

*The Weeping Virgin of Transylvania.*  
*The Wonderworking Icon of the Mother of God from Nicula Monastery, Romania*

The wonderworking icon of the Mother of God from Nicula Monastery in the Province of Cluj attracts tens of thousands of believers every year on August 15. The pilgrimage is one of the most important religious events in Romania. The first attested miracles performed here by the Mother of God are dated from February 1699, when the icon wept for several weeks.

*“O dear Mother, do not let us perish along the way, for we are the children of your tears”*

This is how tens and hundreds of thousands of believers seek the help of the Mother of the Lord, in simple words with a profound theology, with fervent longing, with their whole being, with strength and confidence. It happens every year on August 15, at the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, when pilgrims from Romania and abroad come to Nicula to meet with the one who is our Mother, Intercessor, Protector, and our swift Helper.

The Nicula Monastery Pilgrimage has a centuries-long history. The monastic establishment dates from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The place emerges out of anonymity at the moment when an icon of the Mother of the Lord, painted in 1681 by a priest from a nearby village, was brought to the monastery.

In 1681 the wonderworking icon of the Mother of the Lord was painted in a village called Iclod, located between Gherla and Cluj. It was painted by an Orthodox priest by the name of Luca, who painted many icons during his lifetime. Today we have three wonder-working icons that were painted by him. One is in the Strâmba Monastery in Salaj Province, one is in the museum of the Cathedral in Cluj, and the third is at the Nicula Monastery.

This icon was brought to the village of Nicula by a wealthy noble from the village, who purchased it from the Priest Luca. The noble, named Ioan Cupcea, donated the icon to his village church. In 1699 it began to weep, continuing for 26 days almost uninterruptedly, during the months of February and March.

The first witnesses of this miracle were actually soldiers of the Austrian army, who were on a patrol in the village. They were very frightened, and called the village Orthodox priest, who also came and witnessed the miracle, followed by all the villagers. Even from Cluj a delegation came out to see what was happening here in Nicula, and declared that it was a divine miracle taking place. This miracle was documented in an account written down by the Austrian army. The military report containing the testimonies of several eye witnesses is now preserved in the Archives in Cluj.

So why did the icon weep? As is well known, in 1699 the Unia was imposed on all the Orthodox of Transylvania, who were compelled by the Habsburg Empire to submit to union with the religion of the empire, the Roman Catholic Church. The Romanians resisted, and for that reason many had their possessions confiscated, were imprisoned, and some even martyred. Later the

monastery was entirely destroyed by General Bukow; in all, over 150 monasteries were then demolished. We can say that this was the reason why the Mother of the Lord wept. It was a prediction of the tragic suffering that was soon to take place here in Transylvania.

With the arrival of the icon at Nicula a new period of history began for the monastery, a history full of glory but also struggles.

Throughout its history, the icon has at times been hidden to keep it protected from periodic struggles like wars and revolts. The first time was at this location where the monastery currently stands. It was buried by village peasants for its protection for about 70 years. The second time was in 1948, when Communism took over the country. At that time the icon was hidden in a house over the hill in a small hamlet. The owner of the house put the icon in place of a window and bricked over it so that the communists would not find it. In 1962, Father Serafim, who is still alive at 92 years of age, found the icon and brought it to the monastery. It was a great joy for the monks and all the people, especially the villagers, for they had waited a long time to see the icon. But their joy only lasted a few hours, because the communist Secret Service came quickly to confiscate it. They took the icon to Cluj, where it was kept in the chapel of the Metropolia until the revolution of 1989.

Immediately after the revolution, between 1990 and 1992, the icon was restored. Thus, in new clothes, after years in which it had been kept away from the faithful who desired it so much, the icon was brought back to Nicula in an impressive procession. The iconostasis in which the icon is kept is unique in Romania.

Painted in accordance with the Byzantine Hermeneia (Painter's Manual), in the category called *Hodegetria* ("She who shows the way"), the icon from Nicula has been distinguished from the very beginning by its artistic beauty. The normal technique for painting icons is egg tempera on wood.

After the miracle of 1699, the peasants of Transylvania wanted to have a copy of the icon of the Mother of the Lord in their homes. Thus, with the appearance of much cheaper materials, the craft of painting icons on glass emerged, and in time a school of iconography on glass developed here.

Miracles known and unknown; a bloody history; holy priests and hierarchs; traditions and life. All these are at Nicula, and all of them are dedicated to our heavenly Mother. On August 15, the Feast of her Dormition means the awakening of many to a more luminous life, but every day of the year everyone who bows before her miraculous icon at Nicula discovers her light and her love.