



# HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH

THROUGH THE CROSS JOY HAS COME INTO ALL THE WORLD

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## ENTRY OF THE HOLY THEOTOKOS INTO THE TEMPLE

Archpriest Alexander Shargunov



Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple (detail).  
Tizian. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice

The feast of the Entry of the Holy Theotokos into the temple is a marvelous model of our entry into the Heavenly Kingdom. The church itself symbolizes the Kingdom of God on earth. In church we see the altar table, which is like a throne on which the Lord God sits, just as He does on His heavenly throne. In church, through the partaking of holy communion, we become united with the Lord Himself. In church, as in heaven, we are surrounded by hosts of angels and saints. In church, by means of the divine services we glorify God, as do the angels and saints in heaven.

When the righteous Joachim and Anna brought the Holy Virgin to the temple, they offered to the Lord a gift that was most pure.

So should we, in order to enter the Heavenly Realm, be absolutely pure, because the Lord Himself said that noth-

ing unclean can enter the Kingdom of God. But we can cleanse ourselves of our sins and all manner of spiritual impurity only through the sacrament of penitence, through confession and communion.

As the righteous parents of the Holy Virgin prepared to take Her to the temple, they first dressed Her in royal garments, adorned Her, and provided Her with an escort of maidens carrying lighted candles. So should we, in order to enter the Heavenly Realm, first clothe our souls in the garment of obedience to the Lord's commandments, adorn our souls with virtues, and accompany them with the lighted candles of prayer and charity.

Upon arriving at the temple, the 3-year-old Infant Mary had to make an effort to ascend 15 high steps in order to enter the temple. So should we, in order to enter the Heavenly Realm, make the effort to ascend the ladder of virtues, to labor at fasting and prayer. The Holy Virgin went up the steps by Herself, without any help from others, but with the miraculous help of God. So should we, in our attempt to attain the Heavenly Realm, make the effort ourselves, but constantly asking God for help along the way.



Southern steps of the Temple Mount, Jerusalem.  
Photo: commons.wikimedia.org

Such is the lesson we receive from this wondrous holiday! The Holy Mother of God, by entering the temple, clearly shows us the Way, and through the earthly temple lies the way into the heavenly temple, the Kingdom of God. Let us follow the Holy Theotokos into the temple, into the church. Now is the time of the Nativity fast, a time for purifying oneself through fasting, prayer and repentance, a time of increased church attendance. Let us not pass by this important period of time, for from this holiday, and throughout the entire Nativity fast, we will hear in church the joyous tidings of our coming salvation, we will hear the joyous appeal: "Christ is born - glorify Him!"

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The Entry of the Holy Theotokos into the Temple is one of the twelve major church feasts and is numbered among those that affect our salvation. What takes place on this day? The three-year-old Child, the Most-holy Virgin Mary, is brought by Her parents to the temple of Jerusalem. She is placed on the temple steps and, moved by Divine revelation, the high priest Zacharias comes out to Her and leads Her into the Holy of Holies – the place where God Himself was mysteriously present, the place which no man could ever enter except the high priest, who, moreover, went in only once a year and not without sacrificial blood. And it is precisely this place, the Holy of Holies, which the Virgin Mary enters, invisibly carrying within Herself a new, living sacrifice – the forthcoming Christ, Saviour of the world, Who will sacrifice Himself in order to deliver all men from sin and death.

This holiday is "wondrous," as sings the Church, not finding words to express the inexpressible joy, hope and expectation which commence with today's event.

From a mysterious and grace-filled seed there will grow up a new covenant between God and man. The Saviour's most-pure, animate temple – the Most-holy Maiden, precious bridal chamber, sacred treasure of God's glory – is led into the Lord's temple. And She brings with Her the foreshadowing of God's goodwill to all of mankind, the beginning of a new covenant between God and man, the end of the many centuries of man's alienation from God, and the end of our bondage to sin. Only a brief time remains, only several more years, for the fulfillment of that which the entire humanity awaits – the appearance of God Himself in the flesh, by way of the Most-holy Virgin.



Entry of the Holy Theotokos Into the Temple.  
Panselinos, XIII century. Carey, Mount Athos

She will be brought up in God's temple – a place of holiness, purity and the power of God. She will be nourished by Divine grace, in order to become capable of containing Divinity Itself, so that the mystery of God's incarnation could take place through Her. She must become used to conversing with the angels, in order to harken to the Archangel Gabriel's glad tidings. She must encompass God within Her heart, in order to truly become a new temple of God.

We are all familiar with the words of the Apostle Paul: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." This mystery is revealed to us because we are called upon to become the temples of God, and this is the reason for today's celebration.

Today's feast reminds us of the unique significance of man-made temples (i.e. churches). Let us ponder today: what is a church of God? When we come here today to celebrate the feast, we not only participate in wondrous hymn-singing, but we touch upon eternity, which is always present in a church of God. And nothing else in life makes sense except in the light of eternity. We should ponder this and repent of how often we remain deaf and blind to these great mysteries, and reject God's gifts.

The Church cannot save us by itself. For our salvation we must actively participate in church life. The Lord calls upon us today to think of this, and to see the sinful condition in which each one of us lives. The Lord continues to await our repentance. He continues to patiently tolerate

our detrimental lack of faith, and continuously wishes to enfold us within His grace, in order that we may be saved from the terrible misfortunes that are coming upon the world.

And we know that the Most-holy Virgin Mary, Mother of the suffering mankind that is being destroyed by its sins, will surely intercede for all those who appeal to Her with faith and love, and who offer their lives unto Her.

Let us thank God that our churches are still standing, and that the Lord and the Mother of God are present in them along with us. We magnify Thee, O Most-holy Virgin, God-chosen Maiden, and we honor Thine Entry into the Temple of the Lord.

The feast of the Entry of the Holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, into the temple is a feast of the Church itself. It is also a feast of all of us, because the Holy Virgin, ascending the steps of the temple of Jerusalem, presages not only Her future life, Her ascension into the Holy of Holies, but also presages the affiliation of mankind with Christ's way of the cross and with His Resurrection. This feast tells us that the Mother of God, Who now enters the Holy of Holies, is even greater than the Holy of Holies. By the grace of God She is more honorable than the cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the seraphim. She is above all creation. And not only by the grace of God, but by the hope of all of mankind, which has rushed towards this light, towards this holy of holies, towards this focal point of life and the source of life itself – the Lord – through the darkness of ages, through all sorrows, through all the sins and horrors of history.

The entry of the Most-holy Mother of God into the Holy of Holies is revealed to us as the path each one of us must take. It has been said: "The virgins that follow Her shall be brought unto the king, Her companions shall be brought unto Thee" (Psalm 45:14). This has been said about every person and primarily about children. For this reason children participate in a special way in today's feast along with us. This is always very joyful, because if everyone were to participate in what the Lord gives us, our entire being would be transformed. The salvation which the Lord grants us depends on our offering of our children and on our own lives. It also depends primarily on how we lead our children through life, for what we prepare them and to what we actually dedicate them. What Joachim and Anna did was a great labor of love. Having been barren their entire life, they gave up their sole daughter. They gave Her to God, dedicated Her to the Lord, as though they separated

Her from themselves, in order that She belong entirely to God alone.



Photo: A.Goryainov / Expo.Pravoslavie.Ru

What Joachim and Anna have done, offering to God the fruit of their prayers, far exceeds any spiritual labors that we could set up as an example. But let us ponder the following: often we find ourselves in a situation similar to these people – Joachim and Anna, – when misfortune befalls us, when we are in need, when we are ready to promise the Lord everything, say all kinds of words of love, just so He would help us, would deliver us from such a state. And then sorrow passes, need passes. But when the time comes to fulfill our promise, we begin to vacillate. We begin to delay the fulfillment of our own words: "I will definitely do this, Lord, only I pray Thee, do such-and-such for me, what I ask of Thee..." And for this reason our life turns out to be barren. It is barren not in terms of childlessness (although that may also be possible), but in a deeper and more significant sense.

Thinking about this, we should pray today to the Lord and the Mother of God that we may be granted the grace of understanding that we have a true life, that we may be aware that the event which the Church celebrates today is the entry of the holy 3-year-old maiden into the Holy of Holies and Her sanctification by the grace of God for Her future encompassing of God the Word. And all of this for the fulfillment of the sacrament of God's incarnation and for our salvation, which is already coming to pass. For it is not in vain that we sing: "Christ is born – glorify Him, Christ descends from heaven – meet ye Him."

Remember that our salvation has actually come to pass already, and it is not only a remembrance. Over and over again we are given the Lent and the approach to the Nativity of Christ in order for our life to become truly more profound, truly deepen with the knowledge of the one unique mystery – that God has become man, that He is present in the life and destiny of each one of us. He al-

ways hears our every prayer, because there is no longer that curse which used to hang over every person, there is no longer that inescapable and ineffaceable stamp of evil which tainted mankind before Christ's incarnation. The way to heaven is open to every person. We must only desire and want genuine truth, genuine beauty, and the light which had once shone for us, the light which the Lord sometimes gives back to us, and without which everything becomes extinguished.

What can we bring to the Lord on this feast day? The parents of the Most-holy maiden Mary – Joachim and Anna – brought Him their own child, but what shall we give the Lord? Does the One to Whom belongs the entire earth and before Whom all the stars in heaven shine need the candles and the vigil lights which we offer to God? They are needed only to testify to the meaningfulness of our prayers and our standing before God. There are no other sacrifices which we can offer Him except one, of which He says: "Son, give Me thy heart," because our heart is the only thing which does not yet fully belong to Him. He has given us His own heart and wishes us to give Him ours. He, Who loves us and gives all of Himself for us, is waiting for our love in return.



Photo: A.Goryainov / Expo. Pravoslavie.Ru

Let us pray to God that we may learn this love. Every person understands what reciprocal love is, and how terrible is unrequited love. It is precisely love which each person needs, every human soul needs. And the Lord Himself needs us to love Him with all our heart, all our thoughts, all our strength, our entire life. And to love God means to keep His commandments, as He Himself has said. Only when we keep His commandments can we learn what this all means and of what kind of love Christ is speaking. Only then can we learn this love and be worthy of the Lord, be able to stand up for Christ's honor in this world where childhood, purity, and sanctity are being defiled. And this we can accomplish only when we go to church and receive God's grace there, which is always given as long as we are turned towards the Lord.

Let us entreat the Lord for this incorruptible wealth, which He bountifully grants to all of us by the prayers and intercession of the Holy Theotokos. Let us also entreat

Him for the ability to respond to His immeasurable gifts with our love, our entire life, the offering of our children to Him. And most precious of all – the unity which we achieve through Him. Amen.

*From: <http://www.pravoslavie.ru/66136.html>*



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Moleben on our property:** Starting this month we will start serving a weekly short prayer service on our property in Kernersville. This is a service of supplication (Molieben) that Archbishop Dimitri of blessed memory blessed for the use of parishes in the diocese. Fr. Christopher will be serving it on Friday mornings at 10 AM except where noted in the calendar. Our property is located at 1320 Masten Drive in Kernersville.

**Sisterhood of the Holy Myrrhbearers:** Calling all Holy Cross Women! Do you find yourself looking for ways to form deeper connections with other Orthodox ladies? Do weeknight meetings make your life too hectic? Why not come out to this month's Sisterhood of the Holy Myrrhbearers meeting? We will be spending a leisurely Saturday morning together over brunch at Heather Shaler's house. Mark your calendar and join us on Saturday, November 12th at 10am. Call Mtk. Carrie at 336.688.9917 for details.

**Order Gift Cards Through Holy Cross!** Scrip cards are available from hundreds of retailers and don't cost any more than the face value of the gift card. It's a "free" fundraiser to benefit the Holy Cross building fund! Contact Karen Brudnak-Slate.

## FINANCIAL SUMMARY

*(Figures do not include the Capital Campaign or Building Fund.)*

	October	YTD
<b>Income</b>	\$12,868.21	\$93,955.85
<b>Expense</b>	\$10,671.01	\$92,201.80

Thanks for your continued giving!

# HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 7 PM Choir Rehearsal	2	3	4	5 6 PM Great Vespers
6 9AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	7	8	9	10 6PM Parish Council	11 10AM Prayers at our property 7 PM OCAT House Meeting	12 10AM Sisterhood Brunch 6 PM Great Vespers
13 9AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 12PM Finance Presentation	14	15 Nativity Fast	16 Nativity Fast 7 PM Catechism	17 Nativity Fast 7PM Men's Group	18 Nativity Fast 10AM Prayers at our property	19 Nativity Fast 9AM Parish Council 6 PM Great Vespers
20 Nativity Fast 9AM Church School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 6:30PM Great Vespers	21 <b>ENTRY of the Theotokos</b> Nativity Fast 8AM Divine Liturgy	22 Nativity Fast	23 Nativity Fast	24 Nativity Fast	25 Nativity Fast NO Prayers at our property	26 Nativity Fast 6 PM Great Vespers
27 Nativity Fast 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	28 Nativity Fast	29 Nativity Fast	30 Nativity Fast			

