



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

306 W. Main Street Emmitsburg,  
MD 21727

<http://EntranceMission.org>

717-817-0084

The V. Rev. Elias Yelovich,  
Rector

The Rev. Anthony Duvall,  
Assistant

***The Ultimate Criteria  
March 10, 2024***

**Sunday of the Last Judgment. Entrance Church. 3/10/2024**

**Brothers and Sisters in Christ:**

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

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)*

Before we go on a journey, we need to make preparations. We pack, we check our passports, we take care of things at home – the pets, the plants, etc. And we do our best to see that everything is in readiness. Just think, for example, how you would feel if you were given some tickets to the Summer Olympics in Paris. To go to see the games in person would in and of itself be a thrill like none other. But to see them in Paris! Oh my! For me, returning to Paris would be the trip of a lifetime. We would prepare carefully before making that journey!

Great Lent is a journey. We set out on forgiveness Sunday and travel with anticipation toward

the Feast of Feasts, PASCHA!. There is nothing like PASCHA in any other religious tradition in the world! It is a time of almost giddy joy! Christmas, Birthday, Easter – all rolled into one! Celebration of the central event of our Holy Orthodox Faith – the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead! It is a celebration of His ongoing Life with us, or the certainty of our own resurrection to live eternally with Him! And to live, not just to exist, but to live in the fullness of His Divine love in that place, that Kingdom that will never end. PASCHA is everything! The seed, the foundation, the structure and fulfillment of our faith. It is everything we could or ever might hope for all wrapped up in one glorious celebration.

As such, we prepare. The journey per se begins when we bow before one another seeking and offering forgiveness for the wrongs we have done to one another. The journey moves forward week after week with the most beautiful of all services, the Presanctified Liturgy, each Wednesday evening. Sunday after Sunday, we stand in awe within the great Liturgy of St. Basil and renew our acquaintances with Saints such as St. Gregory Palamas, St. Mary of Egypt, St. John of the Ladder. And then the final leg of our journey during Great and Holy Week, in the Services of such beauty and solemnity – Great and Holy Thursday, Friday, and the Great Sabbath itself, culminating in the joyous moment when the priest asks us to come forward and received the Light of Christ, go on our procession with that Light outside, hear the Gospel of the Resurrection and shout to one another “Christ is Risen!”

It is all before us. But now, we are in that period of time before we embark. Our pre-journey preparations began on Zachaeus Sunday. And each week after that until Lent officially begins, we are brought face to face in our Gospel Lessons with the essential aspects of our preparation. Zachaeus, for example, reminded us of the first step of our journey: *The will to seek Jesus*. Zachaeus sought Jesus with all his heart, and his efforts were met with the unexpected invitation of Jesus inviting Himself to Zachaeus’ house. The Savior always comes to those who seek Him. Then, we heard of a Publican and a Pharisee who go to the temple to pray. One sees his sin; the other does not. The Publican bows his head in recognition of his helplessness: “Lord, be gracious unto me the sinner,” he prays. We call the realization of the truth about himself before God “*humility*.” Knowing that he has nothing to boast about, he comes before God seeking mercy, for like Zachaeus, he knows that it is only mercy that will save him. And then, the very essence of humble repentance is held before us in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We learn from Jesus in that parable to repent, to return from the “far country” and seek mercy from our Father in Heaven. We are reminded of the patient, long-suffering of God, the very qualities exhibited by the Father in the parable, and we are exhorted not to bear resentment against those who are saved in spite of their sin. It is mercy, and love that is God’s inner essence.

Today, we hear that the fruit of our repentance which opens the door to our union with Christ is nothing less than Christ-like love. We who humbly seek Him, who come before Him with repentance, will be received, and as we travel toward PASCHA, indeed as we travel in our lives into eternity, we will be become ever more loving, ever more caring, ever kinder, ever more compassionate. This is the message of the parable of the Last Judgment that we should hear today. This is the final Parable that St. Matthew includes in his Gospel, the very last teaching of

our Lord before He turns His face toward Jerusalem and the Passion.

To seek Jesus; to bow before Him in humility; to repent, and most powerfully, to bear the fruit of love – to see Christ in our neighbor in need – these are the qualities that mark our pre-Lenten preparations. Next week, these qualities will be carried out concretely by each of us as we begin our Lenten journey with the Godlike quality of forgiveness.

To Jesus Christ be all honor and glory forever! Amen.

Orthodox Church of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 West Main Street

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

<https://EntranceMission.org>