



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

New Year in September
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Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

September 1. New Year of Grace. Entrance Church. 2025

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee, and a report concerning him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" ... When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, so that they might throw him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them he went away. (Luke 4: 14-30)

I've often wondered how I would have reacted as a first century male in the synagogue that day when Jesus preached His first sermon. Would I have listened? Wondered? Or, would I have joined the others who were so offended that they tried to throw Jesus out of the synagogue and over a cliff?

St. Luke tells us that this first sermon of our Lord in a local synagogue was given immediately after His temptation in the wilderness. He had opposed the devil which tempted Him and came to His own hometown synagogue. As a Jewish male It was His right to read the scripture. Having been given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah He reads the prophesy of a time when the Lord would send One to fulfill

the desire of every pious Jew: the beginning of an age where mercy would be shown to those in need:² the blind, the sick, the poor. Jesus undoubtedly knew this prophecy by heart. And He preaches a very short, but stunningly effective, sermon: He says simply that the prophecy is fulfilled in His person in their presence.

This, of course was understood by most if not all present as blasphemy. Who did He think He was, God? Was He not Joseph's son, the son of a mere carpenter from Nazareth? The are so enraged that they form a mob and try to kill Him on the spot by trying to throw Him over a cliff. But, St. Luke reports, that miraculously, He walks silently away unharmed.

We hear this remarkable lesson today, because in the Church calendar it is September 1, the beginning of the Byzantine New Year. According to Holy Tradition it was on September 1, the end of summer and beginning of fall, that Jesus preached this sermon. It was on the same date some 300+ years later that Constantine the Great fought his battle at the Milvian Bridge to secure the throne of the Roman Empire and soon thereafter gave freedom to Christians to practice their faith without persecution.

September 1 is a day of New Beginnings. A world ruled by powerful men and forces, armies that destroyed and plundered from one empire to an other; a world propelled by selfish motives, selfish desires, immoral actions, was soon coming to an end. The Christian age was about to begin, an age propelled by faith in Christ and led by aspirations to do precisely what He preached that day: care for the sick, tend to the blind, give comfort to the dying, support the poor: in other words, show mercy to all in any need in any place or circumstance.

You've heard me say many times that these aspirations have all but come to an end. We live in a culture in which we are not so much human beings as consumers. Our worth is measured by the amount of money we make and spend, the quality of our entertainments, the ability we have to eat, drink and be merry. The new religion that propels the younger generation and gives them purpose is physical activity. The gym. They tend to their bodies, but not to their souls.

As we begin a new year in our spiritual year of grace we need to take stock. Our entire purpose in life is to become more and more like God in His attributes; the very attributes St. Isaiah the prophet described in the reading our Lord read that day on September 1 over 2000 years ago in His home synagogue in Nazareth. The very attributes He said would be fulfilled in Him!

Are we His people, or not? Do we strive to give comfort to others who are sick or suffering? Do we reach out – at least and most certainly – to help others in our prayers for them? Do we have hearts of mercy for those who are poor or otherwise afflicted? Do we have hearts that bleed for the well-being of others? If not, it's time to take stock and pray to the Lord for help, guidance and the indwelling of His Spirit. That's what our September New Year of Grace is all about!

Fr. Elias

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