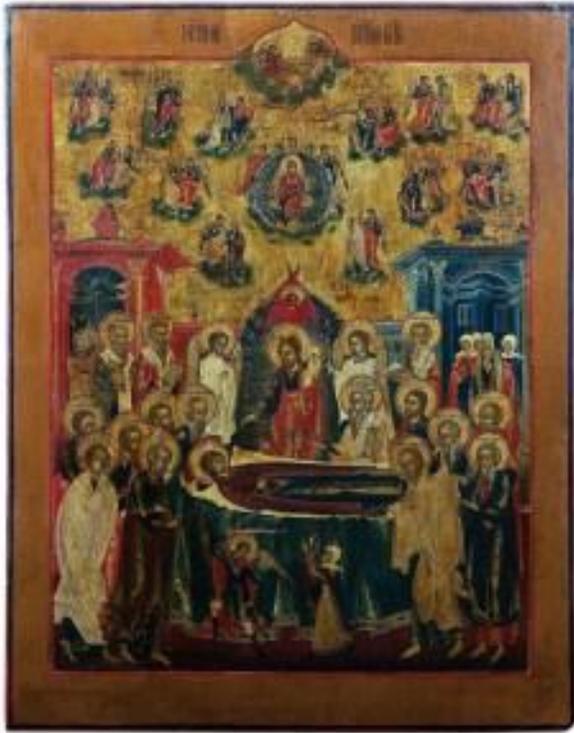


The Dormition of the Theotokos

On the 15th of the month, we celebrate the DORMITION, or the TRANSLATION to HEAVEN, of our All Glorious Sovereign Lady, the MOTHER of GOD and EVER-VIRGIN MARY



When it pleased Christ our God to call His mother to Him, He sent an angel three days beforehand, to give her this news: Coming to her, the angel said to her who is full of grace: “This is what your Son says: ‘The time has come to call My mother to Me.’ Do not be afraid at this news, but rather rejoice, for you are going to eternal life.” Welcoming this message with great joy, the Mother of God, filled with an ardent desire to rise up to her Son, went to the Mount of Olives to pray there in tranquillity, as she often did. An amazing miracle was then wrought: at the moment when the All-Holy reached the top of the hill, the trees planted there bent their branches, bowing down and glorifying the Queen of the

world like reason-endowed servants.

After having prayed, the All-Holy returned home to Mount Zion. When she went into the house, it suddenly began to shake. Giving thanks to God, she had the house-lamps lit and called together her kinsfolk and friends. She herself set everything in order, prepared her deathbed and gave orders that all be made ready for her funeral. To the women who came at her summons, she revealed the news of her departure to heaven and, as proof, gave them the palm branch, the symbol of victory and incorruptibility, that the angel had given her. Still held by the bonds of the world, her companions heard this news with copious tears and groans, begging the Mother of God not to leave them orphaned. She reassured them, saying that she was indeed going to heaven but would nonetheless continue to protect both them and the whole world by her prayers. At these words, the women stopped their weeping and hastened to make the preparations. The All-Holy also told them to give the only two robes that she possessed to two poor widows who were her constant companions and friends.

She had scarcely spoken these words when the house was shaken once again by a noise like thunder, and it was filled with clouds, bearing the Apostles, assembled from the furthest parts of the world. It was thus that the whole Church, in their persons, was mystically present to celebrate

the funeral of its sovereign Lady. To the choir of the Apostles was joined that of the Hierarchs such as Saint Hierotheus (4 Oct.), Saint Dionysius the Areopagite (3 Oct.) and Saint Timothy (22 Jan.). Their eyes full of tears, they said to the Mother of God: "If you were to stay in the world and live among us, we would, of course, have great consolation, O Lady, as it would be as though we saw your Son and our Master. But as it is now according to His will that you are taken to heaven, we are weeping and lamenting as you see. But we rejoice at all that has been arranged for you." She replied: "O you disciples and friends of my Son and my God, do not turn my joy to sorrow but bury my body and keep it in the position that I shall take on my deathbed."

At these words, Saint Paul, the chosen vessel, arrived in his turn. He threw himself at the feet of the All-Holy to venerate her, and addressed this praise to her: "Rejoice, O Mother of Life and object of my preaching, for although I never saw Christ in the flesh, it is Him, in seeing you, that I believe I behold."

After having made her last farewells to all those present, the All Immaculate laid herself down on her deathbed, settling her body as she wished it, and offered ardent prayer to her Son for the preservation of peace in the whole world. Then, having given her blessing to the Apostles and hierarchs, she, with a smile, peacefully gave her soul, white and more resplendent than any light, into the hands of her Son and her God, who had appeared together with the Archangel Michael and a host of angels. Her death came about with no suffering or anguish, as her childbearing had been without pain.

Peter, the leader of the Apostles, then intoned the funeral hymn and his companions took up the bier, preceded by others present who carried torches and accompanied the cortege with their chanting. Saint John the Theologian was at their head, holding the palm of victory in his hand and followed in silence by the crowd of disciples. Angels could also be heard, joining their voices to those of men, so that heaven and earth were entirely filled with this threnody in honour of the sovereign Lady of the world. The air was purified by the ascending of her soul, the earth was sanctified by the burial of her body, and many of the sick recovered their health.

Not being able to bear this sight, the leaders of the Jews aroused the people and sent them to overturn the bier bearing the life-giving body. But divine justice forestalled their dark design, and they were all struck with blindness. One of them, the priest Jephoniah, who, with greater daring, had succeeded in laying hands on the holy bier, also had his hands cut off at the elbow by the sword of divine wrath, and his severed arms hung on the bier, presenting a pitiable sight.

Brought to repentance by the punishment, Jephoniah wholeheartedly embraced the Faith; and, at a word from Peter, he was healed and became for his companions an instrument of salvation and healing. When he was given a branch of the Mother of God's palm, he laid it on the eyes of his companions and healed, at one and the same time, their physical and spiritual blindness.

Arriving in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Apostles buried the most holy body of the Mother of God and remained there for three days, their prayers unceasingly being accompanied by angelic hymns. In conformity with a disposition of divine Providence, one of the Apostles (Thomas, according to some), was not at the funeral.

He only reached Gethsemane on the third day, and was unconsolable at not having a last sight of the deified body of the All-Holy. The Apostles therefore, with one accord, decided to open the tomb in order to let him venerate the holy body. When they raised the stone that closed the entrance, they were all filled with amazement on finding that the body had disappeared and that only the shroud remained, empty and keeping the shape of the body. It was an irrefutable proof of the translation to heaven of the Mother of God: her resurrection and the ascension of her body, united again with her soul, above the skies in the close company of her Son, to be our representative and advocate before God.' Mary, 'daughter of Adam' but having become truly 'Mother of God' and 'Mother of Life' in giving birth to Him who is the Fullness of Life (cf Jn 14:6) thus passed through death. But her death was no dishonour, for, overcome by Christ, Who submitted to it by His own will for our salvation, the" condemnation of Adam became a 'lifegiving death' and the principle of a new existence. And the tomb of Gethsemane, as well as the Holy Sepulchre, appeared as a 'bridal chamber' where the wedding feast of incorruptibility is made radiant.

It 'was fitting, indeed, that, conforming in all things to Christ our Saviour, the most holy Virgin should follow all the paths trodden by Christ to spread sanctification throughout our nature. After having followed Him in His Passion and having 'seen' His Resurrection, she now had the experience of death. As soon as she was parted from the body, her most pure soul found itself united with divine Light; and her body, having lain a short time in the earth, was soon raised by the grace of the risen Christ. This 'Spiritual Body,' was received into heaven as the tabernacle of God-became-Man, as the throne of God. It is the most significant part of the Body of Christ, and had often been likened by the holy Fathers as the Church itself, the dwelling-place of God among men, the first-fruits of our future state and the source of our divinisation. Through the womb of Mary most chaste, the Mother of God, the Kingdom of heaven has been opened to us, and this is why her translation to heaven is a cause of joy for all believers, having thus acquired a guarantee that, in her person, it is the whole of human nature, having become a Christ-bearer, that is called to abide in God.

This feast was fixed on 15 August and made obligatory in the whole of the East by Emperor Maurice (582-602). The practice spread widely, thanks to the eulogies given by the holy fathers and great Church orators on this feast: 55 Andrew of Crete, John Damascene, Germanus of Constantinople, Theodore the Stoudite, Gregory Palamas, etc.'

The term 'Assumption: that was recently adopted as dogma by the Roman Catholic Church (1950), as a corollary to the Immaculate Conception (1854), leaves the ambiguous question that the Mother of God, having been free of the heritage of Adam (original sin and its consequence, death), did not die but was taken, body and soul, to heaven.

Source: THE SYNAXARION, The Lives of the Saints of the Orthodox Church Compiled by HIEROMONK MAKARIOS OF SIMONOS PETRA