

to fulfill their vow. They gathered together their relatives and acquaintances, and dressed the All-Pure Virgin in Her finest clothes. Singing sacred songs and with lighted candles in their hands, virgins escorted Her to the Temple (Ps. 44/45:14-15). There the High Priest and several priests met the handmaiden of God. In the Temple, fifteen high steps led to the sanctuary, which only the priests and High Priest could enter. (Because they recited a Psalm on each step, Psalms 119/120-133/134 are called "Psalms of Ascent.") The child Mary, so it seemed, could not make it up this stairway. But just as they placed Her on the first step, strengthened by the power of God, She quickly went up the remaining steps and ascended to the highest one. Then the High Priest, through inspiration from above, led the Most Holy Virgin into the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest entered once a year to offer a purifying sacrifice of blood. Therefore, all those present in the Temple were astonished at this most unusual occurrence.

After entrusting their child to the Heavenly Father, Joachim and Anna returned home. The All-Holy Virgin remained in the quarters for virgins near the Temple. According to the testimony of Holy Scripture (Exodus 38; 1 Kings 1: 28; Luke 2: 37), and also the historian Josephus Flavius, there were many living quarters around the Temple, in which those who were dedicated to the service of God dwelt.

The earthly life of the Most Holy Theotokos from Her infancy until She was taken up to Heaven is shrouded in deep mystery. Her life at the Jerusalem Temple was also a secret. "If anyone were to ask me," said St Jerome, "how the Most Holy Virgin spent the time of Her youth, I would answer that that is known to God Himself and the Archangel Gabriel, Her constant guardian."

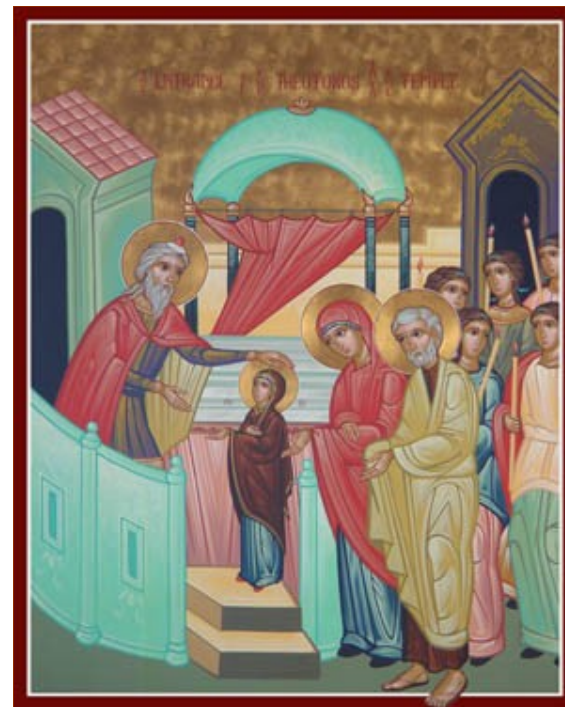
But there are accounts in Church Tradition, that during the All-Pure Virgin's stay at the Temple, She grew up in a community of pious virgins, diligently read the Holy Scripture, occupied Herself with handicrafts, prayed constantly, and grew in love for God. From ancient times, the Church has celebrated the Feast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple. Indications that the Feast was observed in the first centuries of Christianity are found in the traditions of Palestinian Christians, which say that the holy Empress Helen (May 21) built a church in honor of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple.

St Gregory of Nyssa, in the fourth century, also mentions this Feast. In the eighth century Sts Germanus and Tarasius, Patriarchs of Constantinople, delivered sermons on the Feast of the Entry.

The Feast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple foretells God's blessing for the human race, the preaching of salvation, the promise of the coming of Christ.

DISCOURSE ON THE FEAST OF THE ENTRY OF OUR MOST PURE LADY THEOTOKOS INTO THE HOLY OF HOLIES by Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica: <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>

## The Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple



November 21  
*(The 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 12 Great Feasts)*

*Troparion for the Feast of the Presentation, Tone 4*  
Today is the prelude of the good will of God, of the preaching of the salvation of mankind. The Virgin appears in the Temple of God, in anticipation proclaiming Christ to all. Let us rejoice and sing to her, "Rejoice, O Fulfillment of the Creator's Dispensation!"

*Kontakion for the Feast of the Presentation, Tone 4*  
The Most-pure Temple of the Savior; the precious Chamber and Virgin; the sacred Treasure of the Glory of God, is presented today to the House of the Lord. She brings with her the Grace of the Spirit, therefore the Angels of God praise Her: "Truly this woman is the abode of Heaven!"

### **Holy Scriptures for the Feast**

*At Great Vespers for the Feast:*

- 1) Exodus 40
- 2) 1 Samuel 7, 8
- 3) Ezekiel 43:27-44:4

*At Matins for the Feast:*

*St. Luke 1:29-49,56*

*At Divine Liturgy for the Feast:*

*Epistle: Hebrews 9:1-7* Brethren, then indeed, even the first Covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the Ark of the Covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the Tab-

lets of the Covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the Mercy Seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the High Priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance...

*Gospel: St. Luke 10:38-42; 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!"

### **Explanation**

According to Holy Tradition, the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple took place in the following manner. The parents of the Virgin Mary, Sts Joachim and Anna, praying for an end to their childlessness, vowed that if a child were born to them, they would dedicate it to the service of God.

When the Most Holy Virgin reached the age of three, the holy parents decided