

## PRIEST JOHN BYSTROV

In this village, in 1888(9?) the priest John Bystrov was born. Fr. John's parents had only daughters but they really wanted a son, so his mother prayed fervently about it to God, making a vow that if a boy was born she would dedicate him to the Lord. When he was born they named him John.

When he finished gymnasium, John became a teacher in his native village. The construction of the church and the services of the zealous pastor influenced the young teacher greatly. It was clear that education can only be successful if it is godly, because its foundation can only be love. Possessing noticeable gifts as an educator, he soon became well known amongst teacher, and those who knew him foresaw a glorious future for him. It seemed that he had found his own beloved work, and the vow given by his parents before his birth had been forgotten. But the Lord reminded him of Himself. More and more often John remembered his mother's words and began to be increasingly tormented by the thought of his unfaithfulness to God. No matter how successful his future life might be, it could not be of any value if it were built upon the precarious foundation of unrighteousness. When John reached the age of twenty-seven he told his mother, "Mama, I should fulfill the promise. I want to myself."

He married, was ordained a priest and began to serve in the village of Sakanakh, Nizhegorod Province. His was a happy family in all respects. He and his wife had eight children, and mutual love reigned. Fr. John was at times strict, but always with good judgment and fairness, and his children loved him. He never forgot that he was not only a father, not only an educator, but also a priest; an example of good manners and morals for everyone around him. Although the family received double the amount of persecution in those years because he was a priest, he never once regretted his decision to fulfill his mother's vow. No investigations, no persecutions from the godless authorities could frighten him. Persecuted by the authorities, he had to change parishes several times. The last church in which he served was the church in the village of Arapovo, Bogorodetsk region, Nizhegorod diocese. His fame as a pedagogue protected him for a while, but in the late 30's arrest hung over him inevitably. A certain government representative attempted to persuade Fr. John to leave his church and return to education, promising that his priesthood would be forgotten; they would make him a director of schools, and with his capabilities doors would open for him. Otherwise he could not escape arrest. Hearing this, the Priest's wife rushed to talk her husband into leaving the church to become a teacher. She reminded him of his children, begging him with tears to have pity on them. But just as before, so now did he remain the firm pastor in his decision to serve God. With meekness and love he spoke, "The Lord will not abandon them; He will bring all of the children into personhood."

On September 11, 1938, on the feast of John the Faster, he was arrested. When the chekists came, the service was in process, and they did not make so bold as to interrupt. They left the church and lay in wait close by for the priest. Fr. John was imprisoned in the Nizhegorod prison. His death, along with that of many other priests of the Nizhegorod diocese arrested in 1937-1938, was in this manner: They were all taken to the middle of the Volga opposite the town of Bor, not far from Nizhny. The bound priests were pushed into the water one by one. and any who observed to be swimming were drowned. Thus were they all tormented to death.