

Selections on the Dormition of the Theotokos

THE THEOTOKOS DELIVERS HER SOUL, FULL OF LIGHT

It was the Lord's day, and the fifteenth day of the month of August, when that blessed hour that all were awaiting drew near. It was the third hour of the day (9:00 a.m.). In the room a number of lamps were burning. The holy Apostles were offering praise to God. Upon a beautifully adorned bed, the Theotokos was lying and preparing herself for her blessed end when her beloved Son and Lord would come to her. She then greeted each Apostle with a blessing.

She then stretched her hands to heaven and prayed, saying, "I adore, praise and glorify Thy much to be praised name, O Lord, because Thou hast looked upon the lowliness of Thine handmaiden, and because Thou that art mighty hast done great things for me; and, behold, all generations shall call me blessed [Lk. 1:48]. After this prayer, she said to the Apostles, "Cast incense and pray, because Christ is coming with a host of angels; and, behold, Christ is at hand, sitting on a throne of cherubim." When they had prayed, there was thunder from heaven and there came a fearful voice, as if of chariots; and, behold, a multitude of a host of angels and powers, and a voice, as if of the Son of Man was heard.

Then there shone in the room an ineffable light of divine glory which dimmed the lamps. Those that were granted this vision were awestruck. Many beheld the roof of the apartment open and the glory of the Lord descending from heaven. It was Christ the King of Glory with hosts of angels and archangels, and all the heavenly powers. Also with them were the holy fathers and prophets who prophesied of old concerning the pure Virgin, and all the righteous souls, approached His immaculate Mother."

Saint John of Damascus also mentions that some of the most famous and righteous prophets of the Old Testament were in attendance. The text of Pseudo-John, in describing the events, records that the Theotokos' mother, Anna, and her cousin Elisabeth appeared with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob} and David and all the choirs of saints, singing praising and venerating the body of the Mother of the Lord.

BE UNTO ME ACCORDING. TO THY WORD

At the sight of the approach of her Son, the Theotokos cried with great joy unto her son, "My soul doth magnify the Lord and my Spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour (Luke 1:46-47).

And, behold, a stream of light came upon the Virgin because of the presence of her Son, and all the powers of the heavens fell down and adored Him. He then said, "Mary". And she answered, "Here am I, Lord."

Saint Gregory Palamas comments on the love between Son and Mother, thus: "Wherefore, she loves and is loved in return more than any other ... for He was her only Son. Moreover, she alone among women gave birth knowing no spouse, so that the love of

Him, that was of her flesh, was twofold. Who will the Only-Begotten love more than His Mother, He Who came forth from Her in an indescribable manner, without a father, in this last age, even as He came forth from the Father without a mother before the ages? He that came down and fulfilled the law, how could He not multiply the honor due His Mother above and beyond the law?"

And the Lord remained by her and said, "Behold, presently thy soul will be translated to the heavens, to the treasures of My Father in exceeding brightness, where there is peace and joy of the holy angels, and many other things. Then the Mother of the Lord answered and said to Him, "Lay Thy right hand upon me, O Lord, and bless me." Then the Lord stretched forth His undefiled right hand and blessed His Mother.

Saint Cosmas then speaks of the Virgin interceding for us. *As she departed, the Virgin without spot, lifted up her hands--those hands that had held God incarnate in their embrace--and, with the boldness of a Mother to her Son, she said, "Keep unto all ages those whom Thou hast made mine and who cry aloud unto Thee, 'We, who have been delivered, praise the one and only Creator and exalt Him above all forever."*

Saint John of Damascus also speaks of how the Law-Giver fulfilled His law concerning mothers. *He Who, taking flesh, strangely made His dwelling in thy pure womb, Himself received thine all-holy spirit and, as a Son paying His due, He gave it rest with Himself.*

At this point, St. Cosmas describes the scene in this manner. *The angelic powers were amazed as they looked in Sion upon their own Master, bearing in His hands the soul of a woman: for as befitted a Son, He said to her who without spot had borne Him, "Come, honored among women, and be glorified together with thy Son and God."*

With such triumphant hymns did the heavenly hosts accompany the holy soul of the Theotokos as she went in the arms of the Lord to the dwelling above. The holy Apostles, who were found worthy to behold this vision, followed the Mother of God with tender eyes, as once they had followed the Lord when He ascended from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9). For a long time now they looked steadfastly toward heaven as if they were in a swoon. When they came to themselves, the disciples worshipped the Lord Who had raised His Mother's soul to heaven with glory, and they surrounded her bed with weeping.

It must be remembered that it is not the Assumption that the Holy Orthodox Church observes on the 15th of August, but the Dormition (Keemeesis) Or "falling- asleep" of the holy Virgin. This most sacred Feast marks the falling asleep of the Mother of God which was followed by the translation of her sacred body three days later into heaven. This Feast, therefore, marks her soul being commended into her Son's hands and the short sojourn of her body in the tomb. Death is not the annihilation of our existence, but a passage from earth to heaven.

Taken from: The Life of the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos

Published by Holy Apostles Convent and Dormition Skete