

ST BASIL GREEK MELKITE CATHOLIC CHURCH
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THE ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS TO THE TEMPLE

IT IS PROBABLY SAFE TO SAY that most people would prefer to read a story than an academic treatise. Both forms might be conveying the same point, but a narrative is likely to be more compelling – and more memorable – than a dissertation.

The story about the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, the Great Feast we celebrate today, is found in *The Protoevangelion of James*, a second century telling of the birth and infancy of the Theotokos. We know that in the first and second centuries AD a number of books were written about Christ and His Mother. Some were accepted by all the local Churches as presenting a true portrait of the Messiah. Others were rejected because the Christ they portrayed was not the one who had been preached by the Apostles. In some He was a Gnostic philosopher, in other a magician. We call these “apocryphal gospels” and do not see them as the voice of the Holy Spirit to us.

Still other books, *The Protoevangelion of James* among them, were revered by the Christians of their day but not considered canonical Scriptures because their content was not at the heart of the apostolic proclamation or the early Creeds. Their subject matter treated things like Jesus’ physical appearance, or the early periods of Christ’s life not covered in the Gospels. They may be true but not central to our faith.

The Source of This Feast: The prayers and icon of this Feast focus on two elements of the *Protoevangelion* story. In the first, Mary at the age of three is presented to God in the temple at Jerusalem accompanied, as the text reads, “by the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled.” There “the priest received her, kissed her and blessed her.” After describing the scene, the *Protoevangelion* continues: “And Mary was in the temple of the Lord like a dove that is being nurtured: and she received food from the hand of an angel” (8:1). The image of the Virgin receiving food from an angel, often represented in our icon of the Feast, points to the spiritual environment in which Mary was raised and which would prepare the holy Virgin for her future role as Theotokos.

The second vignette is shown in the upper right-hand corner of this icon. There Mary sits in the innermost sanctuary of the temple, the Holy of Holies, ministered to by an angel. According to Jewish Law, no one entered the Holy of Holies: “only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance” (Heb 9:8). It is unthinkable that a child would be not only allowed there but actually live there as the *Protoevangelion* avows.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are given a reason why no one was allowed into the Holy of Holies: “The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning” (Heb 9:9). By placing Mary in the Holy of Holies, the *Protoevangelion* is saying that the way into the Holy Place – the presence of God – now is disclosed. It is Christ, who would be incarnate in the womb of this same Mary, the Theotokos. For this reason, the story and its celebration have been embraced by the Tradition as affirmations of the Gospel.

On this feast in the Christian East, Mary’s coming into the temple is portrayed as an “Entrance” rather than as a “Presentation” as in the West. This term puts us in mind of things like the “Great Entrance” at our Divine Liturgy or the Entrance Procession in the Western rites. Her coming is not the blessing of an insignificant child given in a “side chapel,” as it were, but a festive “prelude” or “overture” inaugurating the main event, the New Testament itself.

Our celebration of this feast focuses on Mary as the temple of the incarnate God, the one for whom the Jerusalem temple was only a prefiguration. This feast celebrates the fulfillment of His prophecy. God’s people will no longer reach heaven via Jerusalem; rather the heavens have been opened to us and God’s temple, the Theotokos, is become for us the way to heaven through her childbearing. (*NovLeaflets*2019)

SUNDAY 10TH AFTER THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS
Saturday, November 23 & Sunday, November 24, 2019

WEEKLY SERVICES

Daily Liturgy: Monday-Friday at 8:30AM
Holy Liturgy: Saturday at 4:30PM, Sunday at 11:00AM
Matins/ Orthos: Every Sunday at 9:00AM
Holy Confession: Every Monday at 4-6PM
Vespers: Every Saturday at 3:00PM
Holy Rosary: Every Sunday at 10:30AM

SPEEDY RECOVERY

Please continue to pray for our convalescing friends, including Archdeacon George Yany, Wael and his son Jordan Barahmeh, Michael Klockowski, Eugene Hutchinson, Maggy Attalah, Nancy Gazzal, Rose Pawlinga, Jean Benoit and Fouad Marji. Please notify Fr. Shofany in case of illness.

WEEKLY OFFERINGS: THANK YOU!

Weekly Collection Nov. 16/17: \$ 405.00
St. Pauly Textile: \$ 00.00
Cheese Sale: \$ 10.00
Memorial Offering: \$ 20.00

** SAVE THE DATES **

St. Basil Greek Melkite Catholic Church will Welcome our beloved Bishop Nicholas Samra for a Parish visit from **Friday, November 22 through Monday, November 25, 2019**. His Excellency will celebrate the Holy Solemn Byzantine Liturgy Sunday **November 24th at 11:00AM. Immediately after The Holy Liturgy, we are all invited to share a luncheon with his Excellency and meet him during this time.** Please come and share this Holy occasion with your family and relatives.

† MEMORIAL MASSES †

THIS SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23 NO HOLY LITURGY

THIS SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 24

† **Rt. Rev. Joseph Francavilla**, By the Community of St. Basil
† **Lena Tebsherany**, 5th Memorial Anniversary, By Anthony & Sandra Showa
† **Mary A. kakaty**, 20th Memorial Anniversary, By her Family

NEXT SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 30

† **Margaret Makames**, 30th Memorial Anniversary, By Robert Lalli

NEXT SUNDAY DECEMBER 1