

August 15

d. ☩ *The Dormition of our Most Holy, Glorious Queen, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary.*



After the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven, the Most Holy Virgin, remaining, according to the will of the Son, in the care of St. John (John 19: 26-27), constantly abided in the spiritual effort of fasting and prayer and in the living desire to meditate on the Son, sitting at the right hand of God. According to the ordering of the Providence of God, the Holy Virgin Theotokos, "sprung from mortal loins", "died conforming to her nature", for the joy of all people, that they also would not be afraid to pass over into Heaven by the same gates of death through which the Heavenly Queen passed, sharing a part with those born on earth.

"It is necessary", says St. John of Damascus, "that which is made of earth also returns to earth, and then ascends into Heaven, having accepted on earth the purest life through the laying aside of the flesh. It is necessary that the body through death, is like gold through fire in the furnace, being cleansed from all the dark and dirty heaviness of clay, arises from the grave incorruptible, pure and shining with the light of immortality".

The day of the death of the Most Holy Theotokos was revealed to Her from the Lord three days prior to Her Dormition through the appearance to her (not far from the Mount of Olives) of the Archangel Gabriel with palm branches in his hands and announcing to her the time of Her departure from the present world. The repose of the Holy Virgin Theotokos was marked by miracles which the Holy Church hymns. For the day of the Dormition of Heavenly Queen, the Apostles were carried on the clouds from the different countries of the earth and are placed in Jerusalem. "It is fitting", sings the Holy Church, "for the eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word to see the Falling Asleep of His Mother according to the flesh", "that they might not only see the Ascension of the Savior from the earth, but also be witnesses to the Translation from earth of her who bore Him. Therefore gathered from all parts by divine power, they came to Zion".

Preparing herself for her departure to heaven, the Most Holy Virgin ordered to beautify her chamber and prepare her bed and to burn incense in the censer and to light candles. She gave instructions about her two tunics, and other things (most

of which were the work of her hands), that they be given to the widows and virgins who were living with her; and also she bequeathed her most pure body to be buried near Jerusalem in Gethsemane, between the graves of her righteous parents and St. Joseph her betrothed. All those gathered who filled the chamber crying and sobbing she encouraged and strengthened with words of love and blessing, promise and consolation, and having promised, even after her departure to Her Son and God not to leave them orphans, but to visit and to watch over all, to pray for all and to help all. Calling everyone to herself, she blessed all, wishing everyone everlasting blessings and works for them in prayer to God. Having prepared to the last minute her blessed exit, the Most Pure Theotokos honorably laid down on her decorated bed, awaiting her departure to Heaven. Suddenly an extraordinary light enveloped the house and the Lord Jesus Christ, seen by all, with an assembly of angels and saints, descends to the bed of the Mother of God and accepts Her most pure soul in His hands. The Most Holy Theotokos, "ineffably with gladness and as if with sweet dreams fell asleep, commits her all pure soul into His hands. And in such a way her soul is being triumphantly led to the heavenly high place, being carried in the arms of the Lord. Having been led through this they with apostolic eyes were vouchsafed to see this most glorious sight".

Then, in the words of the Holy Church, "the heavenly gates were raised, and the Angels sang in praise"; having met the heavenly Queen, "the Cherubim withdrew before Her with gladness and the Seraphim glorified Her with joy". The person of the Mother of God "was sanctified with the goodness of Divinity, and shone with the glory of divine virginity" and from Her body poured out a wonderful sweet fragrance. Kissing the most pure body of the Mother of God with reverence and fear, the holy apostles were sanctified from touching her, and feeling in their hearts the action of the grace of God were filled with spiritual joy. Having begun the burial of the most pure body of the Theotokos, the holy apostles carried the bier on their shoulders while singing the sacred hymns to the place of burial. A broad bright circle of clouds in the likeness of a crown appeared in the sky above those present and accompanied the procession. Sent by the rulers of the Jews, who were inflamed with envy and vengeance to everything that reminded them of Christ, directed those who accompanied the body of Mother of God to upset the majestic procession, but the light bearing cloud surrounded the procession like a wall, and falling upon them a part became blind, and a part were dispersed by the power of God. Having met the solemn procession, one Judaic priest, Athonius, inflamed with evil even furiously rushed the bier of the Mother of God with the intention of plunging it to the ground, but hardly had he touched it with his hands, "when suddenly divine judgment cut off his sacrilegious hands" and the upper part of them were left hanging from the bier. So that no one would be afflicted at her departure from the world, the Most Holy Theotokos, granted, after the prayers of

the holy apostles, healing to the blind enemies, and even to the audacious Athonius (who later was baptized). Having placed the most pure body of the Theotokos in a cave, the holy apostles sealed its entrance with a large stone. For three days the holy apostles and other believers did not leave the tomb of Mother of God. On the third day after the burial of the Mother of God, the Apostle Thomas, who was not present at her death, came to her tomb with cries and tears turned to the tomb in the cave, bitterly grieving that he was not worthy of the last farewell with the Mother of God. With fervent compassion for him the holy apostles opened the cave so that he would be consoled and for him to venerate the remains of the Most Pure Virgin. But, rolling the stone from the tomb, they saw that the body of the Most Pure Theotokos was not in the tomb, and only Her robes laid there, from which poured out a wonderful sweet fragrance, and were convinced that the Mother of life even though "She died but arose to everlasting life like Her Son", and that Her body, "was raised up to Heaven by Jesus Her Son and the Savior of our souls".

The Church always believing that the body of the Most Holy Theotokos was taken up to heaven praises Her so in hymns: "the laws of nature are overcome in you, Pure Virgin, for in birth virginity is protected, and death is betrothed to life: Virgin after bearing child, and alive after death; may You always save Your inheritance, O Theotokos".

That evening the believers were comforted by the appearance of the Theotokos, Whom they have seen standing in the sky, surrounded by the Angelic powers with gleaming unspeakable glory 1). The short-term stay of the body of the Mother of God in the grave and the resettlement of Her soul and body in Heaven was also the reason for the name of the feast of the Dormition. The feast is established for the glorification of the Mother of God and Her Dormition. The Holy Church, singing the glorious Dormition of the Mother of God, invites the believers to approach "the tomb of the Mother of God" and to embrace it "touching it sincerely with the lips, eyes, and brows of the heart". The church glorifies the Mother of God, as more honorable than the Cherubim and without compare more glorious than the Seraphim, Who now, as Queen, stands at the right hand of the Son, and, takes under Her protection the human race, and intercedes for the good heartedness of the Master for it. Together with this event of the Dormition of the Mother of God the Church teaches us, that death is not the destruction of our life, but only transition from earth to Heaven, from corruption and destruction to eternal immortality 2).

Another reason from the IV century also comes together for this basic purpose, that is, to overcome the error of the heretics who denied a human nature to the Most Holy Virgin and therefore asserted that even talk about the death of Mother of God is impossible. Such was the error of the Collyridians, heretics of the VI century. The feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God goes back to the most

ancient times of Christianity and in the IV century is already universal, as is evident from the witness of Gregory of Tours and especially that it is mentioned in all the most ancient calendars. In the V century stichera for this feast were written by Anatolius, Patriarch of Constantinople and in the VIII century two canons attributed to Cosmas of the Holy City and John of Damascus were written. Originally the feast was celebrated on August 18, however that did not prevent its celebration in places on August 15. The common celebration of the feast on August 15 was established by the will of the Emperor Maurice (since the year 582).

Notes:

1) After the resurrection of the Savior the apostles had the custom to leave one place at the table empty during the meal and before this place is placed some bread in honor of the Resurrected Lord, and after the meal, "they stand up and pray" and they lift up this bread, the part named for the Lord, exclaiming: "Great is the name of the Holy Trinity, Lord Jesus Christ, help us". When during the meal on the third day after the Dormition of the Theotokos, the holy apostles began to elevate the bread set aside in the name of Christ, and hardly having time to say the words: "Great is the name", suddenly the Most Holy Theotokos appeared in the air "with a cloud and gleaming angels standing before her", "rejoice, they said, for I am with you all the days". In reply to this the holy apostles exclaimed: "Most Holy Theotokos, help us". After that wonderful event the holy apostles began to do an exclamation in honor of the appearance of the Most Holy Theotokos to them, and ate one part of the bread set aside by them in the name of the Lord before the meal, and the other in the name of the Theotokos after the meal. This exclamation is known by the name of the exclamation of the panagia. The word 'panagia' means 'all-holy' and the Greeks call the Mother of God by this name. The order for the elevation of the panagia is in the Psalter Proceedings, in the Typikon (Ustav) (refer to The Order for the Artos on the Day of Pascha) and in The Book of Needs (Trebnik). The order for the elevation of the panagia is found in the Book of Needs (refer to chapter 95), is done "when one enters into a service or is sent on his way, or sails on the seas". (Novaia Skrizhal page 561).

2) That is why the holy church, in the hymns for this day also calls us to rejoice, inspiring us, that in the wonderful death of the Mother of God for the consolation of all with special celebration was revealed the power of the Lord, Who through His Own death and resurrection has broken the bonds of death and the most terrible torments, made her joyful and blessed for the faithful followers; for the Holy Virgin Theotokos, "as if dreaming for a short time has fallen asleep into death, and soon from her, like awakening from a dream and the darkness of death, like a sleepy one shakes off drowsiness from his eyes, has seen immortal life

and glory in the light of the face of the Lord". Besides this we should rejoice for the Most Holy Virgin, because she, after Her cruelest troubles and sufferings on earth, by passing over into the highest world received the reward for Her good deeds; for us this underlines the new meaning of death given to her Resurrection from the grave: being hitherto punishment for sin, death has now become the witness for good deeds, the reward for spiritual efforts made in life (Rev. 14: 13). Finally, we should rejoice that the Most Holy Virgin after Her Dormition prevailed in the highest world. There, in heaven, in Her essence she stands before the throne of the Life originating Trinity. Humble here on earth, there, in heaven, she was beyond compare more honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious than the Seraphim, brighter than all the righteous, not only more honorable as the servant of the Lord, but also as the Queen of Heaven and earth, the Mistress of the highest powers and people, the fullest Chalice of all divine gifts, the boundless Sea of grace, the most bountiful Source of all gifts, spiritual and physical, the Joy of all those who are troubled, the Intercessor for those wronged, the Nourisher for the thirsty, the Consolation for strangers, the Haven for the storm tossed, the Visitation for the sick, the Protection for the unfortunate, the Rod of old age, the Intercessor for widows and orphans. As His Mother, if She only wishes to petition the Lord, the Lord will not refuse Her anything. She is the one hope of the hopeless, the haven of the oppressed, She is the shameless intercessor for us, the intercessor before the immutable Creator, the warm supplication, the speedy defense, the impenetrable wall, the refuge of the world, the source of mercy, the door to the merciful love of God. Reviewing the history of the Church, perusing the pages of the history of our fatherland, going over the temples dedicated to Her name, reading over Her wonderworking icons, passing through Palestine, Greece, Russia, even through the West fallen from Orthodoxy, everywhere we meet innumerable sets of proofs and the immeasurable might and immeasurable mercifulness of the Mother of God. From what is not present in the Orthodox Church services, there is no litany where the Church in its petitions would not support by name prayers to Our Lady the Most Holy Theotokos; there is no prayer, nor is there any service, where the our Church would not thank, not offer up enthusiastic vigils with hymns to our Victorious Leader, our earnest Intercessor and compassionate Mother, the Ever Virgin Mary.

Troparion, tone 1

In giving birth, you preserved your virginity.

In falling asleep, you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos.

You were translated to life, O Mother of Life, //

And by your prayers you deliver our souls from death.

Kontakion, tone 2

**Neither the tomb nor death, could hold the Theotokos,
Who is constant in prayer and our firm hope in her intercessions.
For being the Mother of Life,
She was translated to life //
By the One who dwelt in her virginal womb.**

Magnification

**We magnify you,
O all undefiled Mother of Christ our God,
And we praise your all glorious Dormition.**

The feast of the Dormition is one of the Twelve Major feasts. It is celebrated from the 14 to the 23 of August. For the Paramoegas and the rest refer to July 8.

At Matins on the day of Dormition "the singing at the tomb is done in some countries; particularly if it is the temple of the present feast; it is done this way: an analogion is placed in the middle of the church, and on it is placed an icon of the feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, the rector with priests and deacons, vested, proceed through the royal doors with candles; and standing according to rank, the rector censens around the icon on the analogion, then and the following, and the whole church. The singers sing the refrain, in the tone: "All generations bless you, Theotokos Virgin, most blessed and most undefiled Mother of our God". And we sing the Kathisma: "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord"; "Glory, both now and ever": "Alleluia", 3-times. A censuring is done at each Stasis: according to the rank of all the Priests. Then, the second choir begins the refrain: "It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos, more honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim". Then: "Your hands have made me and fashioned me": "Glory and now and ever": "Alleluia", 3-times. At the third Stasis, the refrain: "All generations offer a song to the Theotokos, the One we bless". Then: "Look down on me and have mercy on me, according to the judgment of those who love your name": "Glory and now and ever": "Alleluia", 3-times. Both the priests and deacons kiss the icon lying there and enter into the sanctuary. Then: "Praise the name of the Lord", and the Magnification according to the Typikon (Ustav). (Akathist for the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos, pub. in Kiev, in 1861). This occurs on the day of the Dormition in the Kiev Monastery of the Caves Laura; and there the icon of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos is lowered from the iconostasis and stands in the Royal Doors up to the time of singing at the tomb.

Refer to the chapter in the Typikon and the Menaion if the feast of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos falls on a Sunday.

Note that if the Dormition falls on a Wednesday or Friday, then meat, cheese and eggs are not authorized.

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Ovinov

This wonderworking icon is in the men's Monastery of St. Paisius (refer to the Kostroma Diocese). It received its name from the Boyar Ovinov, to whom it wonderfully appeared on the shore of Lake Galicia, near the city of Galicia in the principdom of Dmitri of the Don River. On the spot of its appearance Ovinov built the Temple of the Dormition of the Mother of God.

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Semigorodny

This wonderworking icon representing the Dormition of the Mother of God was written by the Venerable Dionysius the Deaf in the XV century. Brought by hermits from its monastery it was put into the parish church of the Semigorodny District, beyond the Dvinsk River. After the terrible plague that devastated the Vologda District in XV century, the church stood in desolation for about 150 years. In 1593, through a special vision, the Starets Julian, from the family of Beloozero noblemen, found the icon and constructed a monastery on the spot where the holy icon was found. Now the icon is in the Tupichev Monastery, Mogilev Diocese. The icon is celebrated on the day of the Descent of the Holy Spirit.

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Vladimir-Rostov

It was written in the XII century by the Venerable Alypius of the Monastery of the Caves and now is found in the Rostov Dormition cathedral.

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Crimea

This icon was wonderfully depicted on a cliff. Even today many are healed by the water below it.

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of the Pskov Monastery of the Caves

It is found in Pskov Monastery of the Caves (refer to the Pskov Diocese), in which it was wonderfully revealed in 1472. Again it is glorified by miracles in 1523. See October 7.

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Chukhloma See July 20.

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Blachernae

It is in the Quabtahev Monastery, in the middle of Kartli (Georgia).

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Tsilkani

It is found in the Tsilkani Temple of the Theotokos, in Kartli (Georgia), written on a board from the Bethlehem manger and is contemporary with St. Nina, the enlightener of Georgia (January 14).

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Adsqur

This holy and wonderworking icon, by tradition, was wonderfully depicted on a board, in which the Mother of God put her figure, and was brought by the Holy Apostle Andrew the First-called to Iberia. Today it is in the Gaiane Cathedral, near Kutais. There the former Princess Saint Tamara had another Holy Icon of the Mother of God that today is called Gaiane.

Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Bethlehem, in the city of Tiflis, in the Cashoet Cathedral

*S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp 0283-7
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