

Be it unto me according  
to thy word.



The Life of the Theotokos  
Camp St. Raphael  
2005  
Group 1



## Introduction: Rejoice O Unwedded Bride!

The story of Mary, the Most-Pure Mother of God, is veiled in mystery. Her complete life story is not written in the pages of the Bible, some of it is kept within the Tradition of the Church. In Holy Scripture, we first meet her as a young maiden, engaged to Joseph.

She is one of the main characters in the first chapters of the Gospel of Luke and in the 2nd chapter of the Gospel of John in the story of the wedding in Cana. Then, we find only a few sentences scattered throughout the later chapters of the Gospels. These few sentences place her in the company of the Apostles and among the group who followed our Lord during his earthly ministry. The Church has seen fit to hold within its Tradition a body of stories, prayers, services, and devotions to Our Lady. By the 4th Ecumenical Council of the Church in Ephesus, she was proclaimed to be the Theotokos, "God Bearer". It is through this collection of prayers, stories, and services that we get a full picture of the Blessed Mother of God.

We learn of the plan of God for her from

the very beginning of time through the prophetic images in the Old Testament Scriptures. We are drawn into the deep sorrow and longing for a child of her blessed parents Joachim and Anna. And then our hearts soar with joy over

God's gift of Mary to them (and us!). We watch as they carefully guard and raise her for three important years in their home, keeping every evil or impure thing away from her. We marvel at her freely choosing to give her life to God at such a tender age of 3 when, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, she climbs the 15 steps of the temple to enter into the Holy of Holies. We are intrigued to hear of her life in the Temple, praying, sewing, and being fed by the angels.

We are comforted by the familiar Bible stories of the Virgin Mary being engaged to Joseph, and being visited by the angel Gabriel. It is in this moment that the All-Pure Virgin becomes the Theotokos by saying "Yes" to

God, and being overshadowed by the Most High, conceives Jesus. We follow her on a visit to Elizabeth, her cousin and mother of John the Baptist. It is here that the first human lips speak the profound truth: A virgin has conceived, and her child is none other than Christ, the Lord! We travel through the doubts of



*The Fathers saw the burning bush as a type of the Ever-Virgin Mary, because it was burning and yet not consumed, just as she held the Divine fire in her womb and was not burned.*

Joseph, his comfort by an angelic visit, and on to Bethlehem, where Jesus is born in a cave, adored by humble shepherds. We hear of the presentation of Our Lord on his 40th day of life. The bittersweet words to Mary concerning the future, and the joy of Simeon and Anna when they see the baby and recognize him as The Lord.

Our next encounter with the Theotokos is at a wedding feast. Her child has grown into a man. She is concerned about the family giving the wedding. The Blessed Mother asks her Son to intervene. It is then, at His mother's request that Jesus performs His first miracle. We hear of her only a few more times after this. She is mentioned in the company of relatives and friends following Jesus as he travelled. And then we find her at the foot of the cross watching her son die. She is among the first to go to the tomb and find the tomb opened and his body gone, and she is among those to whom he first appeared. She is with the Apostles on the Mount of Olives when He ascends to the Father, and she is in their midst in the upper room at Pentecost as she awaited the Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

The Mother of Our God, lived in Jerusalem in the house of John, the beloved disciple to whom Jesus entrusted her from the Cross. She was an inspiration, comfort and witness to all around her. The faithful cherished her, often following her as she walked the steps of her Son's last days, praying at each stop. She traveled with John to Ephesus to spread the Gospel, and

returned with him to Jerusalem. The Church tells us that this is where her earthly life came to a close.

Following the example of the Apostles, who were very devoted to the Mother of God, the Fathers of the Church wrote beautiful prayers asking for her intercession. These prayers date from at least the (300's) 4th century AD. One of the most beautiful, the Akathist to the Holy Theotokos, was written by St. Romonos in the 5th century. Some of the Saints, who were Priests and Bishops of the Church, wrote homilies to teach their people about the Theotokos, and their beautiful words still teach us today. The prophecies woven into the Old Testament stories frame their writings. Images of the burning bush, the golden censer, the Holy table, the Ark, Jacob's ladder, and Gideon's fleece the Fathers have used to teach about the Theotokos. Much of the oral tradition concerning the Theotokos was preserved through these homilies, prayers

and hymns.

In the next few days, we will read about the life of The Blessed Theotokos, and Ever Virgin, Mary. We will also learn some of the prayers and hymns that the Church has written to her. She is the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of the Church, and she is our Mother. As her children, we ask her to save us by praying for us to her Son, who is God. She is our safe place, someone we can run to for comfort and help. She is always there for us, pointing the way to our true comfort, God.





# Day One

It is truly meet and right to bless thee, O Theotokos, who art ever-blessed and all-blameless, and the mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare with the Seraphim, thou who without stain barest God the Word, and art truly Theotokos: we magnify thee.



*On Mount Sinai, Moses saw the Bush that was burning, but not consumed. So too, the Theotokos bore the fire of Divinity, but was not consumed.*

*“As Moses looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed.”*

*Exodus 3:2*

God had a purpose for Mary even before she was born. Joachim and Anna kept their vow to God when they brought her to the Temple to live when she was three. In her first three years, they prepared her for her holy work. They protected her from all evil and made sure only pure things were near her.

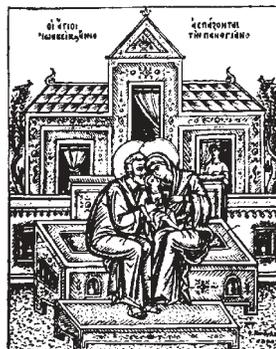
## The Childhood of the Theotokos

**M**ary is the name of the Theotokos. Theotokos is a big word that means “God Bearer” in Greek. This is to say that Mary is Jesus’ Mother. The Orthodox Church believes that Mary is also our mother, spiritually.

**M**ary had parents just like you and I. They were very good and loving people. They did everything to the Glory of God. They prayed a lot.

**J**oachim was a shepherd. He was from the tribe of Judah, from the kingly line of David. He was exceedingly rich, and had many sheep and other animals. It was his way of life to divide all that he had three ways. One part he gave to the poor so that they could eat and be clothed. A second part he gave to the Temple in order

to take care of the Priests who served God everyday so that they also could eat and be clothed. The last part was what he used to feed and clothe his household.



*Our Righteous ancestors, Joachim and Anna.*

And this was the way he lived from the time he was sixteen—on one third of his income! It was a simple and holy way to live, and he was a wonderful example to all who were around him. When he was 20, he took a wife, and her name was Anna. Anna was the daughter of Matthan, who was a Priest from the tribe of Levi.

She happily joined Joachim in his simple life. They loved each other very much. They had everything they needed, except children. In those days, the people believed that childless

couples had somehow displeased God, and therefore were not blessed by Him. To be childless meant that there would be none of the family line to see the Messiah when He came. The prospect that they would die childless made Joachim and Anna very sad.

**O**n a high feast day, around the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, Joachim and Anna went to the Temple to pray and to offer a sacrifice to God. Anna went into the court of women to pray. Joachim waited in line to offer his sacrifice. As his turn approached, the High Priest, Ruben saw Joachim and said "It is not lawful for you to stand among them that are offering sacrifice to God, because God has not blessed you with children! Cursed be everyone who does not have sons or daughters! Go, and do not return to offer a sacrifice until you have children." Well, this made Joachim more sad than he had ever been. He left the Temple crying. And Anna, hearing also the words of the High Priest, left the court of women crying. Joachim went to check the records of the House of Israel to see if indeed he was the only one who had no offspring. He was surprised to learn that he alone in Israel was childless. So, Joachim went up into the hills with his flocks. He was very sad, because he was 70 years old, and the chance for him to have children was very small. But he remembered that God blessed Abraham in his old age with a child, so Joachim prayed to God. "What have I done? Why have I not been granted children?"

**A**n angel of the Lord appeared to him and said "Fear not, Joachim, I have been sent to you by the Lord. He has heard your prayers and he has seen

your love for others. He has seen your shame and the reproach of childlessness brought against you. God does not deny you children as a punishment. He has done so to give a sign. He will give you a daughter which you will call Mary, and she shall be devoted to the Lord from her infancy.

**A**nna was also very sad. She was worried about Joachim, who stayed in the hills for many days. She worried he might be dead. She worried he might never come home. She prayed. As she prayed, she saw that all around her, there was life. Babies were everywhere! The sparrows in the Laurel trees, the fish in the water, all of the plants had flowers; everything seemed to be giving new life back to God. And she cried to God. She asked Him to allow her to also be fruitful. She promised to raise her child to love and serve God, and to give it back to God as a gift. As she was crying out to God, an angel appeared to her -- the same angel that had appeared to Joachim. "Anna, Anna, the Lord has heard your prayer! And you shall have a child. And this child shall be spoken of in all the world." The angel proclaimed. How happy

Anna was! She ran to the gate to meet Joachim. They were joyful over the news.

**I**n the due course of time, Anna's baby was born. A girl, whom they named Mary, as the angel had told Joachim to do. She was the source of great joy for her parents. They loved her beyond measure. When she was 9 months old, Anna placed her on the floor to see if she could stand. Behold! Mary took 7 steps back to her mother. Anna was so amazed at her beautiful child! She was a very careful mother. Anna wanted to protect



*The first steps of the Virgin Mary.*





Mary from every influence of evil. She made Mary's nursery into a sanctuary, and invited some of the young virgins, the daughters of the houses of Israel, to help care for her. Anna took great care that nothing unclean or common came into contact with Mary.

**J**oachim, Anna and Mary had many sweet happy days together as Mary grew. When Mary was three they took her to the Temple, as they had promised God, to dedicate her to the service of The Lord. The High Priest kissed and Blessed Mary. She was not scared; she did not look back or cry for her parents. Mary climbed up all of the stairs to the Temple by herself. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Zacharias, the High Priest, took Mary all the way into the Holy of Holies, where every year atonement prayers were offered on behalf of the people by the High priest alone. It was time for Joachim and Anna to keep their vow to God. They knew that God would take care of her. Mary stayed in the Temple, where she lived with other



virgins and widows who had given their lives to God. Joachim and Anna visited her often over the next several years until they died.

**E**veryone loved Mary. She had a sweet spirit, and she never said an unkind word to anyone. She spent much of her day in prayer. The angels fed her bread, and she grew very strong spiritually. Mary occupied part of her day with wool work, and became very talented in spinning and weaving. Her love for God and her neighbor was evident in everything she did. Some say she ate only the bread given to her by the angels and the food she was given by the Priests she distributed to the poor. It is said that she was loved by all the house of Israel.

**T**hrough her praying, fasting and almsgiving, she grew closer and closer to God. It became her desire to serve God all her life. She did not want to marry, devoting her life only to her husband. Instead she vowed to remain a virgin in the service of The Lord. Indeed the angel's words to Joachim on the mountain came true: that "she will be devoted to the Lord from her infancy".



## Day 1 Questions

1) Who were Mary's parents?

2) How did Joachim make a living?

3) How did Joachim choose to spend his money?

4) What does the way Joachim spent his money tell you about him?

5) What Tribe of Israel was Anna from?

6) What Tribe of Israel was Joachim from?

7) Why did God give Joachim and Anna a child in their old age?

8) Why does the Church refer to Joachim and Anna as the Righteous Ancestors of God?

9) How did Mary's parents raise her?





## Day Two

Troparion tone 4

Today is the beginning of our salvation/ and the manifestation of the mystery which is from eternity./ The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin,/ and Gabriel announces grace./ So with him let us also cry to the Mother of God:/ Rejoice, thou who art full of grace!/ The Lord is with thee.

Kontakion tone 8

Queen of the Heavenly Host, Defender of our souls,/ we thy servants offer to thee songs of victory and thanksgiving,/ for thou, O Mother of God, hast delivered us from dangers./ But as thou hast invincible power, free us from conflicts of all kinds/ that we may cry to thee: Rejoice, unwedded Bride!

From the Liturgy of the Feast of the Annunciation



In the book of Judges we read the account of the dew which appeared miraculously on Gideon's fleece. So, too, the Dew Christ, appeared on the Living Fleece the Theotokos.

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel."

Isaiah 7:14

Mary was obedient to the Priests in the Temple. She had made a vow to remain a virgin, but she obediently became engaged to Joseph. She trusted God to take care of her. Joseph was obedient to the call of God through the voice of the Priests to become the guardian for the young virgin, Mary. Finally, Mary was obedient to the call of God to become the Theotokos. Through her obedience, Mary is the New Eve because she said yes to God.

## Life in the Temple. Life with Joseph.

The parents of the Theotokos had given her three years of love and nurturing. They had kept all impure things away from her. This was a good and Holy foundation for her life. When she was brought to the Temple, God inspired the High Priest to take her up into the Holy of Holies. This was the location of the High Altar, a place where God Himself came to meet the High Priest and accept an offering once a year for the sins of all the people. On all other days, it was forbidden to enter therein--especially for women. Holy tradition holds that not only did Our Lady go into the Holy of Holies on that first day, but that she spent a lot of time there while she lived in the Temple. It is said that the

angels fed her bread, and she was in prayer much of the time. Her life was simple, and revolved around the work of the Temple, which was to love and serve All Mighty God.

Mary was not alone; she lived in the Temple with other young virgins and widows who had given their lives to the service of the Lord. She was loved by all, because she was kind, gentle and loving toward everyone. Her days were occupied by prayer and needlework. She became very adept at weaving and spinning. The Most-Pure Virgin was educated in the community of pious virgins, reading Holy Scriptures, doing handiwork, prayer, and growing up with love towards God. How she loved this life!

How she loved God! Her every thought and desire was to draw closer and closer to God. She dedicated her life to God and vowed to remain a virgin in His service for all of her life.

**N**ow, girls were only allowed to live in the Temple until they were around 12 years old. At that time, they were given back to their families to either be married or kept and supported by the family. When Mary was 14, the Pharisees remarked that it was not according to the custom to allow a woman of that age to live in the Temple of God. Her parents had died a few years before, and so there was no one from her immediate family to care for Mary, or help her to arrange a marriage. The High Priest, Zacharias, knew of her vow to remain a virgin, and he wanted to support her vow. He remembered the prophecy of Isaiah: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) Knowing that the evil one also knew of the prophecies, Zacharias was sure that Satan was watching all virgins, in order to try to ruin God's plan. Zacharias needed to find a way to protect Mary from Satan, and at the same time allow her to keep her vow to God. He did not know what to do. He prayed to God for an answer. God revealed to him a plan that would protect Mary and yet allow her to remain a virgin. He was to call all of the widowers to bring their rods to the Temple. God himself would give a sign as to which man should be entrusted with the Most-Pure Virgin.

**W**hen Joseph heard that all of the widowers were to bring their rods into the Temple to be

used to choose a man to marry one of the virgins, he was embarrassed. He was an old man- with children her age and older. How could he have a wife so young? But Joseph was a pious man, and he obeyed the call from the priests to bring his rods to the Temple.

**T**he High Priest took all of the rods into the Temple and into the Holy of Holies. There they remained over night, while the High Priest prayed. Mary prayed, too. She prayed for a guardian who would protect her and allow her to keep her vow of virginity to God. The next morning, Zacharias, the High Priest, took the rods out of the Temple, and returned them to their owners. But none produced the sign. Dismayed, he prayed to God: "Where is the sign?". An angel answered: "There is one rod left in the Temple, the shortest one, go and get it, and the sign will come."

Zacharias did as the angel had told him to do, and behold! As he handed the rod to Joseph, it budded! This was God's miraculous sign that Joseph, a carpenter from Nazareth, was to be the guardian of Mary, Ever Virgin.

**J**oseph took Mary to his home. She tended and cared for the sons and daughters of Joseph, some of which were to become Apostles and Myrrh bearing women. Our Lady prayed much and gave as she could to the poor. Always her focus was on God, and in this way she kept her body, mind and soul pure. As was the custom for betrothed women, she stayed at home most of the time, only venturing out of the house to attend Divine services, and always in the company of kinsfolk. In this way, she was



*Blessed Joseph, the guardian and protector of the Theotokos and infant Jesus.*





protected by Joseph so that her vow to remain a virgin would not be broken. Joseph went about his business of carpentry, often working in the outlying districts by the sea.

**N**ot long after Mary left the Temple, the Priests decided to have a new veil made. The veil was the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple. The High Priest called five pure virgins of the tribe of David to spin the thread and to weave the veil. One of the virgins was Mary. The new veil was to be the very veil that was torn from top to bottom at the moment that Christ died on the cross! It was, in part, by Our Lady's hands that the veil was woven. By lot it fell to her to spin the pure purple thread for the veil. Purple was the color of royalty, wealth, power, and priestly dignity. In the book of Daniel we learn that the king dressed himself in purple, and in the Psalms it is mentioned that the king and the queen are robed in purple.

**W**hen the thread was given to Mary, the other virgins said to her "Since thou art the last and humble--and younger than all--thou hast deserved to receive the purple." And then they called her, with a mocking voice, "Queen of Virgins". While this was happening, an angel of the Lord appeared and said "What you have said is not a taunt, but a true prophecy!" At the sight and words of the angel, the virgins trembled, and asked Mary's pardon and that she pray for them.

## Be it unto me according to thy Word: Mary says "Yes!" to God.

**N**ow in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of

His father David. "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."



**T**hen Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. "Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. "For with God nothing will be impossible." Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it

be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. Luke 1:26-38

The story of the annunciation occurred after Mary lived in Joseph's house for six months. The angel Gabriel is sent by God with the most wonderful, and also the most mysterious message. A virgin will conceive a child, and not just any child, but the very son of God! In the Akathist hymn, St. Romonos gives words and thoughts to Gabriel's mission. He has the angel pondering God himself, uncontainable by the vast heavens, being formed in the flesh and contained in the womb of a human.

At Gabriel's appearance, Mary dropped what she was doing, the spinning of the purple thread for the Temple veil, to hear the words the angel spoke. As the discussion between Mary and the angel continues, The Most-Pure Virgin asks to know how this will occur. Her question is not asked out of disbelief, nor out of fear. Mary has spent her life developing a relationship with God, she has read and studied the scriptures, attended Divine services, fasted, given alms, and spent many hours in prayer. During the time she lived in the Temple, she was fed bread by the angels, so it is not Gabriel's sudden appearance that bothers her. Rather, it is the statement he makes to her: "You have been chosen by God to bear His Son." She is simply asking how this request of God is to be fulfilled. The angel tells her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and the Power of God would overshadow her. As soon as Mary hears this, she agrees. She will be the Mother of God's Son. She tells the angel, "Let it be just as you say."

The Fathers of the Church taught that Mary conceived through her ears, by hearing the very word of God. This means that as soon as she agreed, that by the word of God, she conceived. The child, Jesus, will be God's own Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by a human father. The Orthodox Study Bible says that "Mary's faithful response makes her the highest model of obedience to God. The Incarnation of the Son of God is not only the work of the Holy Trinity, but also the work of the will and the faith of the Virgin. Therefore, the Virgin Mary is honored not only because God chose her, or because she bore the Son of God in the flesh, but also because she herself chose to believe and obey God firmly."

After the angel departed, Mary went back to work on the spinning of the thread for the veil. This was also holy work. She finished the spinning of the true purple thread and delivered it to the Temple before she departed to visit her cousin Elizabeth.



## Day 2 Questions

1) How did Mary spend her day while she lived in the Temple?

2) Who fed her? What was she fed? Where was she fed?





- 3) What is the Holy of Holies?
  
- 4) Why was it hard for the High Priest to decide what to do with Mary once she reached the age of womanhood?
  
- 5) How did God choose a guardian for Mary?
  
- 6) How did Joseph feel when he was asked to bring his rod to the Temple as a possible spouse for one of the virgins? What did he do?
  
- 7) What was the sign?
  
- 8) What was the important task Mary was asked to do for the Temple?
  
- 9) What did the other virgins say to Mary when she was given the true purple to spin?
  
- 10) What did the angel say to the virgins at their taunting of Mary?
  
- 11) What is significant about the color purple?
  
- 12) Who gives Mary the important message about God's plan for her?
  
- 13) What was Mary's answer?
  
- 14) Who is to be the father of Mary's baby?

# What's your cause?

It seems these days everyone has a "cause". Almost everyone you meet is wearing a wrist band that bears words to remind them of their "cause". Not only are the words on the band significant, but the color of the band may mean something, too. Together, the words on the band and its color prompt the wearer to think about and hopefully be motivated to *do* something each time he looks at it. Sometimes, a portion of the price paid for the band is donated to help fund the "cause". Lance Armstrong, who started the phenomenon, donates the proceeds to cancer research. Other bands carry messages to prompt us to "love", seek "peace", have "faith", and many other positive works.

So it is with Orthodox Christians. We too, have a "cause". Our cause is to draw as close as we can to God. We do this through prayer, fasting, and works of mercy (almsgiving). We cannot do this alone--we need lots of help!! God Himself will help us when we pray. And He has given us the Church, and the Saints to help us on our journey. The Church is there always to nurture and feed us spiritually. It is here, on earth, and we can touch, see, smell, feel, hear, and taste. Through the Church, we are the Body of Christ. The Saints are our spiritual siblings, our heavenly family. They are the example of how to live. They are also our cheering section, calling us to spiritual perfection and praying for us always. The first among the Saints is Our Lady, the Most-Pure Mother of God. She is truly our Mother. She loves all of beyond measure. It is her joy to pray without ceasing for her children.

The Orthodox Church has always maintained that "what we pray is what we believe". This means that the prayers of the Church say in beautiful words what we believe to be true. Our theology is expressed verbally when we pray. The prayers we pray to Mary explain who she is, what she has done, and what she continues to do. We call her in prayer the Theotokos, because she is the one who bore God in her womb. We hold her in high honor because she had perfect love for and faith in God, so much so that she agreed to be the Mother of God. We continue to ask her to pray for us, because we know that she loves us, as her own children, and because we know that Jesus loves His Mother. He loves her so much that He hears her prayers very clearly, and through their special relationship of Mother and Son, her prayers find special favor with Him.

The band you are wearing is purple, as a reminder that Mary's child, Jesus is the King of kings. And the words: Most Holy Theotokos Save Us! are taken from the some of the prayers of the Church, most notably, the Akathist Hymn. We are not worshipping Mary when we pray these words, but rather, we are recognizing that Jesus was her child, and her agreement to bear Him was the beginning of our salvation. We are crying to her as our Mother to save us by her most holy prayers. We fully understand that it is God who saves us.

Each time you look at your band, say a prayer...ask the Mother of God to pray for the world. Ask her to comfort those in need or sickness or sorrow. Ask her to pray for your life and your soul. She is waiting to pray for all of us, like a loving and kind mother.





## Day Three

The Virgin today gives birth to the Transcendent One, / and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One, / Angels and Shepherds glorify Him, / and wise men journey with a star. / For a young Child is born for us, Who is the eternal God. Kontakion of the Feast of the Nativity tone 3

He that was born before the morning star of Father without mother / is today incarnate on earth of thee without father. / A star tells the glad tidings to the Magi; / while Angels and shepherds praise thy seedless childbirth, O thou who art full of grace. Kontakion of the Synaxis tone 6



In a dream Jacob saw a ladder ascending to Heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. The Theotokos is the ladder, stretching from earth to Heaven, for on it God descended to man, having become incarnate.

(Genesis 28:10-17)

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel." Isaiah 7:14

Blessed Elizabeth is the first human to utter the words naming Mary as "the Mother of my Lord". This announcement moves Mary to praise God in the prayer the Magnificat. At Jesus' birth, the angels announce the glad tidings of the virgin birth to the shepherds. Blessed Simeon makes a bittersweet announcement to Mary about the work of her Son, and the piercing of her soul with a sword.

## The Mother of God visits Elizabeth

**N**ow Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! "But why is this granted to me, that the



*Mary greets her cousin Elizabeth*

mother of my Lord should come to me? "For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. "Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

**A**nd Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done

great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever." And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house. Luke 1:39-56

## The Theotokos is Jesus' Mother!

**A**nd it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

**N**ow there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. "And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!" So it was, when the angels had gone away from

them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

**N**ow when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death





before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel." And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign

which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. Luke 2



## Day 3 Questions

- 1) How does Elizabeth react to Mary's greeting?
- 2) What does Elizabeth say to Mary?
- 3) What is unique about these words?

4) Name some things for which Mary exalts God in her prayer: The Magnificat. "My soul magnifies the Lord..."

5) Why did Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem?

6) What great thing happens while they are in Bethlehem?

7) What does the angel announce to the shepherds?

8) When the shepherds came to see and worship Jesus, what did Mary do?

9) When Jesus was 40 days old, what did they do?

10) Who were Simeon and Anna?

11) What was the prophecy that Simeon had for Jesus and Mary?

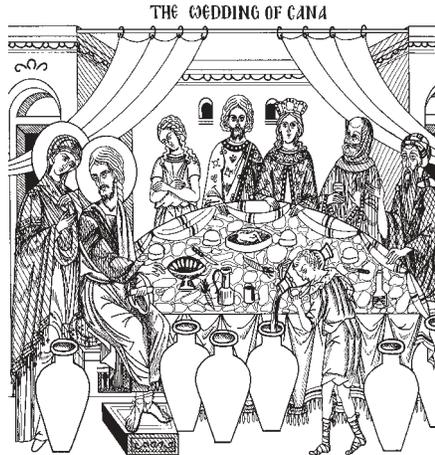




## Day Four

We fly to your patronage, O holy Mother of God; despise not our prayers in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.

A short prayer for help from the 3rd century



In the book of Revelation, there stands an angel before the Throne of God, swinging a censer, representing the prayers of the Saints rising up to God. This is seen as a symbol of the Theotokos, for it is her prayers that find special favor before her Son.

"Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand." Revelation 8:3-4

Mary is the mediatrix, that is, she is the intercessor for all mankind. The Church teaches that she is our mother, and we can run to her in prayer seeking her motherly protection. Because she has a special relationship with Jesus, as His mother, her requests are heard by Him quite clearly. It is through her prayers on our behalf that she tends and cares for us.

## The Mother of God Intercedes for the Family at the Wedding in Cana

**O**n the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece.

Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then that which is inferior; but you have kept the good wine until now." John 2

The story of the wedding in Cana is a beautiful picture of the relationship that Mary had with her Son, Jesus. It also provides further insight into the compassionate heart and the faith of the Theotokos. Mary is very concerned about the family hosting the marriage feast. What an embarrassment it is to run out of wine for their guests. Without wine, the feast would come to a premature end. The Mother of God knows just what to do. She asks her Son to intervene.

Jesus loves His Mother. He addresses her in the most reverent way, calling her "woman". This manner of address does not translate well from the Greek to modern English. The Greek word (γυναί) gynai is a very special title, used in reference to royalty. It is better translated as "My Lady". He reminds her that they are guests, and not the hosts. It is not therefore their responsibility to provide for the guests. He tells her, that it is not yet time for Him to reveal Himself performing miracles in public. Yet He does not tell her "no".

The Mother of God is very confident in how her Son will react. She knows He has a heart and compassion for mankind. Her actions reflect neither impatience with Jesus' words, nor doubt that He will ultimately grant her request. Instead, she directs her next words to the servants: "Whatever He tells you to do...do it!" Without rolling His eyes, or making an exasperated sigh, Jesus complies with His Mother's wishes. It is

His love and compassion for His Mother and also the wedding couple and guests that move Him to act.

St. Romanos paraphrases the Gospel account like this: *"When Christ was present at the marriage feast, the crowd of guests were feasting sumptuously when the supply of wine failed them, and their joy was turned to distress. The bridegroom was upset and the cupbearers muttered unceasingly....Recognizing it, the all-holy Mary came at once and said to her Son: 'They have no wine, but I beg thee, my Son, show thou canst do all things, Thou who hast in wisdom created all things.'"*

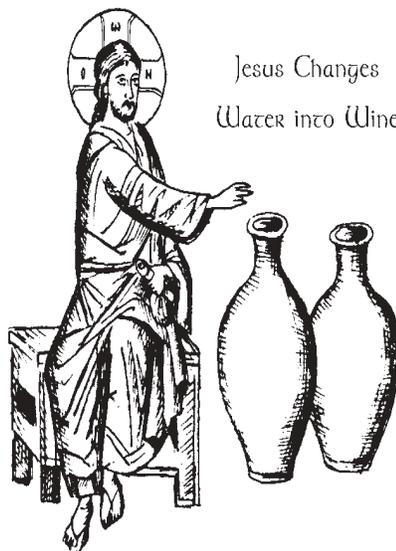
And so it is that Jesus tells the servants to fill the waterpots

with water. He does this for a couple of reasons. First, so that there can be no doubt in the minds of the servants that they are witness to a miracle. The pots have never had wine in them, so it could not be the case that Jesus was simply taking the last dregs of wine and diluting them with water. No, He will take the pure water that they have themselves drawn and placed into pots expressly set aside in the home for water to be used for purification of both body

and vessels, and turn it into wine. Of the miracle performed in their sight, there can be no doubt!

After He has turned the water into wine, He tells the servants to dip into the pots and take a cup of it to the head steward to taste. This they do. And when the steward tastes the contents of the cup he is astonished. Not at

Jesus Changes  
Water into Wine





the miracle, of which he has no knowledge, but of the quality of the wine! For this wine is far and away superior to the wine that the family had been serving. Now the servants are all the more amazed, for not only is the contents in the pots really wine, but the best wine. They alone knew from where the wine came!

**S**t. Romanos reminds us that this miracle is a foretelling of Jesus' giving His own precious Blood for us and our partaking of it at the Holy Eucharist. *"When Christ, as a sign of His power, clearly changed the water into wine, all the crowd rejoiced, for they considered the taste marvelous. Now we all partake of Christ at the banquet in the Church, with holy joy from the wine changed into His blood, praising the great Bridegroom, Mary's Son, the Logos before all time, Who took the form of a servant, and Who in wisdom created all things. Rejoice, thou who hast borne the Grape of Life, Who hath poured forth the wine of salvation!"*



## Day 4 Questions

- 1) Why was Mary concerned at the Wedding feast?
- 2) What did she do to help the family?
- 3) Why did she want to help, according to St. Romanos?
- 4) How is the way Jesus addresses His Mother misinterpreted by modern English speakers?

- 5) Is Jesus speaking disrespectfully to His Mother? Is He reprimanding her?
- 6) How do you know that the Theotokos is confident that Jesus will grant her request?
- 7) What does the Theotokos tell the servants to do?
- 8) Why does Jesus ask them to fill the waterpots with water, rather than the empty wine pitchers?
- 9) What does the steward have to say about the new wine he is brought by the servants?
- 10) What does this story tell you about the relationship between Mary and Jesus?
- 11) Is the Blessed Virgin still one who will intercede with her Son on behalf of men?





In giving birth thou didst keep thy virginity,/ and in thy dormition thou didst not forsake the world, O Mother of God./ Thou didst pass on to life, since thou art the Mother of Life,/ and by thine intercessions thou redeemest our souls from death.

Troparion for the feast of the Dormition tone 1

The grave and death could not hold the Mother of God,/ who is sleepless in her intercessions and an unchanging hope in her mediations./ For as the Mother of Life she was transferred to life/ by Him Who dwelt in her ever-virgin womb. Kontakion for the Feast of the Dormition tone 2

## Day Five



In the Divine Liturgy, the Divine Food, is offered on the Holy Table (Altar). So, too, the Theotokos is the Holy table which bore the Bread of Life. (Exodus 25:23-30)

The Fathers of the Church have seen the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies and symbols in the Theotokos. At His presentation in the Temple, Simeon gives Mary, Ever-Virgin a prophecy concerning her and the death of her Son. *"Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."* Luke 2:34-35

## Mary lives the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Jesus

Even though she is not always mentioned by name in the Gospels as being in the company that followed Jesus during His earthly ministry, Holy Tradition places her there. She most certainly was among those who followed Jesus into Jerusalem in triumph and was with Him during His last week on earth. She who had grown up reading and studying the Scriptures knew full well the prophecies regarding the Messiah. She heard the words He spoke to His Apostles.



Mary at the foot of the cross.

She knew what was to come in the days ahead, but she never doubted that her Son was the Messiah, and as God would rise from the dead. The pain she endured from His betrayal to His death must have been intense. In fact, the Fathers of the Church teach that the pains of childbirth that Mary had avoided at Jesus' birth, she suffered at His death. How heart-wrenching it must have been for her to live through the fulfillment of the prophecy given to her by the Elder Simeon all those years before! Yet, she stood

by her Son until the end. John records the actions of the Theotokos at the foot of the cross in his Gospel.

**N**ow there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. John 19:25-27.

**N**ow many outside the Orthodox faith would have us believe that Jesus had other siblings that were Mary's biological children. The Church has never believed this to be true, and in fact has vigorously taught that Jesus, alone, was Mary's only biological child. The "other children" of the Theotokos, the Church has always held, were Joseph's children by his first wife. St. Athanasios of Alexandria teaches that by entrusting the beloved Apostle, John, with her care shows that Jesus was her only son. For, why, if she had other children, would they not care for her when Jesus was gone. No, He, with great effort and pain, makes provision for her care before He dies.

**I**t is in this same moment that Mary becomes the Mother of us all. St. George of Nicomedia writes concerning Jesus placing His Mother

under the care of John: "Hence, Mary is constituted as a guide for the disciple. She is Mother not only to John, but to all other disciples who will honor her as their Mother." So, if we are true disciples of Christ, we are true children of the Blessed Virgin.

**M**ary is among the group of women who arrive at the grave to find the stone rolled away and Jesus' body gone. The angel tells them He has risen. As the others run to tell the Apostles the good news, Mary is the first to see her risen Son. Jesus appears to her and speaks to her. She is with those assembled in the upper room when Jesus enters through the closed door. Mary is there when Thomas first doubts, and then is convinced by the Lord Himself again appearing and allowing Thomas to touch his wounds, and believe.

**T**he icons of the Ascension and Pentecost place her not only present, but front and center. Mary watches as Jesus is lifted up to heaven on the cloud. Her hands stretch upward in the attitude of prayer. The icon of the Ascension places her in the center just below Jesus because she is the personification of the Church. It is through her intercessory prayer and faith that she shows us what the Church, the Body of Christ is supposed to be. It is up to us, to become useful members in that body, following after the holy example of Mary, Ever-Virgin, the Mother of God and our Mother.



*Mary at the Ascension of Jesus.*



*Mary with the Apostles at Pentecost.*





## The Dormition of the Theotokos

**A**fter Jesus died, rose, and ascended to heaven, Mary stayed in St. John's house near Jerusalem. Now some say that The Ever Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, lived in the house of St. John the Evangelist 15 years after the ascension of our Lord. She spent her days helping the poor and those in need. She also encouraged all of the apostles in the work Jesus had given them to do. She was a "mother" to all of them.

**M**any hours of Mary's days were spent in prayer and worship. She often went alone to the Mount of Olives to pray, just as her Son had done. As she prayed, she remembered the wonderful miracles and healings that He had performed for people. Besides her prayers alone, Mary also prayed with the apostles and all those who loved Jesus. She was an example to everyone. In her, people could see what it meant to love God and follow His commandments. And in her they could see the joy that comes from being close to Him.

**O**ne day as Mary was praying at the Mount of Olives, an angel told her that she would die soon. (We know that many saints have had the great gift of knowing when they would die. This gives them time to prepare for their death, and to make themselves ready to meet God.) So when Mary heard the angel's words she was not sad or afraid. She wanted to be with God. She was ready to see the face of her Son again. After the angel departed, Mary prayed. She asked her Son to grant her to see the Apostles one last time.

**M**ary went home to John's house and made preparations for her funeral. She asked John to make sure she would be buried in Gethsemane, near the Mount of Olives. This was the place where her parents, Joachim and Anna, were buried. It was also the place where Joseph was buried.

**A**s Mary lay dying peacefully, the apostles gathered around her. She asked them how they had gotten there. They described the great cloud that had miraculously transported them to St. John's door. She marveled at how Jesus had answered her prayer. The Apostles wept with sorrow because they would not have Mary with them much longer. Yet they felt peace and joy, because she herself was full of peace and joy. She blessed each one of them, and told them to continue their work with courage and strength. Then she closed her eyes and it was as though she fell into a deep sleep. As she died, the apostles heard angels singing. They saw a radiant light cover her face, and smelled a sweet fragrance coming from her body.

**T**he apostles carried Mary's body on a platform, sometimes called a funeral bier, toward Gethsemane. As they went along, the crowds followed them and sang holy songs as they carried candles. Some of the Jews tried to disrupt the procession, but God surrounded the bier and the procession with a cloud, like a wall of protection. The persecutors were struck with blindness by the holy angels. A Jewish priest grabbed at the bier, trying to turn it over and thereby cast the body



of the Mother of God to the ground. Instantly, his arms were cut off by the sword of an angel! His severed limbs hung from the bier, held fast by his own hands clasping the cloth which covered it. In that moment, he cried, repenting: "Verily, He that was brought forth by thee is the true God, O Mother of God, Ever-Virgin, Mary." St. Peter went over to the man. He told him to touch the wounded ends of his arms to his severed limbs and ask for the Theotokos to pray to her Son to heal him. This is what the man did, and instantly, he was healed, with only red lines around his arms. By her prayers, the man was healed! Mary was laid to rest in a tomb at Gethsemane, just as she had asked to be.

**T**he apostle Thomas was not with the others when Mary died. He was preaching the Gospel in India at that time. On the third day after the burial, Thomas was suddenly caught up in a cloud and transported to Jerusalem. Thomas was filled with grief at having not been present to see the Theotokos one last time and to help bury her. He asked the other apostles to let him see and say good-bye to the "mother" he had loved very much. So, together, the apostles opened the tomb. They were amazed to find that Mary's body was not there. There were only the cloths her body had been wrapped in, and the same lovely fragrance that had come from her body when she died.

**G**od had prevented Thomas from being caught up in a cloud and transported with the others. This was so that, just as the Apostles had been more greatly assured of the Resurrection of Jesus, through the doubting of Thomas, they now learn of the bodily assumption into heaven of the Theotokos, through the delay of Thomas. The apostles prayed that God would show them where Mary's body had been taken. As they prayed, they saw a vision of Mary in heaven, surrounded by angels. They thanked God with great joy. Now they knew that Mary was once again with her Son.



## Day 5 Questions

- 1) Who did Jesus have a conversation with at the foot of the cross just before He died?
- 2) What was the conversation about?
- 3) Why was this conversation significant?
- 5) What did Mary do in Jerusalem nearly everyday?





6) What message did the angel give Mary in the garden of Gethsemane while she was praying?

7) What was final request to her Son?

8) How was this request answered?

9) Describe how Mary died.

10) How did the Apostles react?

11) What miraculous things happened at Mary's funeral?

12) Why was Thomas not with them?

13) When they opened the tomb for Thomas to see the Theotokos one more time, what did they find?

14) When they prayed to God to show them where her body had been taken, what did they see?



**Pray for us Most Holy Theotokos!  
Camp St. Raphael 2005**