Feasts of Glory

IN EAST AND WEST

Birute Arendarcikas rsm
COVER ICON
“All Creation Rejoices in Thee” by Nicholas Tsai
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All of creation rejoices in Mary, a young woman of Nazareth, because through her openness to the Holy Spirit, God the Saving Word has come into the world. All the Feasts of Glory culminate in this icon of the revelation of the God-manhood of Christ, made possible by Mary’s “fiat”. In Mary the Church can recognize an icon of herself. In all nations and cultures, in all languages and societies, the Church is perpetually striving to give birth to the presence of Christ in word, sacrament and mercy.

Archpriest Lawrence Cross

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"And God saw that it was good". This delightful refrain in the Genesis creation story is a reminder of the role of the visual in our tradition. What is 'seen' can be good, and therefore, presumably, a source or minister of what is good. If we read it aright, the created universe is 'charged with the grandeur of God'. It is 'charged' or saturated with godliness; it is also 'charged' with the duty or responsibility of revealing something of the beauty of God. The story is told of the great St Antony of Egypt that after giving away his New Testament he was asked how he might learn of the great works of God to which he replied: 'My book is the nature of created things; and any time I want to read the words of God, the book is before me'. At the centre of the created universe is the human being who, when truly alive, is 'a vision of God' according to St Irenaeus. And Jesus Christ, the 'perfect image of the unseen God' is the one in whom the beauty of this world is being restored.

Christian art seeks to capture something of the drama of this redeeming process. It can be expressed through the comparative 'realism' of the West or through the more 'mystical' approach of the Christian East. But the two have a wonderful synergy and not a little interaction. Here indeed is the unity of faith expressed in the 'orthodoxy', the 'right way of worship' of the Church, both East and West. And here Christian art has its own relationship to the Holy Scriptures. As Vladimir Lossky remarked, Christian art provides 'a material centre in which there reposes an energy, a divine force'. The Spirit touches us through Christian art and indeed for centuries the elaborately decorated Church interior was the Word of God in art form.

The worshipper was literally immersed in the great deeds of God expressed in shape and colour. The Church set its formal seal on this truth at the Second Council of Nicea in 787 when it pronounced that as we represent Christ, his Mother and the prophets and saints in art 'so much more readily are (we) lifted up to the memory of their prototypes'.

Sister Brute provides a beautiful selection of icons and art works to accompany each of several great feasts of the Christian year. Along with these there are accompanying texts from Scripture and from writers throughout the Christian centuries. Hopefully these will enrich the celebration of these festivals and help keep alive such an essential aspect of our spiritual tradition. The beauty of God reflected in great art can enthral and transfigure the beholder: may this lovely book be a grace bearing experience for many!

Austin Cooper omi
Catholic Theological College/University of Divinity
February 2015
Icon of “All of Creation Rejoices in Thee”
Introduction

Who are [Eastern Christians]? The shortest answer is that they are the other side of the Roman Catholic soul. The reverse is also true. The Roman Catholics are the other side of the Eastern Christian soul.

Archpriest Lawrence Cross

In order to unite, we must first love one another. In order to love one another, we must first get to know one another.

Cardinal Suenens

Historically there are really three great families of Apostolic Churches: the West Roman (Catholic), the East Roman (Orthodox and Eastern Catholic) and the Oriental Churches (the so-called Monophysite and Nestorian). This book intends to reveal the deep connections particularly between the West and East Roman traditions. It lists the Great Feasts of the Eastern Church and Pascha (Easter), the ‘feast of feasts’, which are celebrated in both Churches. It illustrates these by citations from Scripture. For each feast it cites parallel commentaries from the Fathers and contemporary theologians of both East and West, and it places the great works of religious art and iconography, generated by these traditions, side-by-side revealing their wonderful complementarity. This aims to be a fresh way of demonstrating the rich dimensions of the Christian imagination and the various manners in which both East and West realise that spiritual vision. This book also includes several feasts and icons highlighting the spiritual, maternal protection and intercession of the Virgin Mary. Two other icons, evocative of the deep compassion of the Mother of God, also deserve attention because they so clearly demonstrate the essential complementarity and the deepest level of unity between the Churches of the East and the West.

Almost every Pope, from Leo XIII to Francis, has urged Roman Catholics to pay attention to the Churches of the Christian East. However, most Roman Catholics continue to know very little about the Christian East. The Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio, 15) urges all Catholics to know, venerate, preserve and cherish the very rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches. The Decree goes on to say: “They must recognise that this is of supreme importance for the faithful preservation of the fullness of Christian tradition, and for bringing about reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians” (UR, 15). The Decree shows profound respect for the theology of the Christian East, recognising that it is deeply embedded in both Sacred Scripture and Apostolic Tradition. It can enrich the theology of the West, and thereby the whole Church. Similarly, the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, which first met in Rhodes in 1980, and whose purpose is the re-establishment of full visible communion between the two Churches, declares that the ecumenical dialogue should begin positively with the elements which unite the two Churches.

In his Apostolic Letter Orientale Lumen (1995), after acknowledging that the Eastern Catholic Churches “are very conscious of being the living bearers of this tradition, together with our Orthodox brothers and sisters”, John Paul II calls upon the members of the Catholic Church of the Latin or West Roman tradition “to be fully acquainted with this treasure” (OL, 1). This book intends to reveal the hidden treasures buried in the fields of the Churches; rediscovered treasures that call the alienated sisters back to family unity.
THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast (Phil 2:5-11)

And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood by, saying, Anna, Anna, the Lord God has heard your prayer, and you shall conceive, and shall bring forth; and your seed shall be spoken of in all the world. And Anna said: As the Lord my God, if I beget either male or female, I will bring it as a gift to the Lord my God; and it shall minister to Him in holy things all the days of its life.

The Protevangelium of James 4:1

Let the whole creation therefore sing praise and dance and unite to celebrate the glories of this day. Today let there be one common feast of those in heaven and those on earth. Let everything that is, in the world and above the world, join together in rejoicing. For today a shrine is built for the Creator of the universe. The creature is newly made ready as a divine dwelling for the Creator.

Andrew of Crete

What do we see in the icon of the feast when we look at it with spiritual eyes? ... Could it be that the Church is telling us through this icon that every birth, every entrance of a new human being into the world and life, is a miracle of miracles, a miracle that explodes all routine, for it marks the start of something unending, the start of a unique, unrepeatable human life, the beginning of a new person. And with each birth the world is itself in some sense created anew and given as a gift to this new human being to be his life, his path, his creation ... In and through this newborn girl, Christ—our gift from God, our meeting and encounter with Him—comes to embrace the world. Thus, in celebrating Mary’s birth we find ourselves already on the road to Bethlehem, moving toward the joyful mystery of Mary as the Mother of God.

Alexander Schmemann

Your Nativity, O Mother of God, heralded joy to the whole universe, for from you rose the Sun of Justice, Christ our God. He canceled the curse and poured forth his grace: He vanquished death and granted us eternal life.

Troparion for the Feast
THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Alternative First Reading of the Mass for the Feast
(Rom 8:28-30)

This woman, chosen and outstanding among daughters, surely did not receive her name by pure chance or simply because it pleased her parents, as happens with most girls. No, she received her name according to a divine plan, so that the very pronouncing of her name points to something of great importance. For “Mary” means “star of the sea”… Everyone who worships Christ, when rowing through the waves of this world, must keep his eyes fixed on this Star of the Sea; that is, on Mary. She is nearest to God, the highest pole of the universe, and they must steer the course of their life by contemplating her example. Anyone who does this will never be tossed by the wind of vainglory or broken on the shoals of adversity or drowned in the stormy whirlpool of pleasures; but he will successfully reach the safe harbor of eternal rest.

Fulbert of Chartres

Mary does not differ from us because she possessed these gifts [the gifts of God’s grace]. It is her possession of them from the beginning, and incomparably, that is the sole difference between her and us. As for the content of this gift, its nature and intrinsic meaning, the eternal Father could not intend anything for the mother of his incarnate Son, without intending it for us too, and giving it to us in the sacrament of justification. For us too he eternally intended this saving grace from the beginning, in his eternity, even though it was only effected in us after the beginning of our earthly, temporal life, in order that it might be plain that it is all his grace, that nothing in our salvation belongs to us of ourselves. God has eternally kept his eternal love in readiness for us too, so that in the moment that we call our baptism, he may come into the depths of our heart. For we too are redeemed, saved, marked with God’s indelible seal. We too have been made the holy temple of God. In us too the triune God dwells. We too are anointed, hallowed, filled with the light and life of God. We too have been sent by him, from this beginning, into our life, that we too may carry the light of faith and the flame of love through this world’s darkness, to the place where we belong, in his eternal radiance, his eternity.

Karl Rahner
THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast
(1 Cor 1:18-24)

God is love, and the Holy Cross is the symbol of divine love. Love is sacrificial. The power and flame, the very nature of love is the cross, and there is no love apart from it. The cross is the sacrificial essence of love, since love is sacrifice, self-surrender, self-abnegation, voluntary self-renunciation for the sake of the beloved. Without sacrifice there can be no acceptance, no meeting, no life in and for another; there is no bliss in love except in sacrificial self-surrender which is rewarded by responsive fulfilment. The cross is the exchange of love, indeed love itself is exchange. There is no other path for love and for its wisdom than the path of the cross …

A Christian is essentially a cross-bearer. The sweetest Name of Jesus is said to have been inscribed on the heart of St Ignatius of Antioch, the God-bearer; and similarly the heart of a Christian holds the cross of the Lord which has pierced it once and for all and set it aglow. A Christian lives in God, and, in so far as he enters into the love of Christ, he shares both in the burden and in the sweetness of his cross.

Sergius Bulgakov

O Lord, save your people and bless your inheritance. Strengthen our Public Authorities in every good deed, and protect your nation with your cross.

Troparion for the Feast

We are celebrating the feast of the cross, whereby darkness was dispelled and the light restored. We are celebrating the feast of the cross, and with the crucified one we are raised up, leaving behind us the earth and sin so that we may possess what is above. How great the cross! What blessings it holds! He who possesses it possesses a treasure. More noble, more precious than anything on earth, in fact and in name, it is indeed a treasure, for in it and through it and for it all the riches of our salvation were stored away and restored to us.

Andrew of Crete
THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Second Reading of the Mass of the Feast
(Phil 2:6-11)

This Tree is my eternal salvation. It is my nourishment and my banquet. Amidst its roots I cast my own roots deep; beneath its boughs I grow and expand, revelling in its sigh as in the wind itself. Flying from the burning heart, I have pitched my tent in its shadow, and have found a resting-place of dewy freshness. I flower with its flowers; its fruits bring perfect joy—fruits which have been preserved for me since time’s beginning, and which now I freely eat. This Tree is food, sweet food, for my hunger, and a fountain for my thirst; it is a clothing for my nakedness; its leaves are the breath of life.

This Tree, vast as heaven itself, rises from earth to the skies, a plant immortal, set firm in the midst of heaven and earth, base of all that is, foundation of the universe, support of this world of men, binding-force of all creation, holding within itself all the mysterious essence of man. Secured with the unseen clamps of the spirit, so that, adjusted to the Divine, it may never bend or warp, with foot resting firm on earth it towers to the topmost skies, and spans with its all-embracing arms the boundless gulf of space between.

Pseudo-Chrysostom, The Cosmic Tree.
Sermon VI for Holy Week

The one tree has wrought so much evil, the other tree has brought us to salvation, to health. This is the course of humanity’s story: a journey to find Jesus Christ the Redeemer, who gives His life for love. God, in fact, has not sent the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. This tree of the Cross saves us, all of us, from the consequences of that other tree, where self-sufficiency, arrogance, the pride of us wanting to know all things according to our own mentality, according to our own criteria, and also according to that presumption of being and becoming the only judges of the world. This is the story of mankind: from one tree to the other. God takes this course for love! There’s no other explanation: love alone does this. Today we look upon the Cross, the story of mankind and the story of God. We look upon this Cross, where you can try that honey of aloe, that bitter honey, that bitter sweetness of the sacrifice of Jesus.

Pope Francis

We should glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom is our salvation, life and resurrection, through whom we are saved and delivered.

Entrance Antiphon for the Feast
THE ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS INTO THE TEMPLE

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. For a tent was constructed, the first one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the Presence; this is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a tent called the Holy of Holies. In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot speak now in detail. Such preparations having been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties: but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year, and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people.

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast (Heb 9:1-7)

And her months were added to the child. And the child was two years old, and Joachim said: Let us take her up to the temple of the Lord, that we may pay the vow that we have vowed, lest perchance the Lord send to [inquire of] us, and our offering be not received. And Anna said: Let us wait for the third year, in order that the child may not seek for father or mother. And Joachim said: So let us wait. And the child was three years old, and Joachim said: Invite the daughters of the Hebrews that are undefiled, and let them take each a lamp, and let them stand with the lamps burning, that the child may not turn back, and her heart be captivated from the temple of the Lord. And they did so until they went up into the temple of the Lord. And the priest received her, and kissed her, and blessed her, saying: The Lord has magnified your name in all generations. In you, on the last of the days, the Lord will manifest His redemption to the sons of Israel. And he set her down upon the third step of the altar, and the Lord God sent grace upon her; and she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her.

Where could be more fitting for her who was truly the holiest of all to dwell? Where else could be better for God’s tent to be pitched? Surely it was absolutely necessary for the actual Tabernacle to be set up in the same place as the figurative one? She was the Tabernacle in which He Who is seated above the whole Creation rested, the true King, the Lord of all rulers, Who is marvelously clad in the many-coloured kingly robe woven from both created and uncreated natures. His Tabernacle does not shine with the brightness of precious metals, but because it is full of spiritual graces. It does not hold symbols of angels or the first fruits of physical prototypes, but bears within it the inexpressible supernatural radiance of spiritual purity, a will conformed to God’s, the divinely lovely brilliance of virginity, the magnificent lustre of all that is good and, to put it concisely, the place which truly held God Who encompasses everything.

Gregory Palamas

The meaning of all these events, words and recollections is simple: from now on man himself becomes the temple. No stone temple, no altar, but man—his soul, body and life—is the sacred and divine heart of the world, its ‘holy of holies.’ One temple, Mary—living and human—is led into a temple made of stone, and from within brings to completion its significance and meaning ... From the moment the Virgin Mary entered ‘the holy of holies,’ life itself became the Temple. And when we celebrate her Entrance into the Temple, we celebrate man’s divine meaning and the brightness of his high calling.

Alexander Schmemann

Troparion for the Feast

Today is the prelude to God’s munificence, and the announcement of the salvation of men: in the Temple of God the Virgin is seen openly, foretelling to all the coming of Christ. Wherefore let us cry out to her with all our strength: “Joy to you, Fulfillment of the Creator's Plan!”

The Protoevangelium of James 7
Sing and rejoice, O Daughter Zion! For lo, I will come and dwell in your midst, says the Lord. Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst. And you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem. Be silent, all people, before the Lord; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

First Reading of the Mass of the Feast
(Zech 2:10-13)

Mary, our Mother, the whole world reveres you as the holiest shrine of the living God, for in you the salvation of the world dawned. The Son of God was pleased to take human form from you. You have broken down the wall of hatred, the barrier between heaven and earth which was set up by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. In you heaven met earth when divinity and humanity were joined in one person, the God-Man.

Mother of God, we sing your praises, but we must praise you even more. Our speech is too feeble to honor you as we ought, for no tongue is eloquent enough to express your excellence. Mary, most powerful, most holy, and worthy of all love. Your name brings new life, and the thought of you inspires love in the hearts of those devoted to you.

Bernard of Clairvaux

The feast comes from apocryphal sources and has its origins in Eastern Christianity from around the fourth century. Its antiquity suggests at least a very early “intuition” that Our Lady’s life, from early childhood forward, was marked out in unique ways as a kind of preparation for the uniqueness it would assume with her divine motherhood.

Whether or not the child Mary was physically presented in the Temple, we have good reason to trust that her holy parents spiritually presented her to the Lord, most particularly in offering her the family and religious environment that enabled her to become, as St. Luke later described, the woman who pondered the Word of God and kept it (Luke 2:19; 8:21). We could say that her dwelling in the spiritual Temple of the Lord during her childhood and adolescence provided the appropriate prelude to her becoming the very Temple itself in which the Son of God Incarnate would make His dwelling for nine months.

Peter M.J. Stravinskas
THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

But when the fulness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast (Gal 4:4-7)

This is our festival, this is the feast we celebrate today, in which God comes to live with human beings, that we may journey toward God, or return—for to speak thus is more exact—that laying aside the old human being we may be clothed with the new, and that as in Adam we have died so we may live in Christ, born with Christ and crucified with him, buried with him and rising with him. For it is necessary for me to undergo the good turnaround, and as painful things came from more pleasant things, so out of painful things more pleasant things must return. “For where sin abounded, grace superabounded,” and if the taste [of forbidden fruit] condemned, how much more does the Passion of Christ justify? Therefore we celebrate the feast not like a pagan festival, but in a godly manner, not in a worldly way, but in a manner above the world. We celebrate not our own concerns but the one who is ours, or rather, what concerns our Master, things pertaining not to sickness but to healing, not to the first molding but to the remolding.

Gregory of Nazianzus

One theme or motif woven throughout the Christmas celebration is the Church’s experience of Christ’s Mother as the world’s gift to God, as humanity’s gift to the One who comes to the world, to man. One of the Christmas hymns asks: “What shall we offer You, O Christ, who for our sakes has appeared on earth as man?” And then comes the answer: “All Creation offers You thanks: the angels offer a hymn; the heavens, a star; the wise men, gifts; the shepherds, their wonder; the earth, its cave; the wilderness, a manger. And we offer You a Virgin Mother!”

The profound significance of this remarkable hymn is that the world and all creation do not merely thirst for union with God or wait for His coming: they prepare for it, so that it is precisely the meeting of God with man, in freedom and love, that is at the heart of Christian faith ...

[A]: the heart of Christmas night is the image of Mother and Child streaming with blinding light. Here, everything that had been torn apart by sin and hostility and human pride is once again united: heaven and earth, God and man, nature and spirit. The world becomes a hymn of praise, words become a song of love, matter becomes a gift and all of nature becomes a manger. In this image of Mother and Child, God’s eternal love for the world—in its inmost being—for God are united, completed and victorious ...

Gazing at this image and rejoicing in it, we behold the only authentic image of the true world, of true life, of the true human being.

Alexander Schmemann

Troparion for the Feast

Your Nativity, O Christ our God, has shed the light of knowledge upon the world. Through it, those who had been star-worshippers learned through a star to worship You, O Sun of Justice, and to recognize in You the One who rises and who comes from on high. O Lord, glory to You.

Troparion for the Feast
THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

First Reading of the Vigil Mass of the Feast
(Isa 62:1-5)

O Christian, be aware of your nobility—it is God’s own nature that you share: do not then, by an ignoble life, fall back into your former baseness. Think of the Head, think of the Body of which you are a member. Recall that you have been rescued from the power of darkness, and have been transferred to the light of God, the kingdom of God. Through the sacrament of baptism you have been made a temple of the Holy Spirit; do not, by evil deeds, drive so great an indweller away from you, submitting yourself once more to the slavery of the devil. For you were bought at the price of Christ’s blood.

Leo the Great

“Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you Good News of a great joy.... This day is born the Savior”, that is, he who, as Son of God and Son of the Father, has traveled (in obedience to the Father) the path that leads away from the Father and into the darkness of the world. Behind him omnipotence and freedom; before, powerlessness, bonds and obedience. Behind him the comprehensive divine vision; before him the prospect of the meaninglessness of death on the Cross between two criminals. Behind him the bliss of life with the Father; before him, grievous solidarity with all who do not know the Father, do not want to know him and deny his existence. Rejoice then, for God himself has passed this way!... From a worldly point of view everything may seem very dark; your dedication may seem unproductive and a failure. But do not be afraid: you are on God’s path. “Let not your hearts be troubled: believe in God; believe also in me.” I am walking on ahead of you and blazing the trail of Christian love for you. It leads to your most inaccessible brother, the person most forsaken by God. But it is the path of divine love itself. You are on the right path. All who deny themselves in order to carry out love’s commission are on the right path.

Hans Urs von Balthasar
THE HOLY THEOPOPHY OF OUR LORD GOD AND
SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds . . . But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast
(Titus 2:11-14, 3:4-7)

But let us honor today the baptism of Christ and celebrate well, not feasting with the stomach but rejoicing spiritually. And how shall we feast? “Wash, become pure”. If you are “red” with sin but less than blood-red, become “white as snow”; but if you are scarlet and complete “men of blood,” still, come to be “white as wool.” Be entirely purified and be pure, for nothing gives so much joy to God as the correction and salvation of the human being, for whose sake every discourse and every mystery exist, that you may become like “stars in the world,” a life-giving force for other human beings; that as perfect lights standing beside the great Light, you may be initiated into the illumination hereafter, illumined with greater purity and clarity by the Trinity, from whom you have now received in measure the one ray of the one divinity, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory to the ages of ages. Amen.

Gregory of Nazianzus

What we are doing, then, at each celebration of Epiphany, at every Blessing of the Waters, is to reaffirm our sense of wonder before the essential goodness and beauty of the world, as originally created by God and as now recreated in Christ. Nothing is intrinsically ugly or despicable; it is solely our distorted vision that makes it seem so. Through the power of God incarnate shown in His Baptism in the Jordan, all persons and all things can be made holy, can be transfigured and rendered Spirit-bearing. All things are capable of acting as sacraments of God’s presence ... Water, earth, sky, the human body and the whole human person with its emotions and affections—through Christ’s Incarnation and Baptism these are all reborn, transformed, hallowed. The great Blessing of the Waters is in this way a proclamation that the universe around us is not a chaos but a cosmos. There is glory in everything; this is a world full of wonder.

Kallistos Ware
THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

He [John] proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Mark 1:7-11

The Lord was baptized, not to be cleansed himself but to cleanse the waters, so that those waters, cleansed by the flesh of Christ which knew no sin, might have the power of baptism. Whoever comes, therefore, to the washing of Christ lays aside his sins.

Ambrose of Milan

Having reached adulthood, Jesus began his public ministry by going to the River Jordan to receive from John a baptism of penance and conversion. What might seem paradoxical in our eyes actually happened. Did Jesus need penance and conversion? Of course not. Yet the One who is without sin put himself among sinners to have himself baptized, to make this act of penance. The Holy One of God joined those who recognized they were in need of forgiveness and asked God for the gift of conversion, that is, the grace to return to him with their whole heart, to belong totally to him. Jesus chose to join the ranks of sinners, to be in solidarity with them, expressing God’s closeness.

Jesus shows his solidarity with us, with our efforts to convert and to be rid of our selfishness, to break away from our sins in order to tell us that if we accept him in our life he can uplift us and lead us to the heights of God the Father. And Jesus’ solidarity is not, as it were, a mere exercise of mind and will. Jesus truly immersed himself in our human condition, lived it to the end, in all things save sin, and was able to understand our weakness and frailty. For this reason he was moved to compassion, he chose to suffer with men and women, to become a penitent with us. This is God’s work which Jesus wanted to carry out: the divine mission to heal those who are wounded and give medicine to the sick, to take upon himself the sin of the world.

What happened at the moment when Jesus had himself baptized by John? In the face of this act of humble love by the Son of God, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit showed himself in the form of a dove, while a voice from on high expressed the pleasure of the Father who acknowledged his Only-Begotten, his beloved Son. This was a real manifestation of the Blessed Trinity, that bears witness to the divinity of Jesus, of his being the promised Messiah, the One whom God sent to set his People free in order to save them (cf. Is 40:2).

Pope Benedict XVI
Hail O Woman full of grace, Virgin and Mother of God: from you has arisen the Sun of Justice, Christ our God, enlightening those who stand in darkness. You too, just Elder Simeon, rejoice, for you carried in your arms the Redeemer of our souls, our Resurrection.

Troparion for the Feast

It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case, tithes are received by those who are mortal; in the other, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him. Now if perfection had been attainable through the levitical priesthood—for the people received the law under this priesthood—what further need would there have been to speak of another priest arising according to the order of Melchizedek, rather than one according to the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. Now the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to another tribe, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. It is even more obvious when another priest arises, resembling Melchizedek, one who has become a priest, not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an indestructible life. For it is attested of him, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast (Heb 7:7-17)

The most chaste Virgin Mother of God bore in her arms the true light and came to the help of those who were lying in darkness. In the same way we must hurry out to meet him who is truly light, enlightened by the beams of his brightness and bearing in our hands the light which shines for all men... Let none of us remain a stranger to this brightness, let no one who is filled with it continue in the darkness, but let us all go forth shining with light, let us all go together bright with that light to welcome with old Simeon that everlasting shining light.

Sophronius

The Infant was born on earth—the eternal God in a humble manger, but there was a place for Him in the Temple, for the Temple was built for Him. And He was brought into His Temple, where it pleased His Name to dwell (1 Kings 8:29). But He came there not to receive veneration, but to serve many, in the form of a servant, veiling the radiance of His Divinity with the abject humility of the flesh. He came there as a son under the law, obedient to the law which He Himself had given to Moses, manifesting Himself as the model of obedience: for he came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. His Mother came to dedicate Her firstborn Son to God, to give God the Son to God the Father, and to offer the redemptive and purifying sacrifice. In giving birth to the Infant, She did not know sin; but just as He, sinless, came to receive from John the baptism of repentance, so She too, in Her immaculate birth, came to offer a sacrifice for sin, having in Her arms the One who truly was the Sacrifice for the sins of the entire world.

Sergius Bulgakov
THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the
way before me, and the Lord whom you seek
will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger
of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he
is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can
endure the day of his coming, and who can stand
when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire
and like fuller’s soap; he will sit as a refiner and
purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendents
of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until
they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.
Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be
pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in
former years.

First Reading of the Mass of the Feast (Mal 3:1-4)

He had lingered long in the world to see the birth
of him who made the world. The old man knew
the child, and in that child became a child himself,
for in the love with which he regarded the Father
of all, he felt his own years to be as but yesterday.
The ancient Simeon bore in his arms the new-born
Christ, and all the while Christ ruled and upheld
the old man. Simeon had been told by the Lord
that he should not taste of death before he had seen
the birth of the Christ of the Lord. Now that Christ
was born, all the old man’s wishes on earth were
fulfilled. He that came into a decrepit world now
also came to an old man … The old man Simeon
has seen God as little child.

Augustine of Hippo

A little child is brought to the Temple, as all first-
born children were brought. There is nothing
uncommon or striking, so far. His parents are with
him, poor people, bringing the offering of pigeons
or doves, for the purification of the mother. They
are met in the Temple by an old man, who takes the
child in his arms, offers a thanksgiving to God, and
blesses the parents; and next are joined by a woman
of a great age, a widow of eighty-four years, who
had exceeded the time of useful service, and seemed
to be but a fit prey for death. She gives thanks also,
and speaks concerning the child to other persons
who are present. Then all retire … The infant in
arms was the Saviour of the world, the rightful
heir, come in disguise of a stranger to visit His own
house … Such has ever been the manner of His
visitations … silent, sudden, unforesen, as regards
the world, though predicted in the face of all men,
and in their measure comprehended and waited for
by His true Church … in spite of warnings ever so
clear, considering how the world goes on in every
age. Men who are plunged in the pursuits of active
life, are no judges of its course and tendency on the
whole. They confuse great events with little, and
measure the importance of objects … by the mere
standard of nearness and remoteness … But that He
is calling upon us all to prepare as for His coming, is
most evident to those who have religious eyes and
ears. Let us turn this festival to account, by taking
it as the memorial-day of His visitations. Let us
from the events it celebrates, lay deep in our hearts
the recollection, how mysteriously little things are
in this world connected with great; how single
moments, improved or wasted, are the salvation or
ruin of all-important interests.

John Henry Newman
THE ANNUNCIATION

For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying, “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Here am I and the children whom God has given me.” Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast (Heb 2:11-18)

What could be more marvelous than to see the condescension of God reaching as far as pregnancy in the womb of a woman? O paradoxical events! God, “who has heaven as his throne and earth as his footstool” (cf. Isa 66.1), is [contained] in the reproductive parts of a woman! God, who is above the heavens, is in a womb, while at the same time he is sharing power with his Father’s eternity. And what could be more paradoxical than this: for God to be seen in human form, having not separated himself from his own divinity, and also to see human nature entirely joined together with the Creator in order that the entire human being, who at first fell under the power of sin, may be deified?

Andrew of Crete

We rejoice with delight and wonder, for this image [of Mary, the most-pure Mother of God] is always with us as comfort and encouragement, as inspiration and help. We rejoice because in gazing at this image, it is so easy to believe in the heavenly beauty of the world and in man’s heavenly transcendent calling.

Alexander Schmemann

Today is the Fountainhead of our salvation and the revelation of the mystery that was planned from all eternity: the Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin and Gabriel announces this grace. Let us join him in crying out to the Mother of God: “Hail O Woman full of grace! The Lord is with you.”

Troparion for the Feast
THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

As Christ came into the world, he said: Behold! I have come to do your will, O God.

Entrance Antiphon of the Mass for the Feast

A gain the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel…”

First Reading of the Mass of the Feast (Isa 7:10-14)

You have heard, O Virgin, that you will conceive and bear a son; you have heard that it will not be by man but by the Holy Spirit. The angel awaits an answer; it is time for him to return to God who sent him. We too are waiting, O Lady, for your word of compassion; the sentence of condemnation weighs heavily upon us.

The price of our salvation is offered to you. We shall be set free at once if you consent. In the eternal Word of God we all came to be, and behold, we die. In your brief response we are to be remade in order to be recalled to life.

Tearful Adam with his sorrowing family begs this of you, O loving Virgin, in their exile from Paradise. Abraham begs it, David begs it. All the other holy patriarchs, your ancestors, ask it of you, as they dwell in the country of the shadow of death. This is what the whole earth waits for, prostrate at your feet. It is right in doing so, for on your word depends comfort for the wretched, ransom for the captive, freedom for the condemned, indeed, salvation for all the sons of Adam, the whole of your race.

Answer quickly, O Virgin! … Behold the handmaid of the Lord, she says, be it done to me according to your word.

Bernard of Clairvaux

Mary is the guarantor of Christian realism; in her it becomes manifest that God’s word was not only spoken but also heard; that God has not only called, but that man has also answered; that salvation was not only presented, but also received. Christ is God’s word, Mary is the answer; in Christ, God has come down from heaven; in Mary, the earth has become fruitful. Mary is the seal of perfect creatureliness; in her is illustrated in advance what God intended for creation.

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn
PALM SUNDAY

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasant, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast (Phil 4:4-9)

O Christ God, when You raised Lazarus from the dead, before the time of your passion, you confirmed the future resurrection of all. We too, like the children of old, carry before You the symbols of your triumph and victory and cry out to You, the Conqueror of Death: “ Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Troparion for the Feast

Come, come, let us go up together to the Mount of Olives. Together let us meet Christ, who is returning today from Bethany and going of his own accord to that holy and blessed passion to complete the mystery of our salvation. And so he comes, willingly taking the road to Jerusalem, he who came down from the heights for us, to raise us who lie in the depths to exaltation with him ... Come then, let us run with him as he presses on to his passion. Let us imitate those who have gone out to meet him, not scattering olive branches or garments or palms in his path, but spreading ourselves before him as best we can, with humility of soul and upright purpose. So may we welcome the Word as he comes, so may God who cannot be contained within any bounds, be contained within us. For he is pleased to have shown us this gentleness, he who is gentle and who ‘rides upon the setting sun’, which refers to our extreme lowliness.

He is pleased to come and live with us and to raise us up or bring us back to him through his kinship with us.

Andrew of Crete

“On the throne of the cherubim and on the foal He sat for our sake, advancing toward His voluntary passion, with the children shouting Hosanna.” Christ is the King, but His Kingdom is not of this world; and in the world He manifests his Kingdom by the meekness and obedience of crucified love. The cross is His instrument, and the crucifixion is His victory. He is the Lord of creation, the Creator and Provider, the Miracle Worker and the Resurrector. He is the King of kings, but He still seeks yet another kingdom in creation—the kingdom not of omnipotence, but of love; not of power, but of sacrifice; not of subjugation, but of persuasion: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,” saith the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). And the sign of His victory is the cross—the scepter of the suffering God, beneath which all are called: “On this day the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together, and all of us who have taken up Your cross say: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna is the Highest” ....

Let our powers be renewed for labor in Christ’s vineyard, for the work of the Kingdom of God both within us and outside of us, here on earth! For on this earth the people spread out their garments before Christ and shouted” Hosanna! And Christ followed to the end the earthly path, and we too together with Him ascend to His glory. “Work for the Lord in fear and rejoice in him with trepidation!”

Sergius Bulgakov
PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: "Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

Alternative Gospel of the Procession before the principal Mass of the Feast (Jn 12:12-16)

It was not for pleasure the Lord of the world was borne a public spectacle upon the back of an ass, but that He might by the Mystery within Him caparison the inner chambers of our soul, and as a Mystic Rider occupy an interior seat in the depths of our hearts, penetrating there as it were by a certain substance of His divinity, guiding the steps of the soul, restraining the wantonness of the flesh, so that made gentle by the hand of kindness He might then wholly rule in the hearts of the Gentiles.

Ambrose of Milan

Six days before the Passover, when the Lord came into the city of Jerusalem, the children ran to meet him; in their hands they carried palm branches and with a loud voice cried out: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed are you, who have come in your abundant mercy!

O gates, lift high your heads; grow higher, ancient doors. Let him enter, the king of glory! Who is this king of glory? He, the Lord of hosts. He is the king of glory. Hosanna in the highest! Blessed are you, who have come in your abundant mercy!

Entrance Antiphon of the Mass for the Feast

At the very beginning of today's Liturgy, the Church anticipates her response to the Gospel saying: "Let us follow the Lord". This clearly expresses the theme of Palm Sunday. It is the sequela. Being Christian means considering the way of Jesus Christ as the right way for being human as that way which leads to our destination, to a completely fulfilled and authentic humanity ... being Christian is a path or, better, a pilgrimage; it is to travel with Jesus Christ, to journey in the direction he has pointed out and is pointing out to us.

But what direction is this? How do we find it? ... Jesus walks before us and towards the heights. He leads us to what is great, pure. He leads us to that healthy air of the heights: to live in accordance with the truth; to courage that does not let itself be intimidated by the gossip of prevalent opinions; to patience that bears with and sustains the other. He guides people to be open towards the suffering, to those who are neglected. He leads us to stand loyally by the other, even when the situation becomes difficult. He leads us to the readiness to give help, to the goodness that does not let itself be disarmed, even by ingratitude. He leads us to love he leads us to God.

Pope Benedict XVI
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'”) From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Gospel of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast (John 1: 1-17)

Let no one fear death, for the death of our Saviour has set us free; He has destroyed it by enduring it, He has despoiled Hades by going down into its kingdom, he has angered it by allowing it to taste of his flesh. When Isaiah foresaw all this, he cried out: 'O Hades, you have been angered by encountering Him in the nether world.' Hades is angered because frustrated, it is angered because it has been mocked, it is angered because it has been destroyed, it is angered because it has been reduced to naught, it is angered because it is now captive. It seized a body, and, lo! it discovered God; it seized earth, and, behold! it encountered heaven; it seized the visible, and was overcome by the invisible. O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you are abolished, Christ is risen and the demons are cast down, Christ is risen and the angels rejoice, Christ is risen and life is freed, Christ is risen and the tomb is emptied of the dead: for Christ, being risen from the dead, has become the Leader and Reviver of those who had fallen asleep. To Him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

John Chrysostom, Easter Sermon

The Passion is linked to the Resurrection, and Good Friday to Pascha. A seed dying in the earth is an inseparable part of the cycle of germination. Misfortunes are woven together with comfort; and the resurrection of Christ prevails. Within the joyful mourning of our holy Church, the light and joy and the abundance of goodness in the Lord are so great that every living thing of goodwill abounds in it; it intoxicates the excavated earth of the soul of man with its manifold trials and wounds; and, in turn, it sprouts there heavenly joy ... Continue the struggle of your work. Go down to the sea of your life and all that you have tried to do. You will see the Risen One on the seashore. And coming out of the boat with a multitude of fish in your nets, signifying all that you seek in life, you will find on the seashore nourishment ready to eat — “a piece of broiled fish and beeswax” — which will sweeten any bitterness in your mouth and sustain your heart. And nobody will ask who He is because you will be sure that He is the Risen Lord, who blesses and sanctifies the universe.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
EASTER

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is free from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Second Reading of the Vigil of the Feast
(Rom 6:3-11)

Our Lord and Redeemer, revealed the glory of his resurrection to his disciples gradually and over a period of time, undoubtedly because so great was the virtue of the miracle that the weak hearts of mortals could not grasp [the significance of] this all at once. Thus he had regard for the frailty of those seeking him. To those who came first to the tomb, both the women who were aflame with love for him, and the men, he showed the stone rolled back. And since his body had been carried away, he showed them the linen cloths in which it had been wrapped lying there alone. Then, to the women who were searching eagerly, and who were confused in their minds as to what they had found out about him, he showed a vision of angels who were to disclose by certain evidence the fact that he had risen again. Thus, with the report of his resurrection, already accomplished, going ahead of him, the Lord of Hosts and the King of Glory himself at length appeared and made clear with what great might he had overcome the death he had temporarily tasted.

Bede the Venerable

The only surviving image of real power—and for Christians it is more than an image—is the tangible reality of resurrection from the dead. One man has come back, not as a spiritist phenomenon but in flesh and blood: "Touch me and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have." He did not come back as a projection of the living faith of the disciples, for he came when none of them had the least idea of such a possibility, and he had a hard battle against their stubborn unbelief. This One Man brought back with him from the realm of the dead the hope and certainty of eternal life of all. He brings us the very thing we need, although we cannot see how, namely, a continuing life that is not simply a continuation of the old life ...[It is] both a transition into God's eternity and at the same time the transfiguration and fulfillment of all that remained hopelessly unfilled and unfulfillable on earth. This wonderful, unique, earthly life, purified of all its slag, of all its inadequacies, is to be lifted up to the plane of the eternal.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar

Entrance Antiphon of the Mass during the Day for the Feast

I have risen, and I am with you still, alleluia. You have laid your hand upon me, alleluia. Too wonderful for me, this knowledge, alleluia, alleluia.
THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast
(Acts 1:1-12)

Now the angels have received that for which they have long waited; the archangels see that for which they have long thirsted: They have seen our nature shining on the King’s throne, glistening with glory and eternal beauty . . . . Therefore they descend in order to see the unusual and marvelous vision: Man appearing in heaven.

John Chrysostom

By His Ascension the Lord not only opened to man the entrance to heaven, not only appeared before the face of God on our behalf and for our sake, but likewise “transferred man” to the high places. “He honored them He loved by putting them close to the Father.” God quickened and raised us together with Christ, as St Paul says, “and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Ephes. 2:6. Heaven received the inhabitants of the earth . . . . the Office for the Feast of the Ascension depicts the mystery in a poetical language. As on the day of Christ’s Nativity the earth was astonished on beholding God in the flesh, so now the Heavens do tremble and cry out. “The Lord of Hosts, Who reigns over all, Who is Himself the head of all, Who is pre-eminent in all things, Who has re-instated creation in its former order — He is the King of Glory.” And the heavenly doors are opened: “Open, Oh heavenly gates, and receive God in the flesh”.

George Florovsky
THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

First Reading of the Vigil Mass of the Feast
(Eph 1:17-20)

Since then Christ’s Ascension is our uplifting, and the hope of the Body is raised, whither the glory of the Head has gone before, let us exult, dearly-beloved, with worthy joy and delight in the loyal paying of thanks. For today, not only are we confirmed as possessors of paradise, but have also in Christ penetrated the heights of heaven, and have gained still greater things through Christ’s unspeakable grace than we had lost through the devil’s malice. For us, whom our virulent enemy had driven out from the bliss of our first abode, the Son of God has made members of Himself and placed at the right hand of the Father, with Whom He lives and reigns in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Leo the Great

[Christ’s Ascension] is a sursum corda, a movement toward the above into which we are all called. It tells us that man can live toward the above, that he is capable of attaining heights. More: the altitude that alone is suited to the dimensions of being human is the altitude of God himself. Man can live at this height, and only from this height do we properly understand him. The image of man has been raised up, but we have the freedom to tear it down or to let ourselves be raised. We do not understand man when we ask only where he comes from. We understand him only when we also ask where he can go. Only from this height is his essence really illuminated. And only when this height is perceived does there awaken an absolute reverence for man that considers him still holy in his humiliation. Only from there can we really learn to love the human condition [Menschein] in ourselves and in the other.

Joseph Ratzinger
PENTECOST

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”


Everything has been accomplished which remained to be done on earth; but it still remained necessary that we should share and participate in the divine nature of the Word—that is, that we should put away our life and be utterly transformed and launched on a new way of holy living. Now this could not be brought about except by a sharing and a participation in the Holy Spirit. The most suitable and appropriate time for the sending of the Holy Spirit and his descent upon us was the time which followed immediately upon the departure of Christ from our midst.

Cyril of Alexandria

The tongues of fire which descended at Pentecost abide in the world; and we, the Christian people, live by the active power of Pentecost, for the latter is the abiding Church of Christ. All the sacraments, prayers and sacramentalia of the Church are the tongues of fire of Pentecost which abide in the world. And the entire holiness of the Church, the spiritual gifts and achievements, is realized by the power of Pentecost ... Each of us is given participation in Pentecost, but we must nurture its gift, fully acquiring it by toil and exertion.

Sergius Bulgakov

Blessed are You, Christ our God, who have filled the fishermen with wisdom by sending down the Holy Spirit upon them and who, through them, have united the world. Glory to You, O Lover of Mankind!

Troparion for the Feast

* In the Eastern Church the icon of the Holy Trinity is venerated on Pentecost Sunday.
PENTECOST

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, “Come let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, “Look they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

First Reading of the Vigil Mass of the Feast

(11:1-9)

The Sacred Writings teach that after men had believed, were baptized, and received the Holy Ghost, they began to speak the tongues of all nations. Those present were astonished, some wondering, some mocking, so that they said:

These men are full of new wine (Acts ii. 1-13). They laughed, yet they said a true thing. For these skins were filled with new wine. You heard when the Gospel was being read, how, no one puts new wine into old wineskins (Mt. ix.17): the carnal minded cannot grasp spiritual things. The carnal mind is age, grace is newness. To whatever degree a man is changed for the better, so much the more does he grasp the flavor of truth. The new wine bubbled up, and as the must boiled, the tongues of the nations poured forth.

Augustine of Hippo

If we look out for inner freedom in which a person, regardless of herself, remains faithful to the dictate of her conscience; if someone succeeds, without knowing how, in really breaking out of the prison of her egoism; if someone not only gets his pleasures and delights, but possesses that joy which knows no limit; if someone with mute resignation allows death to take her and at the same time entrusts herself to an ultimate mystery in which she believes as unity, meaning, and love: when these things happen, what we Christians call the Holy Spirit is at work, precisely because in these and similar experiences what is involved is not a controllable and definable factor of the world of our experience. The Spirit is at work precisely because this world of experience is delivered up to its incomprehensible ground, to its innermost center which is no longer its very own.

Karl Rahner
THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more eager to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never stumble. For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you. Therefore I intend to keep on reminding you of these things, though you know them already and are established in the truth that has come to you. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

Jesus Christ was transfigured on the Mount, not taking upon Himself something new, nor being changed into something new, nor something which formerly He did not possess. Rather, it was to show His disciples that which He already was, opening their eyes and bringing them from blindness to sight. For do you not see that eyes that can perceive natural things would be blind to this Light?

Gregory Palamas

We live in a world of suffering, a world broken and disintegrated, in which Christ’s Transfiguration uncovers reality and reveals to our skeptical minds a new humanity that has either entered into the light of the Risen One, or is still called to do so. Ever since Pentecost, the Transfiguration no longer takes place on Mount Tabor, but within every person who welcomes Christ, the image of the Father who sends the Holy Spirit upon his beloved. Our darkness is removed to the extent that we become Christ-like. The light enables us to assume our human condition, a condition that remains limited until our death, but is nonetheless restored in its essence as it awaits a “body of glory.” The Transfiguration reminds us that for true disciples, tears, suffering, wounds of body and soul will all be transformed in the joy of the Resurrection.

Michael Quenot

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast
(2 Peter 1:10-19)
THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened ... As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

First Reading of the Mass of the Feast
(Dan 7:9-10, 13-14)

Let us then, ascend to the mountain, let us beseech the Word of God to show himself to us in his splendour, in his beauty; to grow strong and proceed prosperously, and reign in our souls, For behold a deep mystery! According to thy measure, the Word diminishes or grows within thee. If thou reach not that summit, high above all human thought, Wisdom will not appear to thee; the Word shows himself to thee as in a body without brightness and without glory.

Ambrose of Milan

No one goes unheard before the face of God. The Father hears the pleas of his much beloved Son. Union with God, which Jesus otherwise holds hidden in the ultimate depths of his soul, now fills up all the chambers of his soul, it embraces his body, drawing it, too, into the blessedness of God’s light and God’s unity. “His face was like the sun, and his clothes were as radiant as light.” And still more: there appeared to him Moses and Elijah, the great proclaimers of the law and the prophets. And Jesus is between them as a sign that the law and the prophets have their goal and their fulfillment; as a sign that he gives the power of fulfilling the law from within; that he is the wellspring and the plenitude of every Spirit at work in the prophets and presently to be poured forth upon all who believe in him. And because all redemption and all Holy Spirit takes its departure from the cross, they talk with Jesus about the leave taking he is supposed to set forth upon in Jerusalem. And just as at the baptism, the voice of the Father confirms here, too, that this poor, praying Jesus, consecrated for suffering, and heroically prepared for the cross, is God’s very beloved Son.

This then is the meaning of the transfiguration for Jesus himself: in the dark night of earthly hopelessness the light of God shines, a human heart finds in God the power which turns a dying into a victory and into the redemption of the world.

Karl Rahner
Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” ... While he was saying this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!” But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!”


You were a Mother, and yet remained a Virgin; you went up to heaven, and yet did not forsake the world, O Mother of God. You have passed to life, being the Mother of Life. Through your intercession, save our souls from death.

Troparion for the Feast

What, then, shall we call this mystery concerning you? Death? But even though your holy and blessed soul was separated from your privileged, immaculate body, and your body was committed to burial, as custom demanded, still it did not remain in death, nor was it dissolved by corruption. For she whose virginity remained undamaged in childbirth also kept her body undamaged in her passage through death. She was brought over to ‘a better and more divine tent’ (cf. Heb 9:11) that is not cut down by death, but endures always, for endless ages of ages. For just as the all-bright, ever-shining sun, when it is hidden for a while by the body of the moon, seems in a way to fail and to be covered in darkness, accepting shadow in place of light, yet nonetheless never ceases to produce its own light—for it has welling up within itself an ever-flowing fountain of light, or rather is itself an inexhaustible fountain of light, as the God who created it has ordained—so you, too, the ever-flowing fountain of true light, the inexhaustible treasure of light itself, the abundant spring of blessing, the cause and sponsor for us of all good things, even if your body is hidden for a short space of time in death, still you pour forth light for us in a generous and endless stream: immortal life, unceasing, pure and inexhaustible waves of true blessedness, rivers of grace, springs of healing, blessings without end. ‘You are like an apple tree growing in the midst of the deep woods’ (Cant 2:7). And your fruit is sweet in the mouths of the faithful. Therefore I will not call your holy passing [from this world] a death, but rather a falling-asleep, a parting, or—more properly speaking—a homecoming.

John of Damascus

In contemplating this death and standing at this deathbed we understand that death is no more, that a person’s very act of dying has now become an act of living, the entrance into a larger life, where life reigns. She who gave herself completely to Christ, who loved him to the end, is met by Him at these radiant gates of death, and there at once death is turned into joyful meeting—life is triumphant, joy and love rule over all.

Alexander Schmemann
THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being: for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Second Reading of the Mass during the Day for the Feast (1 Cor 15:20-26)

Finally, when blessed Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was about to be called from this world, all the apostles, coming from their different regions, gathered together in her house. When they heard that she was about to be taken up out of the world, they kept watch together with her.

And behold, the Lord Jesus came with his angels and, taking her soul, handed it over to the archangel Michael and withdrew. At dawn, the apostles lifted up her body on a pallet, laid it in a tomb, and kept watch over it, awaiting the coming of the Lord. And behold, again the Lord presented himself to them and ordered that her holy body be taken and carried up to heaven. There she is now, joined once more to her soul; she exults with the elect, rejoicing in the eternal blessings that will have no end.

Gregory of Tours

We are gathered here, once again, to celebrate one of the oldest and best loved of the feasts dedicated to Mary Most Holy: the feast of her Assumption into the glory of Heaven in body and soul, in other words in the whole of her human existence, in the integrity of her person. Thus we have been given the grace of renewing our love for Mary, of admiring her and of praising her for the “great things” which the Almighty worked through her and brought about in her.

In contemplating the Virgin Mary we are granted another grace: the ability to see our own life too in depth. Yes, because our own daily existence, with its problems and hopes, receives light from the Mother of God, from her spiritual journey, from her destiny of glory: a journey and a destination that can and must become, in a certain way, our own journey and our own destination.

Pope Benedict XVI

Let us rejoice in the Lord, as we celebrate the feast day in honour of the Virgin Mary, at whose Assumption the Angels rejoice and praise the Son of God.

Alternative Entrance Antiphon of the Mass during the Day for the Feast
THE PROTECTION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. For a tent was constructed, the first one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the Presence; this is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a tent called the Holy of Holies. In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot speak now in detail. Such preparations having been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties; but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year, and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people.

Epistle of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast (Heb 9:1-7)

At the fourth hour of the night the blessed Andreas, who used to stand as long as his zeal gave him strength, sometimes until midnight, sometimes until morning, saw the most Holy Mother of God appearing visibly, very tall, from the Royal doors, escorted by an awe-inspiring retinue in which there were, among others, the honorable Forerunner and the Son of Thunder, holding her by the hand on both sides. Many other holy men in white garments accompanied her, some going before her, others following her, singing hymns and spiritual songs. As she approached the ambo [pulpit] the blessed man went up to Epiphanius and said, ‘Do you see the Lady and the Mistress of the world?’ He answered. ‘Yes I do, my spiritual Father.’ Before their eyes she knelt and prayed for a long while, besprinkling with tears her godlike and immaculate face. Having finished her prayer she went into the sanctuary and prayed there for the people standing around. As she prayed she removed with beautiful dignity the veil that she had on her immaculate head, appearing like a flash of lightning and spread it (it was large and awe-inspiring) with her immaculate hands over all the people that were standing there. For a long time the admirable men saw it stretched out over the congregation, radiating the glory of God like [an] electrum. As long as the most Holy Mother of God was there the veil was also visible, but when she had withdrawn they could no longer see it. No doubt she had taken it away with her, but her favour she left to those who were there.

Life of St Andrew the Fool

The hearer of this account is left in no doubt as to the actual physical presence of the Mother of God at the midnight vigil. Mary is seen as a majestic almost super-human figure who in queenly fashion is surrounded by a retinue of holy figures. Nevertheless, the depth of her compassion for mankind causes her to make an appearance in church and to pray at length on their behalf. The fact that she prays is revealing in itself: the power to save comes not from herself but from God, with whom she stands in a unique relationship. The text also suggests the Virgin’s accessibility to ordinary men and women. She is ready to answer every prayer and to help in any difficulty.

Mary Cunningham
OUR LADY OF MONTE BERICO

Trust in him, and he will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in him. You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy; do not stray, or else you may fall. You who fear the Lord, trust in him, and your reward will not be lost. You who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for lasting joy and mercy. Consider the generations of old and see: has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed? Or has anyone persevered in the fear of the Lord and been forsaken? Or has anyone called upon him and been neglected? For the Lord is compassionate and merciful; he forgives sins and saves in time of distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, but not into the hands of mortals; for equal to his majesty is his mercy, and equal to his name are his works.

First Reading of the Votive Mass of Our Lady of Mt Beric (Sir 2: 6-11, 18)

O you, whoever you are, who feel that in the tidal wave of this world you are nearer to being tossed about among the squalls and gales than treading on dry land, if you do not want to founder in the tempest, do not avert your eyes from the brightness of this star [Mary]. When the wind of temptation blows up within you, when you strike upon the rock of tribulation, gaze up at this star, call out to Mary. Whether you are being tossed about by the waves of pride or ambition or slander or jealousy, gaze up at this star, call out to Mary. When rage or greed or fleshly desires are battering the skiff of your soul, gaze up at Mary. When the immensity of your sins weighs you down and you are bewildered by the loathsomeness of your conscience, when the terrifying thought of judgment appalls you and you begin to founder in the gulf of sadness and despair, think of Mary. In dangers, in hardships, in every doubt, think of Mary, call out to Mary... Asking her help, you will never despair... With her protecting you, you will not be afraid.

Bernard of Clairvaux

I consider it impossible then, for those who believe the Church to be one vast body in heaven and on earth, in which every holy creature of God has his place, and of which prayer is the life, when once they recognize the sanctity and dignity of the Blessed Virgin, not to perceive immediately, that her office above is one of perpetual intercession for the faithful militant, and that our very relation to her must be that of clients to a patron, and that, in the eternal enmity which exists between the woman and the serpent, while the serpent’s strength lies in being the Tempter, the weapon of the Second Eve and Mother of God is prayer.

John Henry Newman
THE “REIGNING” ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

Second Reading from Great Vespers for the Feast of the “Reigning” Icon of the Mother of God (Gen 28: 10-17)

I [the Lord] will build you [my Mother] into the wall of the universe, into a bridge for those who are awash in the waves, an ark of salvation, a staff for the disabled, an advocate for sinners, a ladder to heaven strong enough to bear the weight of all humanity as it climbs.

Germanus of Constantinople

O holy and now heavenly Virgin, how can I fully describe you? How can I glorify the treasure-house of glory? … You have become the treasurer of graces and their store, not so you might keep them for yourself, but that you might fill the universe with grace. For the trustee of inexhaustible treasures sees to their distribution. Why would never-dwindling wealth be locked away? Therefore, O Lady, generously share your mercy and your graces with all your people, your inheritance. Rescue us from the terrors that encompass us. See how many dangers of all kinds afflict us, from our own people and from strangers, from within and without. Through your power turn everything for the best. Bring mutual calm between fellow-citizens at home, and drive away those who attack like wild beasts from outside. Bestow your aid and healing on us to counteract our passions, and give our souls and bodies abundant grace sufficient for every need. And if we are unable to contain it, increase our capacity and give us more, that saved and strengthened by your grace we may glorify the pre- eternal Word, Who took flesh from you for our sake, together with His Father without beginning and the life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto unending ages. Amen.

Gregory Palamas

The Mother of God is the praying Church itself in its personal embodiment … She is the universal Mother, defender and guardian. She is personal, incarnate mercy and pty for the world in its creaturely shortcomings and sinful distortion … She is the sunlit summit of the world for she still belongs to it.

Sergius Bulgakov

Seeking the city of Sion, we flee today beneath they protection, O pure Virgin, and none can assail us, for there is no city as powerful as the one of Him Who is God, and no other might to equal that of the mercy of the Virgin Mistress.

Troparion for the Feast.
OUR LADY OF MERCY

As the vine I have brought forth a pleasant odour: and my flowers are the fruit of honour and riches. I am the Mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth; in me is all hope of life and of virtue. Come over to me all ye that desire me; and be filled with my fruits. For my spirit is sweet above honey; and by inheritance above honey and the honeycomb. My memory is unto everlasting generations. They that eat me shall yet hunger; and they that drink me shall yet thirst. He that hearkeneth [listens] to me shall not be confounded; and they that work by me shall not sin. They that explain me shall have life everlasting.

First Reading of the Mass of the Feast (Ecel 24:23-31)

Why does the Church call Mary “the Queen of Mercy”? It is because we believe that she opens the abyss of the mercy of God to whomsoever she wills, when she wills, and as she wills; so that there is no sinner, however great, who is lost if Mary intercedes for him.

Bernard of Clairvaux

The blessed Virgin has so merciful a heart that she deserves not only to be called merciful, but mercy itself.

Leo the Great

Go to this Mother of Mercy and show her the wounds which your sins have left on your soul; then she will certainly entreat her Son, by the breasts that nourished Him, to pardon you for everything. This divine Son who loves her so tenderly, will most certainly grant her petition.

Bernard of Clairvaux

Divine Mercy: the Holy Father [John Paul II] found the purest reflection of God’s mercy in the Mother of God. He, who at an early age had lost his own mother, loved his divine mother all the more. He heard the words of the crucified Lord as addressed personally to him: “Behold your Mother.” And so he did as the beloved disciple did: he took her into his own home … And from the mother he learned to conform himself to Christ.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger
THE VIRGIN OF THE PASSION

When she beheld her Son and Lord hanging on the Cross, the pure Virgin was torn with grief and, weeping bitterly with the other women, she cried out: ‘Woe is me!’

‘I see Thee, dearest and beloved Child, hanging on the Cross and my heart is wounded bitterly’, said the pure Virgin. ‘But in Thy love speak some word to Thy handmaiden.’

‘By Thine own will, my Son and Creator, Thou didst endure a fearful death upon the Tree’, said the Virgin, standing by the Cross with the Beloved Disciple.

‘How am I deprived of Him who is my hope, my joy, my gladness, of my Son and God. Woe is me! My heart is filled with anguish’, said the All-Pure weeping.

‘I see Thee bruised and wounded, without glory, stripped upon the Cross, O my Child, and my heart burns’, said the Virgin sorrowing with a mother’s grief.

The pure Virgin Mother wept as she took Him on her knees; her tears flowed down upon Him, and with bitter cries of grief she kissed Him.

‘My Son, my Lord and God, Thou wast the only hope of Thine handmaiden, my life and the light of mine eyes; and now, alas, I have lost Thee, my sweet and most beloved Child.’

‘In my arms I hold Thee as a corpse, O Loving Lord, who hast brought the dead to life; grievously is my heart wounded and I long to die with Thee’, said the All-Pure, ‘for I cannot bear to look upon Thee lifeless and without breath.’

‘O God supreme in love, O Lord all-merciful, I am filled with horror as I see Thee dishonoured, lifeless, without beauty, stripped, and I weep as I hold Thee. Woe is me! I never thought to look upon Thee thus, my Son.’

‘Where, O my Son and God, are the good tidings of the Annunciation that Gabriel brought me? He called Thee King and God and Son of the Most High; and now, O my sweet Light, I behold Thee naked, wounded, lifeless.’

‘A dread and terrible mystery do I behold’, the Virgin cried. ‘My Son, how art Thou laid in a narrow tomb, who dost by Thy command raise all the dead from the tomb?’

‘I shall not leave Thy tomb, my Child, nor shall I Thy handmaiden cease to shed tears, until I too descend into hell. For I cannot bear to be deprived of Thee, my Light.’

‘Now heal the wound of my soul, O my Child’, cried the Holy Virgin weeping. ‘Rise and still my pain and bitter anguish. For Thou hast power, O Master, and canst perform what Thou dost will. Even Thy burial is voluntary.’

‘How hast thou not seen the depth of My tender love?’ said the Lord to the Pure Virgin. ‘Because I wish to save My creature, I have accepted to die. But I shall rise again and as God shall magnify thee in heaven and on earth.’

‘I sing in praise of Thy compassion, loving Lord, and I worship the wealth of Thy mercy. For as God willingly Thou hast accepted to save Thy creation’, said the all-pure Virgin. ‘But, O Saviour, by Thy Resurrection have mercy on us all.’

The Lamentation of the Most Holy Theotokos (excerpts), by Simeon the Logothete
OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

At the cross her station keeping,
Mary stood in sorrow weeping
When her Son was crucified.

While she waited in her anguish,
Seeing Christ in torment languish,
Bitter sorrow pierced her heart.

With what pain and desolation,
With what noble resignation,
Mary watched her dying Son.

Ever-patient in her yearning
Though her tear-filled eyes were burning, Mary gazed upon her Son.

Who, that sorrow contemplating,
On that passion meditating,
Would not share the Virgin’s grief?

Christ she saw, for our salvation,
Scourged with cruel acclamation,
Bruised and beaten by the rod.

Christ she saw with life-blood failing,
All her anguish unavailing,
Saw him breathe his very last.

Mary, fount of love’s devotion,
Let me share with true emotion
All the sorrow you endured.

Virgin, ever interceding,
Hear me in my fervent pleading:
Fire me with your love of Christ.

Mother, may this prayer be granted:
That Christ’s love may be implanted
In the depths of my poor soul.

At the cross, your sorrow sharing,
All your grief and torment bearing,
Let me stand and mourn with you.

Fairest maid of all creation,
Queen of hope and consolation,
Let me feel your grief sublime.

Virgin, in your love befriend me,
At the Judgment Day defend me.
Help me by your constant prayer.

Savior, when my life shall leave me,
Through your mother’s prayers receive me
With the fruits of victory.

Virgin of all virgins blest!
Listen to my fond request:
Let me share your grief divine

Let me, to my latest breath,
In my body bear the death
Of your dying Son divine.

Wounded with His every wound,
Steep my soul till it has swooned
In His very Blood away.

Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,
Lest in flames I burn and die,
In His awe-full judgment day.

Savior, when my life shall leave me,
Through your mother’s prayers receive me
With the fruits of victory.

While my body here decays
May my soul your goodness praise,
Safe in heaven eternally. Amen. Alleluia

Stabat Mater
Appendix: Table of Feasts
The Nativity of the Theotokos
(8 September)
The Exaltation of the Holy Cross
(14 September)
The Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple
(21 November)
The Nativity of Christ
(25 December)
The Holy Theophany of Our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ
(6 January)
The Meeting of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple
(2 February)
The Annunciation
(25 March)
Psalm Sunday
(Sunday before Pascha)
The Ascension of the Lord
(Forty Days after Pascha)

Pentecost
(Fifty Days after Pascha)
The Transfiguration of the Lord
(6 August)
The Dormition of the Theotokos
(15 August)
The Protection of the Mother of God
(1 October Slavic tradition/ 28 October Greek tradition)
The “Reigning” Icon of the Mother of God
(6 March)
The Virgin of the Passion

HOLY PASCHA
Feasts of Glory

IN EAST AND WEST
Notes

INTRODUCTION

Archpriest Lawrence Cross

Cardinal Suenes
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Some of the commentaries from the Fathers and contemporary theologians have slight punctuation additions to allow for clearer and easier reading.
THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

Troparion for the Feast

Scripture
Philippians 2:5-11.

The Protoevangelium of James 4:1
*The Protoevangelium of James.*

Andrew of Crete, Oration 1: On the Nativity of the Theotokos

Alexander Schmemann
A. Schmemann, *Celebration of Faith: The Virgin Mary* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 24-25.

Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Entrance Antiphon for the Feast

Scripture
Romans 8:28-30.

Fulbert of Chartres, Sermon 4 on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Karl Rahner

The Birth of the Virgin (Erasmus Quellinus II)
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons:
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Erasmus_Quellinus_(II)_-_El_Nacimiento_de_la_Virgen_1650-1660.jpg

THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

Troparion for the Feast

Scripture
1 Corinthians 1:18-24.

Andrew of Crete, Oration 10: On the Exaltation of the Cross
Cited in *From the Fathers to the Churches,* 742-743.

Sergius Bulgakov

Icon of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

Entrance Antiphon for the Feast

Scripture
Philippians 2:6-11.

Pseudo-Chrysostom, The Cosmic Tree, Sermon VI for Holy Week

Pope Francis
Pope Francis, “Pope Francis: Approach mystery of the Cross with prayer and tears”.

Apse Mosaic at San Clemente, Rome
Photo by Dnalo1_01, Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA 3.0
THE ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS INTO THE TEMPLE

Troparion for the Feast
Raya and de Vinck, Byzantine Daily Worship, 516.

Scripture

The Protevangelium of James 7
The Protevangelium of James.

Gregory of Palamas, Sermon II On the Entry of the Mother of God into the Holy of Holies

Alexander Schmemann
Schmemann, Celebration of Faith, 27.

Icon of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple
Iconographer Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Opening Prayer of the Mass for the Feast
The Weekday Missal, 1729.

Scripture
Zechariah 2:10-13.

Bernard of Clairvaux, Prayer of Saint Bernard

Peter M.J. Stravinskas

The Presentation of the Virgin Mary (Ttitian)
Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons

THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

Troparion for the Feast
Raya and de Vinck, Byzantine Daily Worship, 559.

Scripture
Galatians 4:4-7.

Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 38: On the Nativity of Christ

Alexander Schmemann
Schmemann, Celebration of Faith, 33, 35.

Icon of the Nativity of Christ
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

Entrance Antiphon of the Vigil Mass for the Feast
The Weekday Missal, 79.

Scripture
Isaiah 62:1-5

Leo the Great, Sermon 21 on the Nativity
From the Fathers to the Churches, 113.

Hans Urs von Balthasar

Nativity (Fra Angelico)
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/San_Marco_Frescos_ (Angelico)#mediaviewer/File:Adorazione_del_Bambino_-_Beato_Angelico.jpg
THE HOLY THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD GOD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST

Troparion for the Feast

Scripture

Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 39: On the Baptism of Christ
*Feast Oration: Saint Gregory of Nazianzus*, 97.

Bishop Kallistos Ware
Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 71.

Icon of the Holy Theophany of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

THE MEETING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE

Troparion for the Feast

Scripture
Hebrews 7: 7-17.

Sophronius, Oration 3, 6-7: On the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple
Cited in From the Fathers to the Churches, 644.

Sergius Bulgakov

Icon of the Meeting of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Entrance Antiphon of the Mass for the Feast
*The Roman Missal*, 227.

Scripture
Mark 1:7-11.

Ambrose of Milan, Commentary on Luke 2:83
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Pope Benedict XVI

The Baptism of Christ (Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci)
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

Entrance Antiphon of the Mass for the Feast
*The Weekday Missal*, 1337.

Scripture

Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 13 de Tempore

John Henry Newman
http://www.newmanreader.org/works/parochial/volume2/sermon10.html

Presentation of Jesus at the Temple (Andrea Mantegna)
Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presentation_at_the_Temple_(Mantegna)#mediaviewer/File:MantegnaPresentazione.jpg
THE ANNUNCIATION

Troparion for the Feast

Scripture
Hebrews 2:11-18.

Andrew of Crete, Oration on the Annunciation of the Supremely Holy Lady, Our Theotokos

Alexander Schmemann

Icon of the Annunciation
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

Entrance Antiphon of the Mass for the Feast
*The Weekday Missal*, 1366.

Scripture
Isaiah 7:10-14.

Bernard of Clairvaux

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn

Annunciation (Sandro Botticelli)
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Cestello_Annunciation#mediaviewer/File:Botticelli_annunciazione_di_cestello_02.jpg

PALM SUNDAY

Troparion for the Feast

Scripture
Philippians 4:4-9

Andrew of Crete, Oration 9: On Palm Sunday
Cited in *From the Fathers to the Churches*, 288.

Sergius Bulgakov
Bulgakov, *Churchly Joy*, 101, 103-104.

Icon of Palm Sunday
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Entrance Antiphon of the Mass for the Feast
*The Roman Missal*, 309.

Scripture
John 12:12-16

Ambrose of Milan
St Ambrose, “The Colt a Figure of the Gentiles”, in *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964), 172.

Pope Benedict XVI

Palm Sunday (Duccio di Buoninsegna)
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7a/Maesta_Duccio_detail.jpg
HOLY PASCHA

Troparion for the Feast

Scripture
John 1:1-17.

John Chrysostom, Resurrection Homily

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Easter Enccylical

Icon of the Anastasis
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

EASTER

Entrance Antiphon of the Mass during the Day for the Feast
*The Roman Missal*, 424.

Scripture
Romans 6:3-11.

Bede the Venerable

The Resurrection (Fra Angelico)
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/San_Marco_Frescos_(Angelico)#mediaviewer/File:Resurrection_of_Christ_and_Women_at_the_Tomb_by_Fra_Angelico_(San_Marco_cell_8).jpg

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Troparion for the Feast

Scripture

John Chrysostom
Cited in George Florovsky, “And Ascended into Heaven . . .”, *St Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1954), 26.

George Florovsky

Icon of the Ascension of Our Lord
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Entrance Antiphon of the Vigil Mass for the Feast
*The Roman Missal*, 469.

Scripture
Ephesians 1: 17-20.

Leo the Great
Leo the Great, Sermon 73.

Joseph Ratzinger

Ascension (Giotto di Bondone)
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/CATEGORY:Ascension_of_Christ#mediaviewer/File:Giotto_di_Bondone_-_No._38_Scenesc from_the_Life_of_Christ_-_22_Ascension_-_WGA09226.jpg
PENTECOST

Troparion for the Feast
Raya and de Vinck, Byzantine Daily Worship, 890.

Scripture

Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on John’s Gospel
Cited in From the Fathers to the Churches, 380-381.

Sergius Bulgakov
Bulgakov, Churchly Joy, 130.

Icon of the Trinity
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

PENTECOST

Entrance Antiphon of the Vigil Mass for the Feast
The Roman Missal, 491.

Scripture
Genesis 11:1-9

Augustine of Hippo

Karl Rahner

Pentecost (Anthony van Dyck)
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anthony_van_Dyck_-_Pentecost_-_WGA07442.jpg

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

Troparion for the Feast
Raya and de Vinck, Byzantine Daily Worship, 746.

Scripture
2 Peter 1:10-19.

Gregory Palamas, Sermon on the Transfiguration
Gregory of Palamas, “Sermon on the Transfiguration”.
http://oca.org/fs/sermons/sermon-on-the-transfiguration.
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Icon of the Transfiguration of the Lord
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD

Entrance Antiphon of the Mass for the Feast
The Roman Missal, 965.

Scripture
Dan 7:9-10, 13-14.

Ambrose of Milan

Karl Rahner
Karl Rahner, The Great Church Year, 341-342.

Transfiguration (Raphael)
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transfiguration_Raphael.jpg
THE DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS

Troparion for the Feast
Raya and de Vrele, Byzantine Daily Worship, 756.

Scripture

John of Damascus, Homily I: On the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God

Alexander Schmemann
Schmemann, Celebration of Faith, 40.

Icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos
Icon written by Antonina Gatin. Casamento Photography.

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Alternative Entrance Antiphon of the Mass during the Day for the Feast
The Roman Missal, 981.

Scripture

Gregory of Tours
Cited in L. Gambaro, Mary and the Fathers of the Church (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 353.

Pope Benedict XVI

Assumption of Mary (Rubens)
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Peter_Paul_Rubens%201622%2080%931624#mediaviewer/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_167.jpg
THE PROTECTION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

Troparion for the Feast
The October Menuion (Boston, Massachusetts: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2005), 7.

Scripture

St. Andrew the Fool

Mary Cunningham

Icon of the Protection of the Mother of God
Icon written by Antonina Ganin. Casamento Photography.

OUR LADY OF MONTE BERICO

Entrance Antiphon of the Votive Mass

The Antiphon in Italian reads as follows: O Dio, Padre di misericordia, che in Maria, Madre di Cristo tuo Figlio, ci hai dato una Madre sempre pronta a soccorrerci, concedi, ti preghiamo, che, implorando assiduamente la sua materna protezione, meritiamo di godere per sempre il frutto della Redenzione. Per il nostro Signore Gesù Cristo, tuo Figlio, che è Dio, e vive e regna con te, nell’unità dello Spirito Santo, per tutti i secoli dei secoli.

Scripture
Sirach 2: 6-11, 18.

Bernard of Clairvaux

John Henry Newman

Statue of Our Lady of Mt Berico
(Ferdinando Prinoto, Ortise, Bolzano, Italy).
Casamento Photography.
THE “REIGNING” ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

Troparion of the Feast
Orthodox Calendar.

Scripture
Genesis 28: 10-17.

Germanus of Constantinople

Gregory Palamas
Palamae, Mary the Mother of God, 78.

Sergius Bulgakov

Our Lady Derzhavnaya
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
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THE VIRGIN OF THE PASSION

Simeon the Logothete, The Lamentation of the Most Holy Theotokos
Cited in Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, The Lenten Triodion (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1977), 617-621.

The Virgin of the Passion
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mary16dhC.jpg

OUR LADY OF MERCY

Entrance Antiphon of the Mass during the Day for the Feast

Scripture

Bernard of Clairvaux

Pope Leo the Great
Cited in Liguori, The Glories of Mary, 94.

Bernard of Clairvaux
Cited in Liguori, The Glories of Mary, 22.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

Our Lady of Mercy
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:San_Pudenziana.027.JPG

OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

Stabat Mater
Stabat Mater
http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/poetry/stabmat.html.

Our Mother of Perpetual Help
Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Our_Holy_Mother_Of_Perpetual_Succour.jpg