

## THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT (INCLUDING JAMES, WHO WAS TO BE CALLED THE RIGHTEOUS/JUST)



### The Synaxis of the Most-holy Theotokos

On the second day of the Nativity, the Christian Church gives glory and thanksgiving to the Most-holy Theotokos, who gave birth to our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. This feast is called "the Synaxis" because on this day all of the faithful gather to glorify her, the Most-holy Theotokos, and to solemnly and universally celebrate a feast in her honor. In Ohrid, it has been the tradition from ancient times that, on the eve of the second day of Nativity, Vespers has been celebrated only in the Church of the Most-holy Theotokos called the Chieftain [Ēelnica]. All the clergy with the people gather together to glorify the Most-pure Mother of God.

### The Commemoration of the Flight into Egypt

The wise men (astrologers) from the East, having worshiped the Lord in Bethlehem, were directed to return to their home another way by command of an angel. Herod, that wicked king, planned to slaughter all the children in Bethlehem, but God saw Herod's intention and sent His angel to Joseph. The angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream and commanded him to take the young Child and His Mother and flee to Egypt. Joseph did this. Taking the Divine Child and His Most-holy Mother, he traveled first to Nazareth (Luke 2:39), where he arranged his household matters, and then, taking his son James with them, went off to Egypt (Matthew 2:14). Thus the words of the prophet were fulfilled: *Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt* (Isaiah 19:1). In old Cairo today, the cave where the holy family lived can be seen. Likewise, in the village of Matarea near Cairo, the tree under which the Most-holy Theotokos rested with the Lord Jesus, as well as a miraculous spring of water under this tree, are visible.

After having lived for several years in Egypt, the holy family returned to Palestine, again in response to a command of an angel of God. Thus another prophecy was fulfilled: *Out of Egypt have I called my Son* (Hosea 11:1). Herod was dead and his wicked son Archelaus—a worthy successor of him in evil—sat on his bloodstained throne. Hearing that Archelaus was reigning in Jerusalem, Joseph returned to Galilee, to his town of Nazareth, where he settled in his own home. Herod's second son, Herod the Younger, who was somewhat less evil than his brother Archelaus, then reigned in Galilee.

## **HYMN OF PRAISE**

### **The Synaxis of the Most-holy Theotokos**

At the border between night and sunny day,  
The dawn is rosy, pink and dewy.  
The crimson dawn thou art, O Virgin given by God,  
Precursor of the day, rosy and glorious.  
Thou didst correct Eve and restore her to Paradise.  
Do not withhold thy help from us sinners.  
Israel crossed dry-shod over the Red Sea;  
A cool spring flowed from the rock in the wilderness;  
The bush burned but was not consumed—  
As the dawn resembles the crimson eve,  
So thou, O Virgin, dost resemble those foreshadowings.  
O thou whom the Church calls the Mother of God,  
Unknown to sin, not given to sin,  
O Most-pure Mother of our Savior,  
Because of thy purity thou wast chosen by God,  
To bring down the Eternal Creator to earth.  
That is why thou hast authority to pray for us,  
And we have the joy of hymning and glorifying thee!

## **REFLECTION**

A story of the Divine Christ-child: When the holy family fled before Herod's sword to Egypt, robbers leapt out on the road with the intention of stealing something. The righteous Joseph was leading the donkey, on which were some belongings and on which the Most-holy Theotokos was riding with her Son at her breast. The robbers seized the donkey to lead it away. At that moment, one of the robbers approached the Mother of God to see what she was holding next to her breast. The robber, seeing the Christ-child, was astonished at His unusual beauty and said in his astonishment: "If God were to take upon Himself the flesh of man, He would not be more beautiful than this Child!" This robber then ordered his companions to take nothing from these travelers. Filled with gratitude toward this generous robber, the Most-holy Virgin said to him: "Know that this Child will repay you with a good reward because you protected Him today." Thirty-three years later, this same thief hung on the Cross for his crimes, crucified on the right side of Christ's Cross. His name was Dismas, and the name of the thief on the left side was Gestas. Beholding Christ the Lord innocently crucified, Dismas repented for all the evil of his life.

While Gestas reviled the Lord, Dismas defended Him, saying: *This man hath done nothing amiss.* (Luke 23:41). Dismas, therefore, was the wise thief to whom our Lord said: *Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise* (Luke 23:43). Thus the Lord granted Paradise to him who spared Him in childhood.

## **CONTEMPLATION**

Contemplate the purity of the Most-holy Mother of God:

1. On the immaculate purity of her body: passionless and disciplined by fasting;
2. On the immaculate purity of her heart, in which a sinful desire never dwelt;
3. On the immaculate purity of her mind, in which a sinful thought never dwelt.

## **HOMILY**

### **on the Most-holy Virgin, the Theotokos**

*And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord* (Luke 1:38).

Here indeed, brethren, is a true handmaid of the Lord! If a handmaid is she who exchanges her will completely for the will of her Lord, then the Most-holy Virgin is the first among all of the Lord's handmaids. If a handmaid is she who, with intent and with complete attention, beholds her Lord, then again the Most-holy Virgin is the first among the handmaids of the Lord. If a handmaid is one who meekly and quietly endures all insults and trials, awaiting only the reward of her Lord, then again and again the Most-holy Virgin is the first and most excellent of all the handmaids of the Lord. She did not care to please the world, but only God; nor did she care to justify herself before the world, but only before God. She herself is obedience; she herself is service; she herself is meekness. The Most-holy Virgin could in truth say to the angel of God: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*. The greatest perfection, and the greatest honor that a woman can attain on earth, is to be a handmaid of the Lord. Eve lost this perfection and honor in Paradise without effort, and the Virgin Mary achieved this perfection and this honor outside Paradise with her efforts. Through the prayers of the Most-holy Virgin Theotokos, O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.