

FEAST OF THE Entrance into The temple Of Our Most Holy Lady The Theotokos

December 4th

Introduction

The Feast of the Entrance into the Temple of Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is celebrated on December 4th each year. The Feast commemorates when as a young child, the Virgin Mary entered the Temple in Jerusalem.

Introduction

The birth and early life of the Virgin Mary is not recorded in the Gospels or other books of the New Testament, however this information can be found in a work dating from the second century known as the Book of James or Protevangelion.

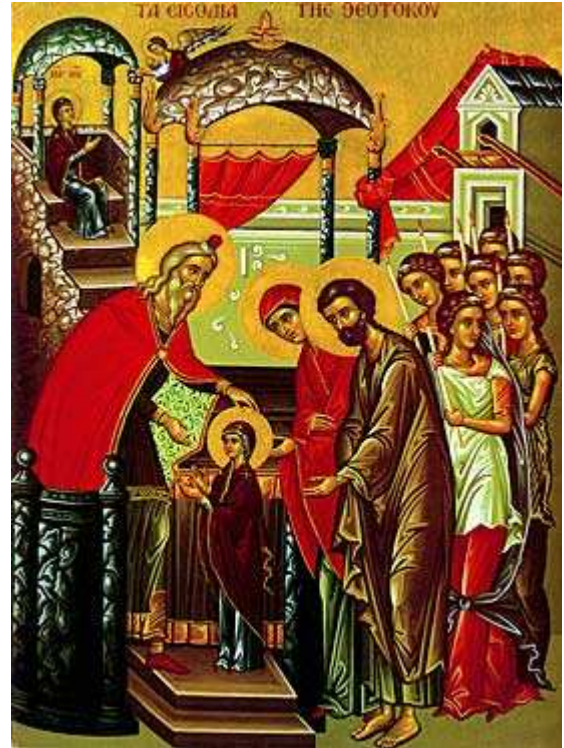
When Mary was three years old, Joachim and Anna decided that the time had come to fulfill their promise and to offer her to the Lord. Joachim gathered the young girls of the neighborhood to form an escort, and he made them go in front of Mary, carrying torches. Captivated by the torches, the young child followed joyfully to the Temple, not once looking back at her parents nor weeping as she was parted from them.

The holy Virgin ran toward the Temple, overtaking her attendant maidens and threw herself into the arms of the High Priest Zacharias, who was waiting for her at the gate of the Temple with the elders. Zacharias blessed her saying, "It is in you that He has glorified your name in every generation. It is in you that He will reveal the Redemption that He has prepared for His people in the last days."

Then, Zacharias brought the child into the Holy of Holies—a place where only the High Priest was permitted to enter once a year on the Day of Atonement. He placed her on the steps of the altar, and the grace of the Lord descended upon her. She arose and expressed her joy in a dance as wonder seized all who saw this happen.

The Virgin Mary dwelt in the Temple for nine years until, reaching an age for marriage, she was taken from the Temple by the priests and elders and entrusted to Joseph as the guardian of her virginity.

The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple signifies her total dedication to God and her readiness for her future vocation as the Mother of the Incarnate Lord. This is a feast of anticipation. As honor is shown to Mary, the faithful are called to look forward to the Incarnation of Christ, celebrated in a little more than a month by the Feast of the Nativity on January 7th.



Icon of the Feast

The icon of the feast tells the story of Mary's entry into the Temple. The High Priest, Zacharias (1), is in his priestly robes standing on the step of the Temple. His arms are outstretched, ready to greet and receive the Virgin. Mary is shown as a small child, standing before Zacharias with her arms reaching up to him (2).



1. The High Priest, Zacharias receives the Theotokos at the steps of the Temple (detail).



2. The Theotokos as a small child being received by the High Priest, Zacharias (detail).

In some icons the young maidens (3) who served as her escort are depicted standing behind her. Also, we see her parents, Joachim and Anna (4), offering their child to God and His divine service.



3. Young maidens gathered by Joachim to form an escort for the Theotokos (detail).



4. Joachim and Anna, parents of the Theotokos (detail).

In the upper center portion of the icon, the Virgin is seated on the steps of the Holy of Holies. An angel is there, attending to the one chosen by God to bring the Savior into the world.



5. An Angel of the Lord attends to the Theotokos in the Holy of Holies (detail).

Orthodox Christian Celebration of the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos

The Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom which is conducted on the morning of the Feast and preceded by a Matins (Orthros) service. A Great Vespers is conducted on the evening before the day of the Feast. Scripture readings for the Feast are the following: At Vespers: [Exodus 40:1-5, 9-10, 16, 34-35](#); [I Kings 7:51, 8:1, 3-4, 6-7, 9-11](#); [Ezekiel 43:27—44:4](#). At the Matins: [Luke 1:39-49, 56](#). At the Divine Liturgy: [Hebrews 9:1-7](#); [Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28](#).

Hymns of the Feast

Apolytikion (Fourth Tone)

Today is the prelude of God's pleasure and the proclamation of man's salvation. The Virgin is clearly made manifest in the temple of God and foretells Christ to all. Let us also cry out to her with mighty voice, "Hail, fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation."

Kontakion (Fourth Tone)

Today, the most pure temple of the Savior, the precious bridal chamber and Virgin, the sacred treasure of God, enters the house of the Lord, bringing the grace of the Divine Spirit. The Angels of God praise her. She is the heavenly tabernacle.

Resources

Festival Icons for the Christian Year by John Baggeley (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), pp. 16-20

The Festal Menaion. Translated by Mother Mary (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1969) pp. 51-52

The Incarnate God: The Feasts of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, Catherine Aslanoff, editor and Paul Meyendorff, translator (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995)

The Synaxarion: The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church, Vol. 2, compiled by Hieromonk Makarios of Simonos Petra and translated from the French by Christopher Hookway (Chalkidike, Greece: Holy Convent of the Annunciation of Our Lady, 1999) pp. 193-196.