

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

The Right Reverend
Bishop THOMAS



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

Diocese of Oakland, Charleston,
and the Mid-Atlantic

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA

November 21, 2018

Feast of the Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple

Beloved brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, God-fearing Monastics,
and all my Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ our True God:

The feast of the Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple is a spiritual foreshadowing of our entrance into the heavenly kingdom. This foreshadowing provides us with our own preparation for entrance into the heavenly realm.

We must be adorned properly with a spirit cleansed by a life of repentance and asceticism. We must be willing to struggle just as the 3-year-old infant had to make an effort to ascend 15 high steps in order to enter the temple. So should we, in order to enter the Heavenly Realm, make the effort to ascend the ladder of virtues, to labor at fasting and prayer. The Holy Virgin went up the steps by herself, without any help from others, but with the miraculous help of God. So should we, in our attempt to attain the Heavenly Realm, make the effort ourselves, but constantly asking God for help along the way.

“Be it done unto me according to thy word.” When it was time, the Virgin was prepared for the visitation of an angel from on high. These are words of the Most Holy Theotokos in response to the angel Gabriel’s announcement. These are the nine words that erased the disobedience of our forefathers in the Garden of Eden and ushered in the advent of our salvation. Our holy father John Chrysostom remarks, “An angel speaks with a virgin, because a woman spoke to a serpent.” The Holy Virgin learned obedience from her years spent in the temple of the Lord. Should we expect to learn the way of salvation in any other place but the church?

Saint Gregory the Wonderworker proclaims, “But in the Holy Virgin alone is the fall of that (first mother) repaired” (*First Homily on the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary*). It is in her obedience to the will of God that the age of salvation is announced and proclaimed to all the world. Holy obedience to the will of God is a sign of predilection and a foretaste of the promise of the blessed life of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Let us follow the Holy Theotokos into the temple, into the church. Now is the time of the Nativity fast, a time for preparing oneself to greet the Savior on earth, a time for purifying oneself through fasting, prayer and repentance, a time of increased church attendance. Let us not pass by this important period of time, for from this holy day, and throughout the entire Nativity fast, we will hear in church the joyous tidings of our coming salvation, we will hear the joyous appeal: “Christ is born - glorify Him!”

A blessed feast to all! Most Holy Theotokos save us!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rt. Rev. Bishop THOMAS (Joseph)
Auxiliary Bishop, Diocese of Oakland, Charleston, and the Mid-Atlantic

“The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11: 26)

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