



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

**306 W. Main Street  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727**

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

***What We Have Gained***  
**March 13, 2022**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

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

*As the prophets beheld, as the Apostles have taught,...as the Church has received... as the teachers have dogmatized,...as the Universe has agreed,... as Grace has shown forth,...as Truth has revealed,...as falsehood has been dissolved,...as Wisdom has presented,...as Christ Awarded,...thus we declare,...thus we assert,...thus we preach Christ our true God, and honor as Saints in words, in writings, in thoughts, in sacrifices, in churches, in Holy Icons; on the one hand worshipping and reverencing Christ as God and Lord; and on the other hand honoring as true servants of the same Lord of all and accordingly offering them veneration. (Synodikon of Orthodoxy)*

The Season of Great Lent was ushered in last week with our observance of the Sunday of Forgiveness. We bowed before one another, sharing mutual forgiveness within the congregation which the Lord has provided for us in His Holy Church. Forgiveness of one another from the heart is a worthy way to begin the Great Fast. For the Holy Fathers remind us that everything that is wrong in this world is wrong because we have pursued our own wills rather than submitting ourselves to the Will of the Father. In recognition of this truth and in humility we seek reconciliation with Him by first seeking reconciliation with one another. As our Lord taught us in the prayer of prayers: "Forgive us our trespasses even as we forgive those who trespass against us." Insofar as we forgive one another, our Father in heaven forgives us our trespasses against us. To seek forgiveness of our heavenly Father without opening our hearts in

forgiveness to one another would be hypocrisy.

The Sunday of Forgiveness from the earliest of times has also been observed as the Sunday of the Expulsion of Adam from Paradise. The fruit of our rebellion is life subject to suffering and death. St. Paul in one of his most direct statements succinctly says, "The wages of sin is death." To turn away from our Creator is to turn away from everything that is good and true and right; it is to turn away from Life itself. We therefore begin Great Lent with the reminder of what we have lost when we as human beings throughout the entire course of our history turned away from the Source of our Being.

The First Sunday in Great Lent, however, focusses on another theme. Knowing what we have lost, we turn on this Sunday upcoming to the theme of what we have gained - what we have gained through the Incarnation of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. What we have lost we have lost through our own actions; we have thrown away the uncreated beauty and wisdom and love of our Creator willingly. But what we have gained, we have gained through the mercy and love and self-giving of our Creator, Who was incarnate in the Person of the Savior Jesus Christ for our salvation.

The First Sunday in Great Lent is a powerful reminder of the vital meaning of the Incarnation. Following the proclamation of the Synod of Constantinople in 843 AD, the Church has gathered on the First Sunday in Great Lent and recited the Synodikon of Orthodoxy, a powerful theological statement in defense of the Holy Icons. The reason that we defend our veneration of the Icons, Brothers and Sisters, is that they give witness to the central dogma of our faith, that God became man in order that we might become "god," in order that we might participate in His divinity. Icons are the supreme reminder of the Incarnation. You see, if God became man, then He in His Incarnation can be depicted in icons. To deny the role of icons in the Church is to deny the Incarnation; it is to turn away from the proclamation of what we have gained through His mercy. We have lost what we have lost through our own actions; but we have gained Life Abundant, Salvation and every good thing through what He has given to us through the Incarnation, through His own Self-Giving. Thus, in the words of the Synodikon:

*... we preach Christ our true God, and honor as Saints in words, in writings, in thoughts, in sacrifices, in churches, in Holy Icons; on the one hand worshipping and reverencing Christ as God and Lord; and on the other hand, honoring as true servants of the same Lord of all and accordingly offering them veneration.*

This is our faith as Orthodox Christians and a worthy theme for us to contemplate on the First Sunday in Great Lent!

Fr. Elias

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