



## The Dormition of the Theotokos

### Ἡ Κοίμησις τῆς Θεοτόκου

*Celebrated on August 15*

**The Feast of the Dormition or Falling Asleep of the Theotokos commemorates the death and glorification of Mary, Christ's mother.** To help us prepare for the feast, a two-week fast precedes it. As with the **Nativity of the Virgin** (September 8/21) and the feast of her **Entrance to the Temple** (November 21/December 4), the Feast of the Dormition also comes from the Holy Tradition of the Church.

There we learn that Mary died, as all people die, because she had a mortal human nature affected by the corruption of this world. The Church proclaims that Mary needed to be saved by Christ, just as all of us need to be saved from this world's trials, sufferings, and death. Having indeed died, she was raised by her Son as the "Mother of Life" and already participates 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**). Finally, we celebrate that what happens to Mary happens to all who imitate her holy life of humility, obedience, and love.

It is important to remember that there are no relics of the Theotokos. Their existence has never been mentioned throughout history. At one time in Constantinople, there was a center of pilgrimage where the belt and veil of the Virgin were venerated.

*Adapted from **The Orthodox Church, Volume II: Worship**, by Fr. Thomas Hopko.*

### From the Tradition of the Church

**Following the day of Pentecost, the Theotokos remained in the city of Jerusalem, comforting the infant Christian community.** She lived in the house of the beloved Apostle John, later the Evangelist. At the time of her death (tradition states she was in her early fifties), many Apostles were scattered throughout the world preaching the Gospel. All but Thomas were miraculously brought to the Virgin aloft on clouds.

As they stood around her bedside, she commended her spirit to the Lord, and Jesus descended from heaven, taking up her soul in His arms. The Apostles sang the funeral hymns in her honor and carried her body to a tomb in Cedron near Gethsemane. When a man tried to interrupt their solemn procession, an angel of the Lord punished him by cutting off his hands, which were later healed.

The Apostle Thomas arrived on the third day and wished to see the Virgin for the last time. They discovered an empty tomb. Church tradition relates that the Theotokos was resurrected bodily and taken to heaven, the same reward that awaits all the righteous on the Last Day.

### About the Icon

**The Theotokos is depicted upon the funeral bier.** Christ, standing behind the Theotokos, is her Son, Who has come to receive His Mother's soul into heaven; He holds in His left arm an infant in white,

symbolizing the soul of the Theotokos reborn in her glory in heaven; Christ also is robed in white and appears in an aureole (elongated halo) depicting the Light of His Divinity.

The Apostles are depicted on either side of the bier stand the Apostles; the group on the left is led by St. Peter, who stands at the head of the bier; the group on the right is led by St. Paul, who stands at the foot of the bier.

*Taken from **The Icon Book**, by Boojamra, Essey, McLuckie & Matusiak.*

### **Troparion (Mode 1)**

*In giving birth, you retained your virginity; in falling asleep, O Mother of God, you did not abandon the world. You passed over into life, you, the mother of life, and by your prayers, you deliver our souls from death.*

### **Kontakion (Mode 2)**

*Nor tomb nor death overpowered the Mother of God, unsleeping in her prayers, unfailing hope in intercession; for as Mother of Life, she has been taken over to life by him who dwelt in her ever-virgin womb.*

## **Terminology**

- ◆ **Theotokos** - Θεοτόκος "God-bearer," "Mother of God"
- ◆ **Aeiparthenos** - Αειπαρθενος "ever-virgin"
- ◆ **Panagia** - Παναγία "all holy"
- ◆ **Dormition** - Κοίμησης "falling asleep, or passage through death"
- ◆ **Assumption** - Ανάληψη ή Μετάσταση "ascension or translation into heaven"

The name "Theotokos" was made official by the III Ecumenical Council (Ephesus, 431 AD), which decreed that the Virgin should be honored by this name, confirming the Orthodox belief in the Incarnation: that Christ was both true God and true man. As so often happened in those days, this action was a response to heretical teachings that needed to be addressed. Thus, once and for all, the Church affirmed her teachings about Christ and Mary.

## **Some Things To Do**

- ⇒ Attend a Parakesis (Supplicatory Cannon) Service with your family. Celebrate the Feast Day in Church as a family, if not on the day itself due to work, then at least on the eve of the feast at Vespers.
- ⇒ Use the section above to explain the significance of the feast to your children.
- ⇒ Use the Troparion and Kontakion hymns as prayers before and after meals and as part of the children's evening prayers during the 8-day "after feast."
- ⇒ If you have an icon of this feast, display it in your family's place of prayer for veneration. Discuss the icon with your children so that they can recognize all the figures and be able to tell the story.
- ⇒ It is the custom in some places to bless flowers on this feast. Have your children pick and prepare a bouquet to bring to the Church to be blessed. Use the flowers to decorate an icon or the family table. Make an extra bouquet for someone who cannot come to Church.