

NOV21-  
SYNAXARION  
November 21  
Entrance into the  
Temple of our Most  
Holy Lady,  
the Theotokos and  
Ever-Virgin Mary



The origin of the feast is found in an account in the apocryphal Protoevangelium of Saint James. According to this document, after Saint Ann's miraculous birth-giving, the Most Holy Virgin having completed her second year, Joachim said to his wife: "Let us lead her to the Lord's Temple, as we promised Him." Ann said: "Let us yet wait until her third year, so that the child will not clamor for her father or mother, thus she will not walk straight before the Lord." When the child was three years old, Joachim said: "Let us call from among the daughters of the Hebrews those who are undefiled, and let them each take a lamp and let these lamps be lit, that the child not turn to look backward and her heart be not held captive outside the Lord's Temple." They did thusly. Zachary the priest received her and said to her: "May the Lord crown your name with glory!", and he set her down on the altar step. There, Mary was nourished by an angel until she was twelve years old. When the time came for her to marry, Joseph received her from the priests' hands, and took her from the Lord's Temple.

Whatever the foundations of this gracious legend may be, the Church invites us above all to meditate on the mystery of the internal preparation of Mary for her vocation as Theotokos. This preparation is a total self-commitment, the "immaculate victim," "as a most holy vessel" which must receive the body of the Word incarnate, "a living temple and throne of the King, elected to be his Mother," "the spiritual ark enclosing the incomprehensible Word." The miracle of her subsistence by the hand of the

Archangel is the symbol of other spiritual life entirely nourished by the will of God.

Historically, this feast had its origin in the dedication of the Church of Saint Mary the New in Jerusalem (November, 543). It was spread throughout the whole East in the Seventh century. Pope Gregory XI introduced it at Avignon at the end of the Fourteenth century. Then it was generalized in the Roman Church in 1585 by Sixtus V.

Contemplation of God Acquired by Means of His Word

The Lord says: 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part which shall not be taken away from her.' [Luke 10:41-42] We too ought to be eager to possess what no one can take away from us, namely the gift of earnest, attentive listening to the Word of God. We know from the parable of the Sower that the seeds even of the heavenly Word are taken away if they are sown along the path. So let the longing for wisdom inspire you as it did Mary, and never think those people idle who are seeking it. Certainly, the Lord did not rebuke Martha for her devoted service. He is rich in many gifts and distributes them severally among human beings. Mary is judged the wiser of the two sisters because she chose what she saw to be the most important thing. The Apostles, you remember, reckoned that it was not good to leave the Word of God to serve tables. [Acts 6:2] Yet each kind of service is a work of wisdom. Stephen who was chosen to serve tables was full of wisdom. [Acts 6:5-10] But the server should obey the teacher, and the teacher should encourage the server. The Church is one body, although it has many different members, and each needs the other. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." [cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-21] For although some members are of chief importance, all are necessary. Wisdom, however, has its seat in the head whereas action relies on the hands. The truly wise are those whose souls are in Christ.

St. Ambrose- On the Gospel of St Luke, 7, 85 (PL15, 1808)

## *THE STORY OF THE ENTRANCE OF MARY INTO THE TEMPLE*

The venerable tradition passed on by her family was that at three years of age, when Mary was ready to awaken to an awareness of social life, she asked her parents Joachim and Anne to present her to the Temple of God in order to prepare herself for the awesome role she was to play in this world. Her parents agreed and brought her to the Temple as an offering and as a precious gift of thanks for the goodness of the Lord to them.

Around this event Christians developed a celebration that only hearts aflame with love for the Lord Jesus Christ, her Son, could imagine and produce. They surrounded it with dignity and solemnity, in order to bring out its meaning, and show their infinite respect for Mary to the Lord. They told the event not simply as historians reporting a fact, but as troubadours of beauty and love. Their imagination soared beyond the confines of human limitations, and introduced humanity to a new order of things where our insight is sharpened and our sensibility purified. We are totally convinced that Mary's supreme dignity as future Bearer of God merits her not only to enter the Temple but to penetrate to the most sacred place of the Temple, the "Holy of Holies." This part of the temple is called the "Holy of Holies" because it contained the "Shekhina," the glory of God, with the Manna, the Rod of Aaron, and the Tablets of the Ten Commandments. Mary was no mere receptacle of signs and symbols, as was the Temple. She was more sacred and holier because she was to contain Glory Himself, the One whom nothing can contain, the God of all:

*The holy one, the all-blameless one,  
moved by the Holy Spirit,  
enters the Holy of Holies,  
to be fed by an angel.*

*She will become a most holy Temple  
to our most Holy God,  
Who by dwelling in her,  
sanctified the whole creation  
and divinized our fallen nature.  
(Office of the Feast)*

...Mary is a subject of joy, and of admiration and love. God is pleased at the sight of a beautiful little girl surrendering to a way of life which is a mystery even to herself. She walks straight to meet the high priest who is filled with joy at her sight. Angels "admire and rejoice," and Joachim and Anne forget their sorrow and overcome the breaking of their heart to look at her "with fullness of joy."

"Theotokos"  
Archbishop Joseph Raya