

**SEPTEMBER 8, 2020**  
**THE NATIVITY OF OUR MOST-HOLY LADY**  
**THE THEOTOKOS AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY**

**The Nativity of the Theotokos**

September 8th

The liturgical texts for this Feast Day, **The Birth of the Theotokos** (September 8th), are based largely on the *Gospel of St. James*, also known as the *Protevangelion*, a work dating from the second century A.D., which recounts the Nativity and the early years of the Virgin Mary. According to the story recorded there, Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, remained childless for many years. Both were true servants of God, righteous and devout: but their prayers for a child were not answered. One day, when Joachim came to make his offering in the temple, to his humiliation he was turned away by the High Priest, who reproached him sharply for his lack of children. In discouragement and bitterness Joachim retired into the desolate hill country, among the shepherds and their flocks, in order to hide his shame. As he was praying to God there, it so happened that his wife Anna was praying at the same time in the garden of their house at Jerusalem. An angel appeared to them both, announcing that Anna would bear a child, whose name was to become illustrious throughout all the world. Anna promised to offer her child, boy or girl, as a gift to the Lord. His depression gone, Joachim returned home in haste; his wife, anxious to share the good news with him, ran out of the house and met him at the city gate. In due time, the angel's promise was fulfilled, and Anna bore a daughter, Mary.

The Orthodox Church does not place the *Protevangelion of James* on the same level as the Holy Scripture: but it is possible, nevertheless, to accept the spiritual truth which underlies this narrative, without necessarily attributing a literal and historical exactness to every detail. The deeper meaning of the story is not difficult to appreciate. It makes clear that from the moment of her birth, and even long before it, the Mother of God was specially consecrated to the Holy Trinity, elect and marked out by God. The Incarnation of Christ was not a casual and fortuitous event, but the fruit of a lengthy preparation, something ordained from before all the ages in the providence of God. And so, at Mary's entry into the world, she who was chosen to be the instrument of this mystery was to a special degree the object of God's ever-watchful care. Such is the inner truth underlying the infancy narratives of Our Lady Theotokos, and such also is the point repeatedly stressed in the liturgical texts for this feast day - that Mary was "*foreordained before the womb as the Mother of our God*" (Vespers, aposticha).

Since the Church's New Year begins on September 1st, the Nativity of the Theotokos is the first Great Feast in the annual cycle. Its position at this point is appropriate. The birth of Mary may be seen as marking the inauguration of the scheme of salvation: with her birth we already begin to look forward to the birth of her Son, and thus to the redemption that He accomplished in the flesh. "*The preordained tabernacle of our reconciliation with God now begins to be*" (Matins, 1st Canon). "*Today grace begins to bear its first fruits*" (Vespers, sticheron).

The feast of Our Lady's Nativity- as the texts for the day abundantly indicate - is above all else an occasion of great joy. The birth of a child is rightly a cause for happiness to the mother and father, particularly when they have begun to despair of ever having children. In Mary's case, however, the parents' rejoicing is shared by all creation, for her birth foreshadows the universal salvation that is to

come. "*Thy birth, O Theotokos, has brought joy to all the inhabited earth*" (Troparion of the Feast); "*Let there be common joy in the world among angels and mankind*" (Matins, 2nd exapostilarion). A fundamental truth is plainly expressed in the liturgical prayers. Mary's link with her Son, her place within the saving and redemptive mission of Christ, never for one moment is forgotten. Mary is honored by the Church, not primarily for herself, but as Mother of the Lord - because it was within her womb that the hypostatic union between God and man was brought to pass in Christ. The many titles given to the Theotokos in the services for the feast day: "*Temple and Throne of God*", "*Bridge of Life*", "*Mystical paradise*", "*living Pavilion of the glory of God*" - all alike serve to illustrate this vital truth. Mary is always venerated because of the Child that she bore: Mother and Son are not to be separated, but Mary is to be understood in the light of Christ.

edited from the Festal Menaion,  
by Bishop Kalistos Ware

## GREAT VESPERS

**LORD I CALL: All stikhera of the Feast:**

***Tone 6:***

Today God, Who rests upon the spiritual thrones,  
has prepared for Himself a holy throne on earth.  
He, Who in wisdom established the heavens,  
has fashioned a living heaven in His love for mankind;  
for, from a barren root He has made a life-bearing branch spring up for us, even His Mother.  
O God of wonders and Hope of the hopeless,//  
O Lord, glory to You!

This is the day of the Lord!  
Rejoice, O peoples,  
for, behold, the bridal chamber of the Light, the book of the Word of Life,  
has come forth from the womb!  
The gate which faces the East is born  
and awaits the entry of the Great Priest.  
She alone admits Christ into the world//  
for the salvation of our souls.

Although by God's will other barren women  
have brought forth famous offspring,  
yet, of all those children Mary shines brightest, as is fitting to God.  
For she herself was born wondrously of a barren mother,  
and gave birth in the flesh to the God of all,  
in a manner surpassing nature, from a womb without seed.  
She is the only gateway of the only-begotten Son of God,  
Who passed through this gate yet kept it closed,

and, having ordered all things in His own wisdom, //  
has wrought salvation for all mankind.

***(by Stephen of the Holy City), Tone 6:***

Today the gates of barrenness are opened,  
and the virgin gate of God comes forth.  
Today grace begins to bear its first fruit,  
revealing to the world the Mother of God.  
Through her things on earth are joined with the heavens//  
for the salvation of our souls.

Today is the prelude of universal joy;  
today breezes blow that herald salvation,  
and the barrenness of our nature is dispelled;  
for the barren woman is revealed as the mother  
of her who remained a virgin  
after giving birth to the Creator.  
From her the One Who is God by nature  
takes what is foreign to Him and makes it His own;  
and works salvation through the flesh for those who have gone astray.//  
He is Christ, the Lover of mankind and the Redeemer of our souls.

Today the barren Anna gives birth to the handmaid of God,  
who was chosen from all generations  
to become the abode of the King and Creator of all, Christ our God  
in fulfillment of the divine plan.  
Through her we earth-born have been fashioned anew//  
and restored from corruption to life eternal.

**GLORY... NOW AND EVER... tone 6:**

Today God, Who rests upon the spiritual thrones,  
has prepared for Himself a holy throne on earth.  
He, Who in wisdom established the heavens,  
has fashioned a living heaven in His love for mankind;  
for, from a barren root He has made a life-bearing branch spring up for us, even His Mother.  
O God of wonders and Hope of the hopeless,//  
O Lord, glory to You!

**OLD TESTAMENT READINGS**

**The reading from Genesis. (28:10-17)**

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the

earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.

Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.

I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

### **The reading from the prophecy of Ezekiel. (43:27-44:4)**

At the end of these days, from the eighth day on, the priests are to present your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar. Then I will accept you, declares the Sovereign LORD." Then the man brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, the one facing east, and it was shut.

The LORD said to me, "This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered through it. The prince himself is the only one who may sit inside the gateway to eat in the presence of the LORD. He is to enter by way of the portico of the gateway and go out the same way."

Then the man brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple. I looked and saw the glory of the LORD filling the temple of the LORD, and I fell facedown.

### **The reading from Proverbs. (9:1-11)**

Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding.

"Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life.

### **LITYA: All Feast, tone 8:**

Let us strike our spiritual harp on this solemn day of our feast,  
for today, from the seed of David,

the Mother of Life is born, dispelling the darkness.  
She is the re-creation of Adam, and the recalling of Eve.  
She is the source of incorruption and our release from corruption.  
In her we are made divine and are given life.  
Through her we have been deified and delivered from death.  
So let us, the faithful, cry out to her with Gabriel:  
“Rejoice, O full of grace, the Lord is with you, //  
granting us His great mercy through you!”

***Glory...now & ever..., tone 8:***

Let us strike our spiritual harp on this solemn day of our feast,  
for today, from the seed of David,  
the Mother of Life is born, dispelling the darkness.  
She is the re-creation of Adam, and the recalling of Eve.  
She is the source of incorruption and our release from corruption.  
Through her we have been made godlike and delivered from death.  
So let us the faithful cry out to her with Gabriel:  
“Rejoice, O full of grace, the Lord is with you, //  
granting us His great mercy through you!”

***APOSTIKHA: All Feast, tone 4:***

The joy of all the world has dawned for us from the righteous ones;  
the all-praised Virgin who springs from Joachim and Anna.  
Through the abundance of goodness she becomes the living temple of God,  
and she alone is acknowledged as truly the Theotokos.  
Through her prayers, O Christ God, //  
send peace to the world and to our souls great mercy!

**VERSE:** *Hear, daughter, consider and incline your ear.*

As foretold by the Angel’s prophecy,  
you have come forth today, O Virgin,  
the most sacred fruit of righteous Joachim and Anna.  
You are the heaven and throne of God, the vessel of purity,  
heralding joy to all the world, you that bring us our life,  
the annulment of the curse, the bestowal bestowed in its stead.  
Wherefore on this feast of your birth, O Maiden called by God, //  
entreat peace for the world and for our souls great mercy!

**VERSE:** *All the rich among the people seek your favor!*

Let the barren and childless Anna today clap her hands with gladness!  
Let those on earth be decked in splendor; let rulers leap for joy;  
let priests be glad in blessing; let the whole world keep the feast!  
For behold the Queen and immaculate bride of the Father

has sprung forth from the root of Jesse.

No longer will women bear children in sorrow, for joy has blossomed forth,  
and the Life of mankind now dwells in the world.

No longer are the offerings of Joachim turned away,  
for the lamentation of Anna has been changed to joy.

She cries: “Rejoice with me, all you chosen of Israel,  
for behold, the Lord has given me the living palace of His divine glory//  
for our common gladness and joy//  
and for the salvation of our souls!”

***GLORY...NOW AND EVER.... tone 8:***

Come, all you faithful, let us run to the Virgin!

For, behold, today she is born, who was foreordained before the womb, as the Mother of our  
God,

the treasure of virginity, the rod of Aaron that budded, springing from the root of Jesse,  
the preaching of the Prophets, the offspring of the righteous Joachim and Anna.

She is born and with her the world is renewed.

She is comes from the womb and the Church is adorned in her majesty.

She is the holy temple, the vessel of the Godhead,  
the virgin instrument and bridal chamber of the King,

in which has come to pass the strange mystery of the union of the natures that came together  
in Christ.//

As we worship Him, we praise the birth of the all-pure Virgin.

***Troparion, tone 4:***

Your nativity, O Virgin,

has proclaimed joy to the whole universe!

The Sun of righteousness, Christ our God,

has shone from you, O Theotokos.

By annulling the curse,

He bestowed a blessing.//

By destroying death, He has granted us eternal life.

<b>DIVINE LITURGY</b>
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**TROPARION, tone 4**

Your Nativity, O Virgin,

Has proclaimed joy to the whole universe!

The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God,

Has shone from you, O Theotokos!

By annulling the curse,

He bestowed a blessing.//

By destroying death, He has granted us eternal life.

**KONTAKION, tone 4**

By your Nativity most pure Virgin,  
Joachim and Anna are freed from barrenness:  
Adam and Eve, from the corruption of death.  
And we, your people, freed from the guilt of sin, celebrate and sing to you:  
The barren woman gives birth to the Theotokos,  
The Nourisher of our Life.

**PROKEIMENON, tone 3:** My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

**Vs.** For He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden, for behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

**EPISTLE: (240) Philippians 2:5-11** Brethren, Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the Cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the Name which is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Alleluia in the eighth tone:** Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear!

**Vs.** The rich among the people shall pray before thy face.

**GOSPEL: (54) Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28** Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" but He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

**COMMUNION HYMN:** I will receive the cup of salvation and call on the Name of the Lord! Alleluia...