In vain did Sergei curse the memory of his dead friend. The guardian was persistent and stood his ground stubbornly.

"Well, what's to be done?" said Zachary. "If you say so, then I'll have to believe you. But I heard that my father, before he died, handed over to you one thousand pieces of silver and one hundred pieces of gold, which you were supposed to give to me."

"That's not true, son!" replied Sergei.

"And you are willing to swear that it's not true?"

"I'll swear even right now," answered the greedy guardian.

So the two immediately went to the Perchersky Church and Zachary asked the abbot to have Sergei take a vow before the image of the Perchersky Virgin Mary. Sergei took the oath, but when he wanted to approach the image in order to kiss it, he could not by any means come near it. He felt great fear in his soul and began to step back to the door. He had scarcely come out onto the church threshold than he fell to the ground. And he began to thrash around in an attack of some terrible sickness. When he regained consciousness, he admitted that he had taken the money from his dead friend and told where it lay hidden. He then immediately died.

And Zachary, seeing this, made a firm resolution to serve God all his life. He entered the monastery and with the money built the Perchersky Church portico of St. John the Baptist, which still stands to this very day.