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## Legends of Our Lady of Pochaiv

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# Legends of Our Lady of Pochaiv

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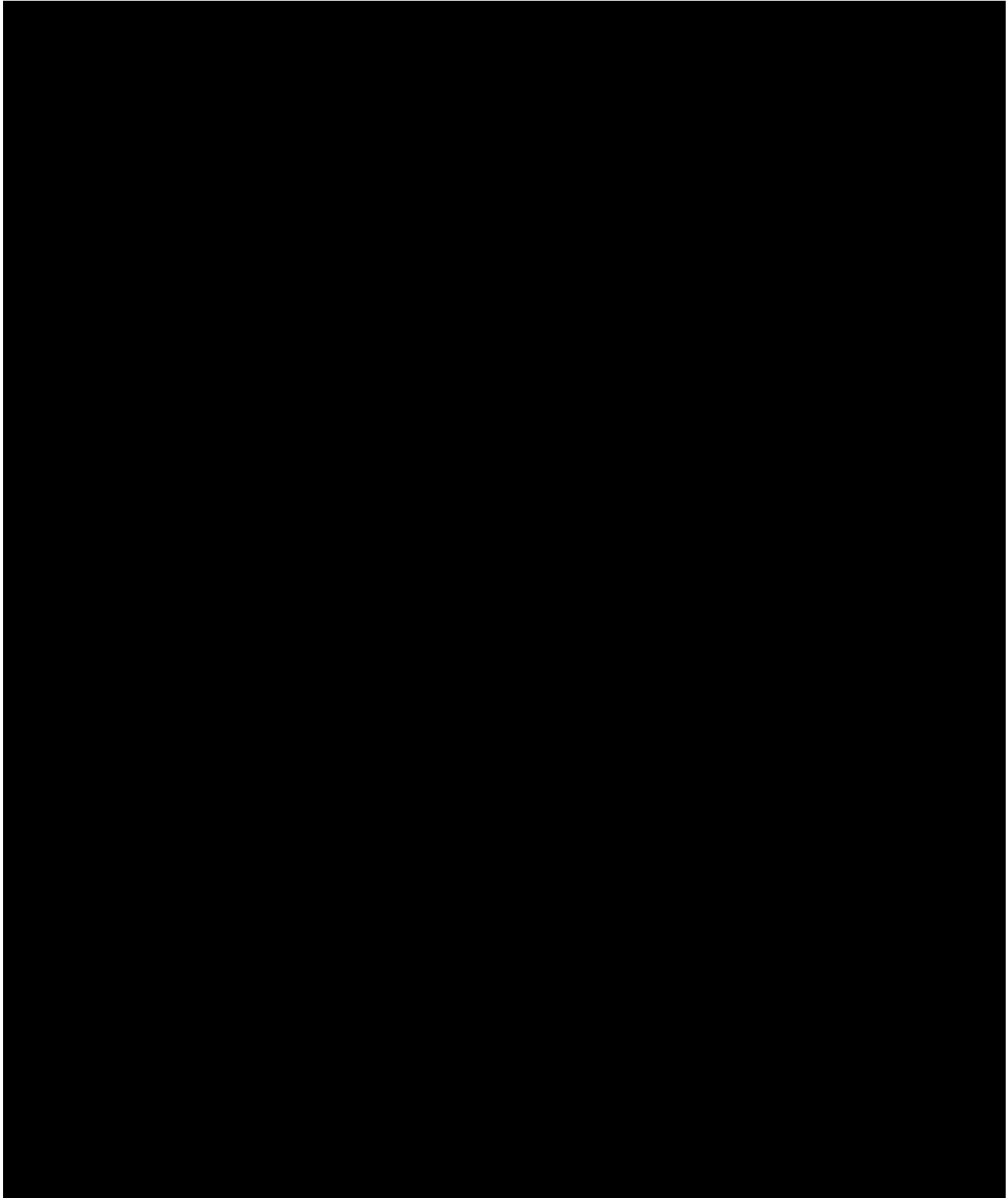
Sunday March 20, 2022

By Melanie Fields

The history of Our Lady of Pochaiv (pronounced Po-cha-yiv) begins in 1198 at the top of Mount Pochayiv in the Carpathian Mountains, about two centuries after Christianity became institutionalized in Ukraine following the conversion of St. Volodymyr.

## Flames and Footprints

On April 17, 1198, a monk in the region of Ternopil Oblast ascended Mount Pochaiv to pray. After beginning his prayers, a pillar of fire appeared to him and to some shepherds nearby. The flames withdrew to reveal the Blessed Virgin standing upon the mountain. The apparition left behind a single footprint upon the rock where she stood, and from this rock, a healing spring began to flow.



News of this supernatural event spread to the people of the region, and many who visited the place told of receiving healing from the waters of the spring. The imprint on the rock became known as the Healing Unshod Footprint, while the spring became known for its miraculous healing ability. The previously uninhabited mountain became the site of a monastery dedicated to the miracle, and a song about the apparition has been passed down through generations:

Shepherds on a hill tended their flock;  
They beheld the Mother of God on the rock,  
And in remembrance of her good  
Leaving a footprint where she stood.  
Water there now flows from a spring,  
Good health, to those who believe, to bring.  
(English translation from “The Virgin of Pochaiv: The Pilgrim Icon” booklet - PDF below)

## Origins of the Miraculous Icon

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Hundreds of years later, the Greek bishop Neophyt visited the monastery and left behind a gift — an icon of the Theotokos from Constantinople — for Anna Hoyska, a rich widow who owned the local town and lands. Soon after, the icon reportedly started glowing, and Anna Hoyska’s blind brother is said to have regained his sight after praying in front of it. Donated to the monastery after Hoyska’s death, the icon eventually came to bear the mountain’s name: the Pochaiv Icon of the Mother of God or the Theotokos of Pochaiv (Ukrainian: Почаївська ікона Пресвятої Богородиці). Painted in a late Byzantine style, the image is an Eastern Orthodox icon of the *Eleusa*, or “tenderness madonna,” iconographic type. The icon shows Our Lady wearing a crown and holding the infant Jesus. In her other hand, she holds the end of her veil. This being a “tenderness” icon, it shows the faces of Jesus and Mary touching while Jesus gives a blessing with his hand. Mary’s face is sad yet beautiful, and her head leans toward her son, a sign of her loving concern and readiness to help.

A variety of artistic interpretations of this icon can be found in the Marian Library's collections and are featured below. Some of these include the symbolic footprint left by the original Marian apparition.

## The Wartime Miracle

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The monastery's chronicles record hundreds of miracles during the icon's stay, one regarding the invasion of the Turks during the Zbarazh War in 1675. At this time, the people of Pochaiv gathered at the monastery in order to weather the attack. Facing certain death at the hands of the invaders, they prayed and sang hymns to Mary, pleading for protection and help. Legend tells that the Blessed Virgin appeared in the sky along with a host of angels and St. Job of Pochaiv. Mary's white mantle (or [Pokrova](#)) spread over the monastery and terrified the besieging army. The Turks fired arrows into the sky at the apparition, but the arrows fell back and wounded the attackers who shot them. This caused enough confusion among the invaders that they scattered, allowing the people of Pochaiv to turn their enemies back. Against overwhelming odds, the people of Pochaiv achieved victory.

### **Further Reading**

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- View images from the [Ukrainian Marian collection on Pinterest](#).

— Melanie Fields is a library specialist in the Marian Library, working with artwork and special collections, writing informative articles and communicating about the Marian Library through a variety of media.



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“Our Lady of Pochaiv” from the Marian Library Ukrainian Marian Collection. This icon was brought from Ukraine by tourists in 1988, the celebration of a millennium of Christianity in Ukraine.