



**Orthodox Mission of the  
Entrance of the Theotokos  
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street  
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***What the Icon of the Dormition Proclaims***  
**August 28, 2022**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

**Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!**

*Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. (Isaiah 49:15-16)*

The Feast of the Holy Dormition of the Mother of God is one of the great feasts of the Church. We celebrate it each year on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August (28<sup>th</sup> in the new calendar). This year, we were not able to come together in our little church in Emmitsburg, but instead, a number of us traveled up to Northeast PA to the little town of Old Forge, where Bishop Nicholas consecrated the monastery there and celebrated the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy for the great Feast.

It may seem odd to us to say that we “celebrate” the Dormition, since the very word “dormition” comes from the Latin for “falling asleep,” or “death.” The Holy Dormition is the celebration of the “death” of the Mother of God, a celebration, not because she dies, but because of what our Holy Orthodox Faith says about her death. The message is proclaimed so very clearly in the icon of the Holy Dormition. Standing behind her bier, where the Holy Apostles lovingly laid her body, is Christ. And in His arms, he holds what looks like an infant,

wrapped in swaddling clothes. When I first saw that icon as a new convert to the Orthodox Faith several decades ago, it struck me as remarkable. What child is Christ holding? Why would He be holding a child in the first place at the funeral of His beloved mother?

But then after briefly contemplating its meaning, I realized that there was a symmetry between the icon of the Dormition and the icon of Christmas, the Nativity of our Lord. In the latter, the Mother of God laid her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in a manger, wrapped in “swaddling clothes,” to tenderly care for Him in the cave where they took shelter according to the Gospel of St. Luke. In the icon of the Holy Dormition, it is our Lord, now ascended in glory, who hold His mother’s soul, having received it in care and gentle compassion when it was separated from her body in death. Just as Mary had cared for Him when He was born in the incarnation of His divine humanity, so now Christ cares tenderly for the soul of His mother at her death.

This icon is a powerful reminder of the essence of our Orthodox proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ! As we hear in the Anaphora each and every Sunday, *God did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved*. When we die, at the very moment that our souls are ripped away from our bodies, Christ will be there to receive them, just as He was there to receive the soul of His mother. Thus, the Holy Dormition is a celebration, not of death, but of love, of the love and care and compassion of our God, so powerfully proclaimed by His prophet of old, when he said, *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me*.

Remember this, Brothers and Sisters, as you contemplate and practice our Holy Orthodox Faith! Remember that it is God’s good will that we be saved, and that when we die, it is He, the very Lord and God and Savior Himself Who created us, Who will receive our souls in the same loving manner as He received the soul of His blessed mother. Thus, we *celebrate* the Feast of the Holy Dormition, giving thanks to God for His great lovingkindness that truly knows no bounds!

Fr. Elias

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