

THE LADDER

of
Divine
Ascent



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The Dormition of the Theotokos: 'The Summer Pascha'

We are hoping through the coming years to make the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, the "Summer Pascha", a more integral event of our parish life. And this is "meet and right." Christianity in America has been mostly shaped by the Protestant ethos, and that basically means that there is no real place for the veneration of the Mother of God --- a place we give her because of the role she plays in salvation history. This was primarily based upon a reaction by the early Protestant reformers against the perceived (and often real) excesses of the medieval West's Marian piety. In a short time this reaction became a thorough rejection - at times quite vehement - in many Protestant circles. So the Virgin Mary in essence disappeared from Protestant worship and piety --- perhaps the classic example within Church history of "throwing out the baby with the bath water." She became just any other 'woman' or, more usually, the notion prevailed that any other woman could just as easily give birth to Christ. Orthodox Christians cannot succumb to any such truncated form of the Church's living Tradition. (However, and for this we should be thankful, there have been clear signs recently of a "recovery" of the role of the Virgin Mary in some Evangelical circles). Archbishop DMITRI often pointed out that a sign of a spiritually strong parish is that parish's devotion to the Mother of God, because she is the personal image of the Church - warm, embracing, nurturing, protecting, faithful and ready to hear and be obedient to God's Word. He also often pointed out that those churches which have minimized and diminished their understanding of Mary's place within the Church have also ultimately done the same thing with Christ.

Since the Dormition has no biblical source, this feast slowly developed over the course of the first five centuries of the Church's history on the basis of a wide variety of sources - primarily narratives, rhetorical homilies and theological poetry/hymnography (Much of this material now exists in English translation). There is no one authoritative text or document. However, though details may differ, a tradition emerged that tells of how the apostles were miraculously brought back to Jerusalem in order to surround the bedside of the Virgin Mary as she lay dying. Upon commending her holy soul to her Son and Savior, she peacefully "fell asleep" in death (the meaning of the Greek word 'dormition') in the presence of the apostles who stood weeping and grief-stricken by her bedside. With great solemnity they buried her pure body which had itself been the "tabernacle" of the Word and King. The traditional place of her burial is a tomb close to Gethsemane. When the tomb was opened on the third day so that the Apostle Thomas (who else would it be?!), who had arrived late, could venerate the body of the Theotokos, it was found to be empty. The "Mother of Life" was thus "translated to life!"

Archbishop Kallistos Ware summarizes the Church's understanding of this tradition in the following manner:

Without insisting of the literal truth of every element in this account, Orthodox tradition is clear and unwavering in regard to the central point: the Holy Virgin underwent, as did her Son, a physical death, but her body - like His - was afterwards raised from the dead and she was taken up into heaven, in her body as well as in her soul. She has passed beyond death and judgement, and lives wholly in the Age to Come. The Resurrection of the Body, which all Christians await, has in her case been anticipated and is already an accomplished fact. That does not mean, however, that she is dissociated from the rest of humanity and placed in a wholly different category: for we all hope to share one day in that same glory of the Resurrection of the Body which she enjoys even now. (The Festal Menaion, p. 64)

Fr. Thomas Hopko further elaborates on the meaning of this beautiful Feast and how it "relates" to every generation of Christians:

Thus, the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos is the celebration of the fact that all men are "highly exalted" in the blessedness of the victorious Christ, and that this high exaltation has already been accomplished in Mary the Theotokos. The feast of the Dormition is the sign, the guarantee, and the celebration that Mary's fate is the destiny of all those of "low estate"

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A Word from the Fathers

"If there is a needy or a poor among them; they [i.e., Christians] fast two or three days and send him the food which they would have prepared for themselves"

~~~ Aristides, writing in defense of the Christians to Emperor Adrianos, AD 128

**St John of the Ladder Orthodox Church**  
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Schedule of Services
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**August 2009**

| Sunday                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Monday                                                    | Tuesday   | Wednesday                                                                                                         | Thursday                                                                                                    | Friday                                                                                                      | Saturday                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>Coming in September</u><br>8 <sup>th</sup> --- Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos<br>12 <sup>th</sup> --- Baptism of Ginamarie Zoltun @ 4:30 pm<br>13 <sup>th</sup> --- Church School Begins<br>14 <sup>th</sup> --- Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross |                                                           |           |                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                             |                                                                                                             | <b>01</b> wine & oil<br>Beginning of the Dormition Fast<br>Confessions<br>Great Vespers<br>6:00 pm                               |
| <b>02</b> 8 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost<br>'Ask the Priest' (in Russian)<br>Divine Liturgy<br>9:30 am<br>Slavonic Molieben<br>12:30 pm                                                                                                                  | <b>03</b>                                                 | <b>04</b> | <b>05</b><br>Forefeast of Transfiguration<br>Confessions<br>5:00 pm<br>Vigil<br>6:00 pm                           | <b>06</b> fish, wine & oil<br>Divine Liturgy<br>7:00 am<br>Transfiguration of the Lord<br>Blessing of Fruit | <b>07</b>                                                                                                   | <b>08</b> wine & oil<br>Inquirer's Class<br>Mary:<br>Man's 'Yes' to God<br>4:30 pm<br>Great Vespers<br>6:00 pm                   |
| <b>09</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost<br>Charity Collection<br>Ven Herman of Alaska<br>Divine Liturgy<br>9:30 am                                                                                                                                      | <b>10</b>                                                 | <b>11</b> | <b>12</b><br>Inquirer's Class<br>The Mysteries:<br>Baptism and Eucharist<br>7:00 pm<br>Daily Vespers<br>6:00 pm   | <b>13</b> fish, wine & oil<br>Leavetaking of St Tikhon of Zadonsk                                           | <b>14</b><br>Forefeast of the Dormition of the Theotokos<br>Confessions<br>5:00 pm<br>Vigil<br>6:00 pm      | <b>15</b> Divine Liturgy<br>8:00 am<br>Dormition<br>Visit of Christ Church Episcopal Group @ Vespers<br>Great Vespers<br>6:00 pm |
| <b>16</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost<br>Icon of Christ 'Not Made By Hands'<br>'Ask the Priest' (in English)<br>Divine Liturgy<br>9:30 am                                                                                                             | <b>17</b>                                                 | <b>18</b> | <b>19</b><br>Inquirer's Class<br>Icons and Saints<br>7:00 pm<br>Daily Vespers<br>6:00 pm                          | <b>20</b>                                                                                                   | <b>21</b>                                                                                                   | <b>22</b><br>Inquirer's Class<br>Prayer and Ascetical Life<br>4:30 pm<br>Confessions<br>Great Vespers<br>6:00 pm                 |
| <b>23/30</b><br>10 <sup>th</sup> /11 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost<br>Leavetaking of the Dormition/ St Alexander Nevsky<br>Divine Liturgy<br>9:30 am                                                                                                      | <b>24/31</b><br>OCF @ Furman University<br>6:00 pm (8/31) | <b>25</b> | <b>26</b><br>Inquirer's Class<br>Life and Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell<br>7:00 pm<br>Daily Vespers<br>6:00 pm | <b>27</b><br>OCF at Clemson University<br>7:00 pm                                                           | <b>28</b> wine & oil<br>Beheading of John the Baptist<br>Confessions<br>5:00 pm<br>Great Vespers<br>6:00 pm | <b>29</b> strict fast<br>Divine Liturgy<br>8:00 am<br>Inquirer's Class<br>Confession<br>4:30 pm<br>Great Vespers<br>6:00 pm      |

Fellowship and Coffee Hour: Sundays immediately following Divine Liturgy

Church School: Sundays following Divine Liturgy (resumes in Sept 13<sup>th</sup>)

Confessions on Saturdays following Vespers (as noted above) and before evening services during the Dormition Fast

Inquirer's Class continues — See schedule above.

**A Word from the Desert**

*You are not able to repent properly and to be alone in the heights of the love of God. That is to say, just God and you; just Christ and you. The love of Christ is offered and always passes through other people.*

Elder Porphyrios the Kapsokaluyite (1906-1991)

*Continued from page 1*

*whose souls magnify the Lord, whose spirits rejoice in God the Savior, whose lives are totally dedicated to hearing and keeping the Word of God which is given to men in Mary's child, the Savior and Redeemer of the world.*

*In this sense everything that is praised and glorified in Mary is a sign of what is offered to all persons in the life of the Church. It is for this reason that Mary, with the divine child Jesus within her, is called in the Orthodox Tradition the **Image of the Church**. For the assembly of the saved is those in whom Christ dwells.*

The importance of the Feast in the Church's life is emphasized by the two week fast which precedes it --- a fast which, though brief, is as rigorous as the Great Fast before Pascha --- and by the Eight Day period of its celebration which continues up to the Leavetaking of the Feast on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. That means that we continue to sing and chant the troparion and kontakion of the Feast as well as other hymns in our liturgical services until then. I would strongly urge everyone to incorporate these hymns into your daily rule of prayer, including their use when you bless your meals as a family, replacing the Lord's Prayer up until the Leavetaking. If you can't sing these hymns, you can certainly recite them! This is how we bring a remembrance of the Feasts into our homes. The troparia and kontakia of the major Feasts are included in many Orthodox Prayer Books, but if you do not have the texts available at home, I am including them here:

**Troparion of the Dormition**

**In giving birth, you preserved your virginity!  
In falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos!  
You were translated to life, O Mother of Life,  
and by your prayers you deliver our souls from death!**

**Kontakion of the Dormition**

**Neither the tomb, nor death, could hold the Theotokos,  
who is constant in prayer and our firm hope in her intercessions.  
For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life  
by the One who dwelt in her virginal womb!**

It is also the custom to bless flowers on the feast of the Dormition of the Holy Theotokos. So feel free to bring flowers to the Vigil or Divine Liturgy of the Feast to be blessed at the Divine Liturgy.

**The Dormition Fast**

*"We do not fast because we think there is anything in itself unclean about the act of eating and drinking. Food and drink are, on the contrary, God's gift, from which we are to partake with enjoyment and gratitude. We fast, not because we despise the divine gift, but so as to make ourselves aware that it is indeed a gift so as to purify our eating and drinking, and to make them, no longer a concession to greed, but a sacrament and means of communion with the Giver. Understood in this way, ascetic fasting is directed not against the body but against the flesh. Its aim is not destructively to weaken the body, but creatively to render the body more spiritual." (Metropolitan Kallistos Ware)*

The Dormition Fast, one of the Church's four seasons of fasting, begins always on August 1<sup>st</sup> and continues for the fourteen days preceding the Feast of the Dormition (the Falling-Asleep) of the Theotokos (the God-Birthgiver, i.e., the Virgin Mary) on August 15<sup>th</sup>.

The fasting principles for this season are the same as for Great Lent and thus somewhat stricter than the rule for Nativity Lent (November 15<sup>th</sup> through December 24<sup>th</sup>) and for the Apostles' Fast preceding the Feast of Ss Peter and Paul on June 29<sup>th</sup>. Thus besides restricting the number of meals, we generally abstain from meat (including fish), dairy products (including eggs), wine (i.e., alcoholic beverages), and oil; but on Saturdays and Sundays (respectively the Sabbath and the Lord's Day), oil & wine are allowed, as are shellfish.

On August 6<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of the Transfiguration, both fish (i.e., fish with backbones) and shellfish are allowed, as well as wine and oil; and in the Orthodox Church in America, this relaxation is provided likewise on August 9<sup>th</sup> and August 13<sup>th</sup> for the Feast Days respectively of St Herman of Alaska and of St Tikhon of Zadonsk.

Especially for anyone not yet well experienced in it, the fasting discipline should be undertaken always in consultation with one's parish priest, for several reasons, including those of ensuring a proper measure of prayer, compassion, and dependence on God, and of avoiding pride or irritability. Reasons of health, age, or pregnancy may mitigate the fast, as well as other personal circumstances, such as those of an individual in a non-Orthodox household.

Most importantly, the Orthodox Church emphasizes not a legalistic approach to fasting, but one of joyful anticipation.

**2009 Financial Snapshot**

|                        | <b>Income</b> | <b>Expenses</b> |
|------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| <b>YTD (thru June)</b> | \$71,179      | \$73,272        |
| <b>June</b>            | \$9,982       | \$12,077        |
| <b>YTD Charity</b>     | \$6,954       | \$7,800         |

***A Prayer for the 6th Hour (12 noon)***

**"O Lord, Thou Who didst measure the heights and the earth in the hollow of Thy hand, and created the six-winged Seraphim to cry out with an unceasing Holy, Holy, Holy, glory to Thy name: Deliver me from the mouth of the evil one, O Master. Forget my many evil deeds, and - through the multitude of Thy compassions - grant me daily forgiveness; for Thou art blessed unto the ages. Amen."**

*Amma Sarah, +4th Century Desert Mother*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### ■ ALMS SUNDAY

August 9<sup>th</sup> is our Alms Collection Sunday. Please remember to bring foodstuffs and personal items. Baskets are in the vestibule as you enter the church. These items are donated to United Ministries. Thanks to all who continue to give so generously to our outreach efforts.

### ■ UPCOMING ---CHURCH SCHOOL, INQUIRER'S CLASS, ETC

- \* A Sign-up sheet is available in the kitchen/parish hall for those who would like to offer flowers for any of the 'Feast of Summer' --- Transfiguration, Dormition, et. al.
- \* Adult Discussion Groups ('*Ask the Priest*') continue in August during Coffee Fellowship. See calendar for the dates. This provides a 'free form' venue at which to ask any questions, from the most common to the sublime, about Orthodoxy Christianity, or anything else for that matter!
- \* Inquirer's Classes continue through August. See calendar.
- \* Church School will begin on September 13<sup>th</sup> at 9 am (immediately preceding Divine Liturgy). Church school will be offered in 3 classes: preschool, elementary, middle school and high school. This year's theme will be Church History (beginning with the Acts of the Apostles). A sign-up sheet is in the Fellowship Hall to 'register' your child. For more details, *if you would like to teach*, or if you have any questions or concerns, email or contact Mat Barbara ([blburch@greenwood.net](mailto:blburch@greenwood.net) or 864 554 5292).

## **A Reminder and a Hearty 'Thank You!'** **August Fellowship and Goffee Hour**

|                         |        |
|-------------------------|--------|
| August 02 <sup>nd</sup> | Team 8 |
| August 09 <sup>th</sup> | Team 1 |
| August 16 <sup>th</sup> | Team 2 |
| August 23 <sup>rd</sup> | Team 3 |
| August 30 <sup>th</sup> | Team 4 |

**Celebrating Anniversaries and Birthdays in August**  
Stefka Eddins (2<sup>nd</sup>), Mary Sucin (3<sup>rd</sup>), Julian Griffin, James Hudson, & Haley Garroll (6<sup>th</sup>), Will Zhang (11<sup>th</sup>), Jerry Gilmer (12<sup>th</sup>), Kara Warnholdt (13<sup>th</sup>), Toma Sucin (14<sup>th</sup>), Lauren Garroll (16<sup>th</sup>), Bill and Margie (18<sup>th</sup>), Fr Gregory and Mat Gatherine (22<sup>nd</sup>), Lawrence Garroll (25<sup>th</sup>), Mat Rachael (27<sup>th</sup>), Teresa & Ryan Garroll (28<sup>th</sup>), Viorel Nicolae and Elena Gonty (30<sup>th</sup>)

## **From the Feast of the Dormition**

Your death, O pure Virgin, was a crossing over  
to a better and eternal life. It translated you,  
O undefiled one, from this mortal life  
to an unending and truly divine one,  
and so you look with joy upon your Son and God!

*(From the Canon of the Feast)*

**St. John of the Ladder**



**Orthodox Church in America**

701 Augusta Arbor Way, Piedmont [Greenville], SC 29673  
(864) 299-1140

[www.stjohnoftheladder.org](http://www.stjohnoftheladder.org)

Rev Fr Marcus C Burch, Rector  
Rev Fr Nikolay Miletkov, Assistant

### **ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED**

#### Schedule of Services

Vespers, Wednesday, 6:00 pm  
Great Vespers, Saturday, 6:00 pm  
Divine Liturgy, Sunday, 9:30 am

"Whatever is obtained as a result  
of long and persistent prayer will remain."

~~~ St John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* ~~~



PLACE
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AUGUST 2009