

12-4-19 Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.

Through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Lord Jesus Christ our God have mercy upon us and save us.

There's joy in our hearts today as we celebrate the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the temple. And often on these feast days, particularly I think with the Mother of God, at least for myself, there is a desire to know why, particularly, we celebrate this day. Why are we so focused on her entering the temple? We have celebrated her conception. We have celebrated her birth. We will celebrate her Dormition.

It is important to know from the apostolic tradition, the life of the Theotokos, for it is not contained in scripture, but in the apostolic tradition. The apostles knew the Mother of God, some of them even in their writings or in the writings of the disciples of the apostles, they mentioned the Mother of God. They mention longing to meet her, the kind of person that she was known to be, but we also want to simply have joy in our hearts that the Mother of God is involved in our life.

There was a time when she was on earth like Christ. There was a beginning and an end to her life. We are celebrating today that at the age of about three years old, her parents took her and dedicated her as one of the virgins in the temple, that after this gift of a child was given to Joachim and Anna, a miraculous child, a child of promise, that they respond by going back to the temple and not just offering, say, a pair of doves as he had tried to offer in the past and were rejected because they had no children.

An offering that was an offering of the poor by the way. Only the poor, those who could not afford to offer a goat or sheep, let alone a bull, they could bring an offering of doves. It was an offering of the poor. They were humble people and when they come back to the temple with this child of promise, they don't just offer the traditional sacrifice in a sense. They don't just offer a pair of doves; they don't bring a lamb or a goat. They bring her, the child that was given to them. They give their daughter, this child of promise, to God completely at a very young age. Those of us who have children and are parents know that it would be an incredible sacrifice to finally have a child and then as early as three, let her go, let her go and trust God to take care of her.

In the Old Testament or in the Epistle reading about Old Testament traditions, we heard about the temple and it's important to know why this is. Why on this Feast of the Theotokos do we read about the old covenant laws of setting up the temple and the tabernacle and preparing the places where an offering would be made? And reminding us why, when we're celebrating the life of the Theotokos, are we reminded of the temple in the Old Testament, the Holy of Holies, where only the high priest went once a year with a blood offering.

Only him, in fear, into the room where the Ark of the Covenant was, and we see that in this symbolism from the Old Testament that we have the Mother of God. She is the Ark. She is the holy of holiest places where God is going to appear. In the Old Testament, God would appear visibly as uncreated light in the Holy of Holies where the Ark was. And now the Mother of God in her womb will contain God the way that the Holy of Holies did. A lot of people don't know this, but the reason that the Theotokos has blue, we associate the color of blue with the Mother of God, in some traditions they'll say it was the color of her eyes, very unlikely, she was Jewish.

The color blue with the Theotokos comes from the fact that whenever the Ark of the Covenant was moved, whenever it was traveling, it was covered in leather that had been dyed blue. That is one of the

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commands of God in the Old Testament that when the Ark of the Covenant traveled, it was covered with a blue covering made of leather. And so even in the color that we associate with the Mother of God, we associate her with being the Ark, that that visible, tangible thing that contained God.

She is the new Ark and she is the bearer of the New Covenant, the new set of commandments that are going to be kept by man. We also have with the readings from the Gospel, always the same reading on the feast of the Mother of God where Mary and Martha are fussing about taking care of Jesus. Mary is distracted, listening to everything that he is saying, and Martha distracted with taking care of all the people that are there and getting the food ready and making sure there's enough seats. That's us, right? The worries and cares of the world distracting us from the word of God, and in the midst of this somebody cries out, spontaneously, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts which nursed you." It's a very important line.

Somebody spontaneously, and when somebody says something to Christ, we always pay attention to what he says back because he's subtle in his answers. When they say to him, you are the son of God, he never says, yes, I am. Thank you for recognizing me. Never. He doesn't say no, which means yes, he is, but he also answers subtly, and with humility and with wisdom. So, this woman enraptured by everything that Christ is saying and teaching, he is teaching in a way that no one has ever heard. It's been hundreds of years since there was a prophet other than St. John the Baptist. And they are hearing the teachings of Christ and enraptured by his teaching, this woman yells out, and it's a very small set of Gospel verses, but we have to pay great attention to it. She calls out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you, blessed is the woman who brought you into the world."

And in some translations, particularly Protestant translations into English that the following response from Jesus is actually mistranslated and it's mistranslated on purpose. Because the woman is bringing attention to the Mother of God and the Protestants have rejected in general the importance and the holiness that she had in the role that she played in being chosen as the Mother of God. They have this misconception that any woman that God chose could have been his mother. It didn't matter what a woman it was. He simply chose prophets, He simply chose a particular bush to have burning and reveal himself to Moses, He simply chose one woman out of millions of women to be his mother because he needed to be incarnate. So, he had to choose one. That is their teaching. They do not want to recognize who Mary was herself as an example to us.

And so often the Christ response will be translated "Rather, rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it," and their teaching from that translation would be that Jesus himself is saying it doesn't matter. Hey, you know, thank you for honoring my mother, but really that's not important. What's important is all of us that hear the word of God and keep it are even more blessed than she was by bearing the Creator, the Incarnate Word. And that is a poor translation. A proper translation which we have is the woman calls out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts which nursed you." And he says, "Yes, yes, you're right. She is blessed. She is unique. She is different from every other woman, and even more so, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it."

Why? Because Mary would never have become the Theotokos if she had not at first done something that no other human beings ever did- Perhaps John the Baptist. When she heard the word of God, when she heard the teaching of the Old Covenant, when she heard the 600 plus laws that God had given to man to keep in order to be righteous, she did it. She did it. And that is what allowed her to be the Mother of God. Out of all of the people in the Old Testament, all of the righteous, all of the prophets, all

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of the great women of the Old Testament, she is the only woman who heard the word of God as God revealed it to them in the Old Testament and kept it, and kept it, so purely that in the apostolic tradition we believe that she never, although a fallen human being, and born into a fallen world through a fallen birth,- we don't have an immaculate conception of the Mother of God in the Orthodox Church,- even though she was just like us, she did what no other human being had ever done and what no other woman had ever done. And God was able, waiting, in his incredible patience to become incarnate through her particularly. And then, then we follow the example that she gives to us in the New Covenant to hear the word of God and to keep it like she did.

She is the greatest of saints and we follow her example as the greatest human being to ever draw near to God and to be so close to him that he was born of her. He took her flesh. If we did a DNA test on Jesus, he would be a clone of the mother of God. There is no other DNA in him. There is no father's DNA. He is of her in his flesh, in his humanity, and so all together throughout the whole life of the Theotokos, we continually celebrate her conception, her birth, her life, her entrance into the temple, all the way to her death because she is an incredible gift that is given to us.

Christ brings his mother to us as an example. Christ brings himself to us through his holy mother. Christ lives his life and his ministry on earth during her lifetime, he ascends into heaven and she stays with us and teaches the Church who her son was. The apostles know her, and they teach their disciples what she was like and we receive that understanding of her through the apostolic tradition. And in that one line, Christ himself says, "Yes, my mother was blessed. And the reason she was blessed by giving birth to me was because she heard the word of God before anyone else, and she kept it before anyone else."

And so in this Nativity fast season as we prepare to celebrate the Nativity of Christ himself, particularly with presents and gifts for each other, let's remember the gift that was given to us by God in his holy mother, that she was with us on earth long ago, and she is with us every day today. On this feast day, particularly, when you use your prayer rope, pray to the Mother of God, "most holy Theotokos, save us. Most holy Theotokos, thank you." Let your gratitude and your glory go to her on this day that Christ might bless you as he promised us he would for blessing and glorifying his holy mother.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.