

**“Behold Your Mother”**  
**Dormition of the Most-holy Theotokos**  
**By Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev)**  
**August 28, 2004**

**Vienna, Austria, Cathedral of St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker**

The Dormition of our All-holy, Sovereign Lady Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, is a feast and source of joy for the entire Church, because Her blessed and holy repose was the crowning of Her entire life, for the life of the All-holy Theotokos, from beginning to end, was consecrated to God.

In early childhood Mary was brought into the temple of the Lord, in order to fulfill Holy Scripture, where She spent her days and nights in prayer. She purified and sanctified Herself to such a degree through prayer and the reading of Holy Scripture, that She Herself became a temple of God and a receptacle of the Godhead. The Lord chose Her to be His temple and His Mother; Her womb became more spacious than the heavens, for it contained God Himself, the Creator of heaven and earth. During the days of the sufferings of the Lord, the All-holy Theotokos was by His side. When the Lord hung upon the Cross and even His closest disciples had abandoned Him, the All-holy Theotokos stood at the Cross of Her Son. Then was fulfilled the prophecy of the righteous Symeon, which he foretold to Her when She brought the Child Jesus into the temple of the Lord, “And a sword will pierce through your own soul also” (Lk. 2:35). The All-holy Theotokos endured great suffering when She stood at the Cross of Her Son. The suffering which She endured encompassed all the suffering of the world. For this reason, our Lord Jesus Christ said from the Cross to His beloved disciple John: “Behold, your mother!” And to His Mother He said: “Woman, behold your son!” (Jn. 19:26-27). And, as the Church believes, at this moment our Lord Jesus Christ made the Theotokos to be the adopted Mother of all mankind.

After the resurrection of Christ, the All-holy Theotokos was together with the holy apostles, and together with them, She preached the (“good news”) of our resurrected Savior. She was especially honored in the apostolic community, and when Her blessed ending approached, all the apostles gathered in Jerusalem in order to be present during the last hours of Her earthly life. And the ending of the All-holy Theotokos was blessed and beautiful, and instead of being a reason for suffering, it became a source of joy for Herself and for those who surrounded Her.

Death is terrible and tragic when a person dies without God. A person dies without God when a person lived his life without God. And, as a rule, how the life of a person was, so also will be his death. In our unchurched world, where only a few people live a full church life, death is regarded as something tragic and horrible. But for the All-holy Theotokos, death was not the end of life, but the event for which She waited many years, for this death united Her with Her beloved Son, to Whom She had dedicated Her entire life.

Death is difficult and tragic when a person dies alone. Today many people die in solitude. And not because they don't have relatives, children or grandchildren, but because many people today live alone, for according to the prophecy of our Savior, “And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold (Mt. 24:12). Often, even members of the same family are not held together by love. Therefore, when there is grief or times of suffering or the hour of one's ending approaches, a person often feels abandoned. But the ending of the All-holy Theotokos was not like this. She died surrounded by the love of the disciples of our Savior, She made Her departure from earthly life as a member of the Church of Christ, and crossed over into the heavenly life accompanied by the prayers of her close ones, the apostles.

St. Andrew of Crete, in one of his discourses, said that after the repose of the All-holy Theotokos She descended into hades the same way as our Lord Jesus Christ and St. John the Forerunner descended into hades. But the majority of the other Fathers of the Church, among them St. John of Damascus, whose canon we read at Matins on the Feast of the Dormition of the All-holy Theotokos, reject this idea. They say that immediately after Her repose, the soul of the All-holy Theotokos was received into Heaven. This is exactly what is confessed by the

Holy Church. And on the icons of the Dormition of the All-holy Theotokos we see near Her death bed our Lord and Savior, Who holds in His hands Her blessed soul in the form of a Child.

We glorify the Dormition of the All-holy Theotokos and rejoice on this great feast, because the All-holy Theotokos has given us the greatest example of human life and death. By the example of Her entire life she showed us how a person who lives with God will also die with God; how a person who lives in the Church will also die as a member of the Church. And his ending and the crossing over of his soul from earthly into heavenly life will be accompanied by the prayers of his close ones and of the Church. Having gathered today at the death bed of the All-holy Theotokos, let us pray to our Heavenly Protectress that She will help us to live in God the same way that She did. Let us also pray that our earthly ending and our crossing over from temporal life will be a crowning entrance into the eternal life with our Savior.

***Translated from the Russian by Archpriest Peter Olsen***