



Light of the East

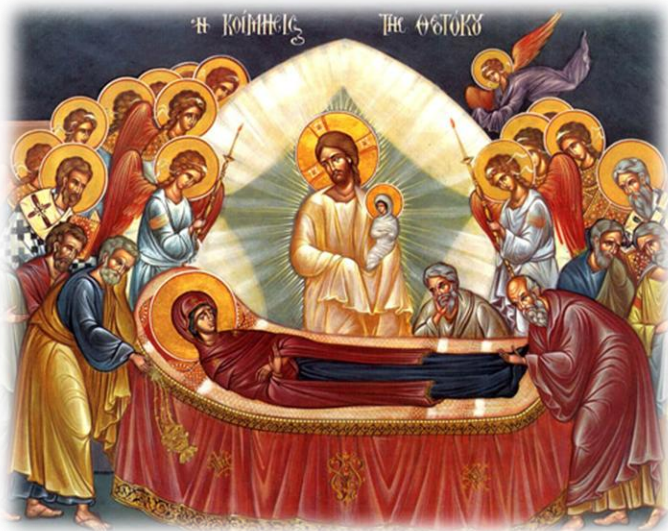


Reflections for our Spiritual Journey

Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church, Roswell, Georgia

Dormition of the Theotokos

August 15



Since the 1st century, the Eastern Church has celebrated the death, resurrection and glorification of Christ's Mother, proclaiming that Mary has been taken by God into the heavenly kingdom in the fullness of her spiritual and bodily existence. Even though she had no personal sin, the Theotokos had to experience death, not "voluntarily" as her Son, but by the necessity of her mortal human nature which is indivisibly bound up with the corruption of this world. The Church teaches as well that Mary truly needed to be saved by Christ, as all human

persons are saved, from the trials, sufferings and death of this world; and that having truly died, she was raised up by her Son as the Mother of Life and participates already in the eternal life of paradise which is prepared and promised to all who "**hear the word of God and keep it**" (Luke 11:27-28). Her "translation" (as the feast was called in the early Church) to heaven is the first one of all humanity; **she is the first fruit of Christ's death and resurrection.**

The feast of the *Dormition of the Theotokos* (*Assumption*) is celebrated by the Church on August 15, a Day of Precept (obligation) for all Catholics. It is a proclamation that all people are "highly exalted" in the blessedness of the victorious Christ, and that this high exaltation has already been accomplished in the Theotokos.

The "Falling Asleep" of the Mother of God is the sign, the guarantee, and the celebration that Mary's fate is the destiny of all those of "low estate" whose souls magnify the Lord, whose spirits rejoice in God the Saviour, and whose lives are totally dedicated to hearing and keeping the Word of God which is given to all of us by the Saviour and Redeemer of the world. With her, all people will be "blessed" to be "more honorable than the cherubim and

beyond compare more glorious than the seraphim" if they follow her example. All will have Christ born in them by the Holy Spirit. All will become temples of the living God. All will share in the eternal life of His Kingdom.

Holy Tradition holds that the Mother of God was gloriously carried to heaven, body and soul. As the time of her repose approached, the Apostles were at her bedside as the inexpressible Light of Divine Glory shone forth. Descending from Heaven was Christ, the King of Glory, surrounded by Angels, Archangels and other Heavenly Powers, together with the souls of the Forefathers and the Prophets, who prophesied in ages past concerning the Virgin Mary. Seeing Christ, the Mother of God rose from her bed to meet her Son Who bid her enter into Life Eternal. Without any bodily suffering, as though in sleep, the Most Holy Virgin Mary gave her soul into the hands of her Son and God. Kissing the all-pure body with reverence, the Apostles buried her earthly body near the Garden of Gethsemane where they chanted psalms for three days. The Apostle Thomas was not present at the burial of the Mother of God. Arriving late on the third day at Gethsemane, he lay down at the tomb and with bitter tears asked that he might be permitted to look once more upon the Mother of God and bid her farewell. The Apostles out of pity for him decided to open the tomb and permit him the comfort of venerating the all-pure body of the Ever-Virgin Mary. Having opened the grave, they found in it, only the burial shroud and an abundance of fragrant flowers. Thus they knew for certain of the bodily ascent of the Most Holy Virgin Mary to Heaven. On this day, then, the tradition of the Eastern Church is to bring fragrant flowers to the Theotokos before Liturgy to remember her empty tomb and to bless flowers as well as scented herbs for culinary and medicinal use.

Traditions are a marvelous way of connecting our spiritual commitments and Christian beliefs with our everyday life, especially for our children. At Epiphany, we have a special custom to honor the Mother of God. Before the Liturgy and during the singing of the Canticle of Mary (My soul magnifies the Lord), our children carry the icon of the Dormition to the tetrapod and place their flowers before their Blessed Mother. Our parishioners also bring flowers to place before the icon of the Theotokos and to bring plants and herbs to be blessed and to take home after Liturgy. We hope all will join in honoring the Most Holy and Pure Theotokos.



This Feast of the Church and the icon celebrate a fundamental teaching of our faith — the Resurrection of the body which is accomplished by the divine will of God. This is a feast of hope in the Resurrection and life eternal. Everything that is praised and glorified in Mary is a sign of what is offered to all persons. As we remember the Dormition of the Theotokos, we prepare ourselves to one day be received into the new life of the age to come. As we journey toward our heavenly abode, we also affirm through this Feast that the Mother of God intercedes for us. Through Christ she has become the Mother of all, embracing us with divine love.