



# Light of the East



*Reflections for our Spiritual Journey*

Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church, Roswell, Georgia

## *The Protection of our Most Holy Mother, The Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary*

**October 1**



The Church has always glorified the Most Holy Mother of God as the Protectress and Defender of the Christian people, entreating by her intercession God's loving-kindness towards us sinners. *The Protection of the Mother of God*, is one of the most beloved feasts in the Byzantine Catholic liturgical calendar. Mary's aid has been clearly shown to individuals and to peoples, both in peace and in war, both in monastic deserts and in crowded cities. Each year on **October 1** we celebrate this constant protection of the Church by the Mother of God.

On Sunday October 1st, 911 AD, the faithful gathered to pray the all-night vigil at the Church of the Mother of God in Constantinople, where her head-covering and part of her cincture had been brought from Palestine in the 5th Century. St. Andrew, Fool for Christ, lifted his gaze to heaven and saw our Most Sovereign Lady, clad in gold-encrusted purple, illuminated by an unspeakable heavenly radiance and surrounded by apostles, saints, martyrs and virgins. The Most-Holy Virgin appeared above the people as with her outstretched hands she spread her veil over the people to protect them and to shelter them from enemies visible and invisible. The Most-holy Lady shone with a heavenly light, and her omophorion was brighter "than the rays of the sun." As long as the Most-Holy Theotokos was there, her veil was visible; on her departure she left behind its accompanying grace. The Church instituted this commemoration as a reminder of the Mother of God's constant protection whenever we prayerfully seek her protection and shelter.

God when creating man instilled in him His Image and His Likeness. He became incarnate in order to restore fallen humanity to His love and to the very nature for which we were created. God's revelation

to the world of His love, His beauty, His truth, His freedom was revealed in human form, in his Son: **Godliness in man, and humanity in God!** This is the central tenet of *theosis* in the Eastern Church: our deification and our attainment of likeness and union with God. Through the Theotokos, something beyond comprehension, the union of what cannot be joined together — the Creator and His creation — is accomplished. What a wealth of treasure and wisdom and love God has for man: the Creator unites with His creation. The Protection of the Mother of God lies in her being the Mother of God, the point on earth in which the Incarnate God was realized, the point in which He, who had eternally been in God, found His temporary form of existence. The Theotokos is the center of two worlds, the Divine and of the earthly.

With this feast we also realize that the heavenly Church, the assembly of all the saints, led by Christ's mother, Mary, is constantly present, interceding for us, praying with us, connected to us. When we go to church and celebrate the liturgical offices we are the Church on earth, gathered together by the Most Holy Trinity, to enter *into* this glorification of the eternal heaven. We are in communion with all of heaven, they are in communion with us, and together we constitute the *Ekklesia*, the great Assembly, the Church of the New Covenant.

It is a principle and norm of our Eastern spiritual tradition that what we experience in church, what we do when we go to church, is to be actualized with every breath that we take and in every moment of our life. It is in the Church that the grace, the vision, the truth and the very presence of God are given to us. When we go to church God is there, present and dwelling among us; the Divine Liturgy is where God acts and resides in his people, where we are united with his Son in his Most Pure Body and Life-Giving

*Remember us in your prayers,  
O Virgin Mother of God, lest  
we perish by the increase of  
our sins. Protect us from every  
evil and from grievous woes,  
for in you we hope, and  
venerating the Feast of your  
Protection, we magnify you.*

Blood, where we share in the Holy Trinity's communion of love. Like the heavenly hosts of the Protection, the Church is not just a place we gather to pray; it is actually the Church of Christ on earth in space and time where the Church of God, worshiping God, glorifying God, communing with God in Christ, risen and glorified, through the power of the Holy Spirit actually experiences this communion of the age yet to come, together with Christ's mother, Mary, and all the saints.

On the feast of the Protection the Church celebrates both the intercession of the Mother of God and the whole assembly of the righteous. That is what we enter into when we go to church, and that's what the Church is.

This feast is a great celebration of uniting of heaven and earth, of those already departed this life in the glorious presence of Christ, raised and glorified with him, already now in him, and we still on earth in the Church and as the Church, entering into that *reality* in the sacramental life of the Church by the power of God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

This is the Christian faith and divine reality we celebrate, a marvelous and magnificent celebration, vision, and experience: the reality which is, indeed, *the* Christian faith, the experience of the fulfillment of the Gospel in Jesus Christ raised and glorified, and we, together with him, with his Most-Holy Mother and all of the saints.

