

# THE SPIRITUAL MEADOW

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## JOHN EVIRATUS

### TO HIS BELOVED IN CHRIST, SOPHRONIOS THE SOPHIST

In my opinion, the meadows in spring present a particularly delightful prospect. They display to the beholder a rich diversity of flowers which arrests him with its charm, for it brings delight to his eyes and perfume to his nostrils. One part of this meadow blushes with roses; in another place lilies predominate, drawing one's attention to themselves and away from the roses. In another part the colour of violets blazes out, resembling the imperial purple. In short, the diversity and variety of innumerable flowers affords delights both to nostril and to eye on every side.

Think of this present work in the same way Sophronios, my sacred and faithful child. For in it, you will discover the virtues of holy men who have distinguished themselves in our own times; men, as the Psalmist says, planted by the waterside <Ps 1:3>. They were all equally beloved of God (by the grace of Christ),—yet there was a diversity in the virtues from which the beauty and the charm of each derived. From among these I have plucked the finest flowers of the unmown meadow and worked them into a crown which I now offer to you, most faithful child; and through you, to the world at large,

I have called this work meadow on account of the delight, the fragrance and the benefit which it will afford those who come across it. For the virtuous life and habitual piety do not merely consist of studying divinity; not only of thinking on an elevated plain about things as they are here and now. It must also include the description in writing of the way of life of others. So I have striven to complete

this composition to inform your love, oh child; and as I have put together a copious and accurate collection, so I have emulated the most wise bee, gathering up the spiritually beneficial deeds of the fathers. Now I will begin to tell <you> those things.

# THE LIFE OF JOHN THE ELDER AND THE CAVE OF SAPSAS

There was an elder living in the monastery of Abba Eustorgios\* whom our saintly Archbishop of Jerusalem wanted to appoint higoumen of the monastery. <The candidate> however would not agree and said: 'I prefer prayer on Mount Sinai', The archbishop\* urged him first to become <higoumen> and then to depart <for the mountain> but the elder would not be persuaded. So <the archbishop> gave him leave of absence, charging him to accept the office of higoumen on his return. <The elder> bid the archbishop farewell and set out on the journey to Mount Sinal, taking his own disciple\* with him. They crossed the river Jordan\* but before they reached even the first mile-post the elder began to shiver with fever. As he was unable to walk, they found a small cave and went into it so that the elder could rest. He stayed in the cave for three days, scarcely able to move and burning with fever. Then, whilst he was sleeping, he saw a figure who said to him: 'Tell me, elder, where do you want to go'? He replied: 'To Mount Sinai'. The vision then said to him: 'Please, I beg of you, do not go there', but as he could not prevail upon the elder, he withdrew from him. Now the elder's fever attacked him more violently. Again the following night the same figure with the same appearance came to him and said: 'Why do you insist on suffering like this, good elder? Listen to me and

do not go there,' The elder asked him: 'Who then are you'? The vision replied: 'I am John the Baptist and that is why I say to you: do not go there. For this little cave is greater than Mount Sinai. Many times did our Lord Jesus Christ come in here to visit me. Give me

your word that you will stay here and I will give you back your health'. The elder accepted this with joy and gave his solemn word that he would remain in the cave. He was instantly restored to health and stayed there for the rest of his life. He made the cave into a church and gathered a brotherhood together there; the place is called Sapsas.\* Close by it and to the left is the Wadi Chorath\* to which Elijah the Tishbite was sent during a drought, it faces the Jordan.