

# The Feasts of the Mother of God

## History and Theology of the Most Holy Theotokos

*“The Most Pure Temple of the Saviour”*

The Entry of the All-Holy Virgin into the Temple inspired hymnographers to compose wonderful hymns with profound theological meaning. One of these is the kontakion of the feast, which we often hear sung during the period of the feast of the Entry.

“The most pure Temple of the Saviour, the precious bridal chamber and Virgin, the sacred treasure of the glory of God, is brought today into the house of the Lord, and with her she brings the grace of the divine Spirit. Of her God’s angels sing in praise: ‘She is indeed the heavenly tabernacle.’”

We see three important points in this troparion. The first is that the All-Holy Virgin is the most pure Temple of the Saviour, the precious bridal chamber and Virgin, and the sacred treasure of the glory of God.

It is not only the place where God is worshipped that is a temple, but above all the person within whom worship is offered up to God. The Apostle Paul writes: “For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people’” (2 Cor. 6:16). In this temple God Himself dwells and walks. The word “dwell” means that Christ is resident, and that the grace of God acts within the human being; and “walk” means that He produces spiritual tremors and spiritual ascents.

The Christian's entire body is a temple. It is the walls and roof of this temple. And his heart is the sanctuary where the sacred altar is and where prayer, praise and worship are unceasingly offered to God. From her infancy the All-Holy Virgin was a completely pure Temple of Christ the Saviour. She was full of grace from her conception, her time in the womb, and her birth.

As the living Temple of God, the All-Holy Virgin is also a spiritual bridal chamber, where the place is being prepared in which the Lord of heaven and earth will rest. The Virgin was the suitable person to become the bride of the great and demanding Bridegroom Who wants everything. The All-Holy Virgin is the treasure of the glory of God, that is to say, she is the great store of God's glory. The glory of God is His light, the divine Light which some people with pure hearts are deemed worthy to see.

The second point is that the All-Holy Virgin, as the most pure Temple of the Saviour, the bridal chamber of the heavenly Bridegroom and the treasure of God's glory, is brought into the Temple of the Lord, and at the same time she brings God's grace with her into the Temple. The Temple where the daily rituals were performed was a blessed place, but the living Temple, the All-Holy Virgin, was more exalted. One might ask how they put a young girl in a place where no one went except the High Priest, and he only once a year. The answer is that the All-Holy Virgin did not simply receive grace by entering the Holy of Holies, but the Holy of Holies received a blessing from this blessed little girl. The High Priest and the Virgin's parents received inner assurance from

God that this young girl was to be made ready to become His mother.

The third point is that the angels who saw the All-Holy Virgin entering the Temple also sang her praises, calling her “the heavenly tabernacle”. The heavenly tabernacle is the uncreated glory of God, the divine Light that is uncreated. The phrase “heavenly tabernacle” reminds us that, as he describes in the book of Revelation, St John the Evangelist saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God, from heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her bridegroom, and he heard a loud voice from heaven saying: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them” (Rev. 21:2-4). This is the uncreated tabernacle, the glory of God, the uncreated Light. This is the true tabernacle “which the Lord erected, and not man” (Heb. 8:2).

This event brings to mind another uncreated tabernacle that descended during the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. When the Apostle Peter saw the glory of Christ’s divinity, he expressed his wish to Christ that they should remain there and made three tabernacles, one for Him, one for Moses and one for Elijah. And at the very moment when he was asking for three created tabernacles, God revealed to him the uncreated tabernacle, because “a bright cloud overshadowed them” (Matt. 17:1-7). Such is the generosity of God. We ask for something small and He fills us with His great and uncreated gifts.

The All-Holy Virgin accepted this uncreated grace of God, and so she too became a heavenly tabernacle. She was

within the uncreated tabernacle, and subsequently she became the heavenly tabernacle who protects all those who call upon her.

Sacred iconography presents the whole scene of Mary's entrance into the Temple and the Holy of Holies. It shows her being offered to the High Priest Zacharias, and various phases of her ascent to the Holy of Holies. Sometimes she is seen being offered by both her parents or by one of them. Sometimes Mary walks in front of her companions and is led by her parents, whereas sometimes she is brought to the High Priest by virgins carrying lighted torches. Sometimes she is standing in front of the steps and sometimes she is climbing up them. Sometimes at the highest point a throne is depicted on which the Virgin is sitting, and an angel flies around her offering her bread.

All these aspects show the great event of Mary's dedication, but also the dedication of every human being to God. Each one has his own way of being led up to God. In every case, those who perceive the excellence of the dedication keep festival.