



Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The First Sunday in Lent: *"Come and See!"*
March 9, 2025

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory to Him forever!

"Come and see!"

These words were said by the apostle Philip to Nathaniel. "Come and see." We have found the One foretold by the prophets; the One Who Is the salvation of Israel, the hope of the entire world. Come and see!

This lesson was perhaps chosen specifically for this Sunday by the Holy Fathers because we observe the First Sunday in Lent as the Sunday of Orthodoxy. It is a remembrance of the Church standing up against false teaching in the 8th and 9th centuries. There were those who said, under the influence of the budding followers of the False Prophet Mohammed that it was somehow inappropriate to have icons in our churches. You will find people like that today among some protestant sects in the United States. The struggle over 1200 years ago was of course primarily political. But the Holy Father saw the need to preserve the ancient teaching about icons, because you see, if Jesus IS God and man, incarnate, having entered our physical existence to bring Life and Salvation, then He can be depicted in art. Icons are a testament to the Truth of the Incarnation.

But at the center of today's lesson are these haunting words of St. Philip: "Come and see." We often understand these words to mean that we should bring people to church. Come and see our beautiful temples! Come and see the proper representation of God made flesh in the icons. Come and see our representations of the Theotokos, the one who bore God in human flesh and

blood. Come and see how we depict the saints, like St. Seraphim, St. Nicholas, St. Mary of Egypt. Come and see how it all comes together in our Liturgy, our splendid singing, the beautiful and meaningful words of the Liturgies of St. Basil and St. John. "Come and see."

But what do people actually see when they come? For you see, the words do not apply as much to icons on wood, drawn according to the specific rules and guidelines of Orthodox iconography. I did a Google search on guidelines for painting icons. Over ten long web pages with specific instructions. Use Linden wood, one page said. Another had great details about paint and method. Another had prayers to be said before during and after painting an icon. All in great detail. Endless instruction.

But the icons that mattered, you see, are not those that we paint on a wall or hang above the altar. Who will come to love the Lord Jesus by seeing them? The icons that matter are the ones not made by hands, the icon within you and within me. The priest censes that icon when he comes out with the censer. Once for lay people, twice for priests, three times for Bishops – those who are supposed to make Christ present through their lives of service. When people come into our churches, they will perhaps remember something of the beauty they see, but more: They will remember how you and I resent the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ to them. Whereas there are over ten pages of instruction for painting the icons, there is only one set of instructions for us, and it is ancient indeed. "Hear O Israel, the Lord God is One! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your hearts, with all your minds and with all your strength! And you shall love your neighbor as yourselves!" This and the rest of the Life, Teachings, Actions, Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ are the only instructions we need. If they see Him within us, they will remember. If they don't, it matters not at all how beautiful the churches are, how wonderful the singing is, how magnificent the priest and bishops look in their vestments. What matters is how we make Christ present in our thoughts, our words and our deeds.

"Come and see!"

May each of us allow the Holy Spirit within so that if and when they do come to see, they will see Christ within each of us!

To Him be all honor and glory forever! Amen.

Fr. Elias

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