

The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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The Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple in the calendar of the Eastern Orthodox Church is celebrated on the 21st day of November, and commemorates the arrival of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple in Jerusalem in the company of Jewish maidens who are carrying torches. Her parents, Joachim and Anna, dedicate her to the service of the Lord in the Temple in fulfilment of the promise which they made at her birth. This essay will explore the history, theology and Biblical themes of the feast.

A significant difficulty with the preparation of this essay was the shortage of contemporary secondary sources.² I was able to find a valuable resource in Fr Mark Schram's unpublished notes on the Infancy Gospels, *The Gospel of Thomas* and the *Protevangelium of St James*. Accordingly this study will use the primary sources. We shall use J.H. Elliott's edition and translation of the *Protevangelium*,³ the liturgical texts which may be found in English translation in *The Festal Menaion*,⁴ two homilies by St Germanos of Constantinople: "On the Entrance into the Temple I" and "On the Entrance into the Temple II,"⁵ and a further two by St Gregory Palamas: "Homily 52 Delivered on the Feast of the Entry of our Exceeding Pure Lady, the Mother of God, into the Holy of Holies," and "Homily 53 On the Entry Into the Holy of

¹ I wish to thank the Very Reverend Protopresbyter Mark Schram for his help with preparing this paper. He generously gave me access to his unpublished notes on the *Protevangelium of James*.

² Dr Andreas Andreopoulos assured me that there were none.

³ J.H. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford Clarendon Press 1993), 57-67.

⁴ Mother Mary & Archimandrite Kallistos Ware (tr.), *The Festal Menaion* (London Faber & Faber 1977), 164-198. Subsequent references will be *The Festal Menaion* and page number.

⁵ Mary B. Cunningham (ed. & tr.), *Wider than Heaven: Eighth Century Homilies on the Mother of God* (Crestwood NY St Vladimir's Seminary Press 2008), 145 – 162 & 163 – 172.

Holies Of Our Exceeding Pure Lady, Mother of God and Ever Virgin Mary and Her Divine Manner of Life There.”⁶

The History of the Feast

The Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple has a comparatively late date. Mary B. Cunningham, editor and translator of a collection of eighth century homilies on the Mother of God, argues for an early eighth century date for the appearance of the feast in Constantinople on the basis of the identification of the author of a homily for this feast.⁷ She writes: “If, as I believe, Germanos is its author, then we can affirm that the feast was being celebrated in Constantinople in the early eighth century.”⁸ In another place she comments that “the first liturgical texts in honour of the Entry of the Virgin are in fact the two homilies attributed to Germanos I of Constantinople and translated in the present volume.”⁹ In her opinion, a homily on the theme of the Entrance would be a response to the Iconoclasm of the times:

It is likely that Germanos is referring to iconoclasts in this passage; indeed it is likely that he means the emperor himself along with his supporters, although the passage referring to ‘their image’ is in fact a reference to Ps 30 [31]19. It is thus possible that this homily was delivered after 726, when Leo III may have promulgated his first iconoclast edict. The passage also suggests that along with images, the iconoclasts also disapproved of devotional practices surrounding the Theotokos.¹⁰

From Constantinople the celebration of the feast spread throughout the Christian East.¹¹

⁶ Saint Gregory Palamas, *The Homilies*, Christopher Veniamin (ed., tr., introduction & notes) with the assistance of the Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex, England (Darlton, PA Mount Thabor Publishing 2014), 407 – 413 & 414 – 444. I am indebted to the Rev Dr Andreas Andreopoulos for recommending these homilies and also to Mr. Bill Wsiaki of Fr Harold Drake Library, St Paul’s College, University of Manitoba, for acquiring the book for his Library and for my use.

⁷ Mary B. Cunningham (ed. & tr.), *Wider than Heaven: Eighth Century Homilies on the Mother of God* (Crestwood NY St Vladimir’s Seminary Press 2008), 170 fn 29 & 170-1 fn 32.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 170 fn 29.

⁹ *Ibid.* 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 170-1 fn 32.

¹¹ I have not yet found any evidence of the presence of this feast in the Christian West.

The Protevangelium of St James

The source of the feast day is the apocryphal document called the *Protevangelium of St James* which is not an early work.¹² It is true that the document ends with the name and date of an author: “Now I, James, wrote this history in Jerusalem when tumult arose on the death of Herod, and withdrew into the desert until the tumult in Jerusalem ceased.”¹³ If this were true, its early date would make this document an important authority. Unfortunately it is not. The mistakes concerning Jewish Law and history which Fr Mark Schram identifies make it more likely that this is a much later document written when such knowledge was less common in Christian circles. Recent scholarship supports a later date for the document. One authority dates this document to the middle of the second century and states that it was known to Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen.¹⁴ A second author, J.H. Elliott, dates it to the second half of the second century.¹⁵ Both authors agree that the document “is devoid of historical value,” and “the historical value of the stories in *PJ* is insignificant.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, this document had an influence on the development of Mariology and liturgy as Elliott writes, “The influence of *PJ* was immense and it may be said with some confidence that the developed doctrine of Mariology can be traced to this book.”¹⁷ Here we have the curious truth that a document which is historically unreliable, of comparatively late date when compared with canonical scriptures and not part of canonical scriptures has nevertheless influenced the development of Mariology and contributed to the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple.

In the next part of this essay, we shall examine the account of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, which is contained in the

¹² For an English translation of the document, see J.H. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford Clarendon Press 1993), 57-67

¹³ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 25, 66-67.

¹⁴ F. L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone (Ed), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church second edition* (Oxford 1974), 723.

¹⁵ J.H. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford Clarendon Press 1993), 49.

¹⁶ Cross & Livingstone, 701, and Elliott, 51.

¹⁷ Elliott, 48.

Protevangelium of St James using J. H. Elliott's edition.¹⁸ The account begins with a very rich man, Joachim, whose generous gift to the Lord is rejected because he has no offspring: "It is not lawful for you to offer your gifts first, because you have no offspring in Israel."¹⁹ He is saddened to discover that he is indeed the only one of the righteous of Israel who has no offspring. He remembers that Abraham was given a son in his old age. In his sorrow, he retires to the wilderness to pray and fast for forty days and forty nights, "saying to himself, 'I shall not go down either for food or for drink until the Lord my God visits; my prayer shall be food and drink.'"²⁰ In this he copies the example of Moses and prefigures that of our Lord Jesus Christ both of whom fasted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness.²¹ We may notice Joachim's sorrow for his childlessness and his faith in the goodness of God. God, if He wishes, will give him a child. Joachim wants a child but does not ask for either a son or a daughter. Next we meet his wife, Anna. She has two causes of grief: she is childless, and her husband has gone into the wilderness. She laments: "I will mourn my widowhood and grieve for my childlessness."²² As her husband remembered Abraham, she remembers Sarah: "O God of our fathers, bless me and heed my prayer, just as you blessed the womb of Sarah and gave her a son, Isaac."²³ Abraham and Sarah, an elderly and childless couple, who received a son from God, are an example for other childless couples.²⁴ Soon an angel appears and tells Anna that she is to become the mother of a child and Anna promises the child to the Lord:

And behold an angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, 'Anna, Anna, the Lord has heard your prayer. You shall conceive and bear and your offspring shall be spoken of in the whole world'. And Anna said, 'As the Lord my God

¹⁸ Subsequent references will be Elliott, *Protevangelium*, paragraph and page number.

¹⁹ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 1, 57.

²⁰ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 1, 57.

²¹ Ex 24.15-18; Ex 34. 28; Deut 9.9; Deut 9.25; Mt 4.1-3; Mk1.12-13; Lk4.1-2.

²² Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 2, 57.

²³ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 2, 58.

²⁴ Gen 17. 1-21, 18. 9-15, 21,1-7 (all Biblical quotations are from the RSV). Compare the prediction of the birth of Samson, Judg 13.2-5.

gives, I bear a child, whether male or female, I will bring it as a gift to the Lord my God, and it shall serve Him all the days of its life.²⁵

This echoes another Biblical figure, Hannah, the mother of Samuel who had been childless and promised her son as a gift to the Lord:

And she vowed a vow and said, 'O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head'.²⁶

Both childless women offer their first born children to the Lord. In Hannah's case, it is clear that she wants a son. Anna will accept either a son or a daughter. Further the appearance of the angel reminds the reader of two other annunciations, that of the angle to Zachariah, and that of the angel to the Theotokos.²⁷ Joachim and Anna were like Zachariah and his wife, Elizabeth, elderly and childless. Joachim, for his part, has also received a message brought by an angel: "Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God has heard your prayer. Go down here; behold, your wife Anna shall conceive."²⁸ This echoes the angel's message to Zachariah: "Do not be afraid, Zachariah, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John."²⁹ We notice that the angels' messages are evidence of God's interventions in to the lives of His faithful people. Joachim and Anna are now reunited in a moment of great joy. Anna exclaims: "Now I know that the Lord God has greatly blessed me; for behold the widow is no longer a widow, and I, who was childless, shall conceive."³⁰ This part of the story concludes with Joachim once more offering his gifts which are accepted, because he is about to have offspring.³¹ Here a connection is made between childlessness and sin. His wife has conceived and his sin is forgiven: "Now I know that the Lord God is gracious to me and has

²⁵ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 4, 58.

²⁶ 1 Sam 1. 11.

²⁷ Lk 1.11-12, Lk 1.26.

²⁸ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 4, 58.

²⁹ LK 1. 13.

³⁰ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 4, 59.

³¹ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 5, 59.

forgiven all my sins.”³² The description of Joachim’s return from the Temple, “and he came down from the temple of God justified,” echoes the phrase in Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican where Our Lord says that the Publican returns home “justified.”³³

Next we are told of the birth of the promised child. We are not told much about the birth. The author merely reports the event and moves on. “In the ninth month Anna gave birth.”³⁴ Anna’s song of thanksgiving is abbreviated to one phrase: “My soul is magnified this day.”³⁵ Once more there are Biblical echoes. The first is Hannah’s song: “my heart exalts in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord” which she sings after she has given her son to the Lord.³⁶ The second is the Blessed Virgin Mary’s song: “my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,” which she sings at her meeting with her cousin, Elizabeth.³⁷

Then the child begins to grow. She lives with the knowledge that she has been promised to God and to a life in the Temple in Jerusalem. Her mother says, “As the Lord my God lives, you shall walk no more upon this earth until I bring you into the temple of the Lord.”³⁸ Even in her infancy, her destiny is recognized and proclaimed. The priests, who attend her first birthday, bless her saying: “O God of our fathers, bless this child and give her a name eternally renowned among all generations.”³⁹ Her mother rejoices: “I will sing a praise to the Lord my God, for he has visited me and removed from me the reproach of my enemies.”⁴⁰ The reproach is her childlessness. We might recall Elizabeth’s words when she conceives a child in her old age after years of childlessness: “Thus the Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away

³² Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 5, 59.

³³ Lk 18.9-17.

³⁴ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 5, 59.

³⁵ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 5, 59.

³⁶ 1 Sam 2.1.

³⁷ Lk 1. 46-47.

³⁸ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 6, 59.

³⁹ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 6, 59.

⁴⁰ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 6, 59.

my reproach among men.”⁴¹ In Israel in those days, a barren woman and a man without offspring were thought to have displeased God in some way and were being punished by Him. When an elderly couple such as Abraham and Sarah produces a child, it was considered to be a great blessing from God.

The next event is the arrival of the Virgin in the Temple. Joachim suggests that this happen when the girl was two years old but Anna insists on three years: “Let us wait until the third year, that the child may then no more long for her father and mother.”⁴² By her third birthday the child will be weaned. Joachim organizes the procession to the Temple. He sends for “the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews” to accompany her with torches “in order that the child may not turn back and her heart be tempted away from the temple of the Lord.”⁴³ At the Temple, she is met by the Priest who predicts an important future for her: “The Lord has magnified your name among all generations; because of you the Lord at the end of the days will reveal His redemption to the sons of Israel.”⁴⁴ The redemption is the birth of her Son who will redeem His people from their sins.⁴⁵ He places her on the third step of the altar and she dances there. The event has several Biblical echoes. The most significant are those to Psalm 45 verses 10 to 17. These verses are very prominent in the liturgical texts for the holy day. The child is brought to the Temple: “Hearken, O daughter, consider, and incline thine ear: forget also thine own people and thy father’s house” (v. 10). She is accompanied by the maidens of Israel: “She is brought to the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins that be her fellows bear her company, and are brought unto thee” (verse 14) Her name will be glorious in Israel: “I will make thy name to be remembered from one generation to another; therefore shall the peoples praise thee, world without end” (v. 17). The author of the *Protevangelium* appears to view the Psalm as a foreshadowing of the events which he describes. The Entrance of the Theotokos suggests the fate of Jephthah’s daughter.⁴⁶ Jephthah had promised

⁴¹ Lk 1.25.

⁴² Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 7, 60.

⁴³ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 7, 60.

⁴⁴ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 7, 60.

⁴⁵ See also Lk 2. 30, “for mine eyes have seen thy salvation”.

⁴⁶ Judg 11. 34 – 40.

to make an offering to the Lord in return for a military victory.⁴⁷ The offering is his daughter. She spends the days before her death wandering in the wilderness: “that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my companions.”⁴⁸ Jephthah’s daughter is accompanied to her death by a company of maidens. The Theotokos is accompanied to the Temple in Jerusalem by a company of maidens. One is offered to God as a burnt sacrifice through death. The other is offered to the Lord as a living sacrifice through a secluded life in the Temple in Jerusalem. The liturgical texts do not refer to this Old Testament parallel.

The Blessed Virgin Mary remained in the Temple until the age of twelve. There she is fed by an angel.⁴⁹ This too had Biblical echoes. The prophet Elijah was fed miraculously while he was in the wilderness first by ravens and then by an angel.⁵⁰ He was also fed equally miraculously in the town of Zarephath by a poor widow whose oil and meal did not run out as long as he dwelt with her.⁵¹ Further Our Lord Jesus Christ was fed by an angel at the end of His fast in the Wilderness.⁵²

The Authenticity of the Protevangelium

The author of the *Protevangelium* was acquainted with some Holy Scriptures. By the second century he had not only the Old Testament, but many of the books of the New Testament to draw upon. It is possible that he saw the Old Testament references being fulfilled first in the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, and then in her son, Jesus. He was, unfortunately, far enough away from the practices of the Jewish religion that he made many mistakes as Fr Mark Schram has argued.

⁴⁷ Judg 11. 30-31.

⁴⁸ Judg 11. 37.

⁴⁹ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 8, 60.

⁵⁰ I Kgs 17. 1-7 & 19.4-8.

⁵¹ 1 Kgs 17.8-16.

⁵² My 4.11; Mk 1.13.

Fr Mark begins his analysis with a strong summary of his findings:

This pseudo-gospel is unacceptable because of the many evident errors in relation to Jewish law and Jewish history, obvious contradictions of the gospels' accounts of the relevant material, and general exaggeration of the alleged events in the life of Mary at the expense of the primacy of Jesus in Christian theology.⁵³

The author's ignorance of Jewish law and ritual customs is a major challenge to the document's credibility. Fr Mark gives two cogent examples. The first concerns 'the water of judgment of the Lord.' Fr Mark comments:

'The priest made Joseph drink (the water of judgment of the Lord)' (16.2) and later Mary too. The Law is clear that this was required only of an *adulterous woman* (Num 5.11-31). It is never required of a man and not of a single woman. Again, the author of this work does not know Jewish law, biblical law in this case.⁵⁴

The second example concerns the Blessed Virgin Mary's presence in the Temple. Here Fr Mark comments:

It is worth recalling that even the high priest entered the holy of holies on only one day of the year, Yom Kippur. Yet Mary lived there, fed there by angels, listening there to the hymn of the angels and dancing there before them. Is it then likely that the high priest who was not permitted to enter would place a young girl therein?⁵⁵

Chapter 16 of the book of Leviticus describes the High Priest's annual visit to the Holy of Holies and the high priest's preparation for his visit. When he enters the Holy of Holies, he carries with him incense and the blood of a bull. He must go alone: "there shall be no man in the tent of meeting when he enters

⁵³ Fr Mark Schram, unpublished notes.

⁵⁴ Fr Mark Schram, unpublished notes. He adds that Tractate Sotah confirms this. Philip Blackman in his "Introduction" to this Tractate states: "The Tractate speaks of the laws concerning the wife under suspicion of marital unfaithfulness to her marriage vows..." Further on the page he comments: "The fact that a similar *trial by ordeal* was not formulated against the faithless husband may perhaps be explained by the fact the *Law* did not prohibit polygamy and thus it would be hardly possible to lay such a charge against the male of committing such an offence with a woman not his licit wife." Philip Blackman (ed., tr, notes), *Mishnayoth: Nahim*, "Tractate Sotah" (Judaica Press, Gateshead 2000) p.239.

⁵⁵ Fr Mark Schram, unpublished notes.

to make atonement in the holy place until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel.”⁵⁶ He makes his visit on one day, “in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month.”⁵⁷ The author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* states the custom:

these preparations having thus been made, the priests go continually into the outer tent, performing their ritual duties, but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people.⁵⁸

While the author of the *Protevangelium* appears not to know about the provisions of the Jewish Law about the sanctity of the Temple, other authors seem well aware of them. St Germanos of Constantinople (c.630-650 to c.742)⁵⁹ calls the Virgin’s entrance into the Temple “this most novel practice,”⁶⁰ and attempts to explain the unusual treatment which the Theotokos received by attributing it to her purity. He writes:

Behold a conspicuous mark of her surpassing purity! For she was brought by her parents for an unbroken sojourn so as to be in the holy, inaccessible [repositories] of grace, where the priest entered not frequently, but only once a year, and carried out the mystical rites. Who ever knew of such a thing? Who had seen or heard, among those living or those long ago, of a female being brought into the innermost holy of holies, which must scarcely be approached even by men, to dwell and be brought up there? Was this not a manifest display of the strange miracle that would befall her later? Was it not a visible sign? Was it not a clear proof?⁶¹

⁵⁶ Lev 16. 17.

⁵⁷ Lev 16. 29.

⁵⁸ Heb 9.6-7.

⁵⁹ See Mary B. Cunningham (trans), *Wider than Heaven: Eighth Century Homilies on the Mother of God* (Crestwood, NY St Vladimir’s Seminary Press 2008), 38-41 for an account of St Germanos’ life, theology and homilies.

⁶⁰ Ibid 165.

⁶¹ St Germanos of Constantinople, “On the Entrance into the Temple II: Encomium to the Holy Theotokos, When she was brought into the Temple (into the holy of holies), at the age of three by her parents” in Mary B. Cunningham (trans), *Wider than Heaven: Eighth Century Homilies on the Mother of God* (Crestwood, NY St Vladimir’s Seminary Press 2008), 163.

Here St Germanos attempts to reconcile the provisions of the Jewish Law about access into the Holy of Holies of the Temple with his belief that the Blessed Virgin Mary not only entered the Holy of Holies, but lived there for years afterwards. He recognizes that this is unusual and attempts to explain it by a reference to her purity not only then but in later years as well. Mary's purity, as we shall see, is an important theme of the Liturgical texts and the Homilies.

The author's ignorance of Jewish history is another problem. As Fr Mark explains, he introduces two high priests into the list of high priests who were not high priests:

But pseudo-James makes Symeon the successor of Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, as high priest. Note that there is no record of either of them serving in that position, nor for that matter have we any other indication that Symeon was a priest. The list of high priests (footnote 3 above), based on Josephus, does not show either of them.⁶²

Thus we have an author with limited knowledge of Jewish Law and history. The *Protevangelium* by itself is a weak foundation for an important liturgical feast.

The Liturgical Texts

Our next task is to examine the texts of for this feast for their theological themes. The guiding principle is this, that what we say in our worship expresses what we believe. There are a number of theological themes in the texts that emphasize the Blessed Virgin Mary's holiness, purity and singular place in the drama of our redemption. As Theotokos, Mother of God, she bears Jesus in her womb. This makes her a temple of the Lord since Jesus, the Son of God, dwells in her as He does in the Temple in Jerusalem and as He dwells in Heaven. At Great Vespers, she is described as "His hallowed Tabernacle, the living Ark, that contained the Word who cannot be contained," "the dwelling place of God" and "the living Temple of the holy glory of Christ our God."⁶³ We find another reference to her status as Temple in Great Vespers, "the Temple that is to hold God."⁶⁴The phrase "dwelling place of God" appears in the Matins for the feast.⁶⁵

⁶² Fr Mark Schram, unpublished notes.

⁶³ *The Festal Menaion*, 166.

⁶⁴ *The Festal Menaion*, 171.

The theme of Mary as “temple” appears in another place associated with the theme of Mary as Virgin: “the most holy Virgin, Temple that is to hold God, is dedicated within the Temple of the Lord.”⁶⁶ A second theme is her virginity. In the Great Vespers, these verses speak of her virginity: “for today she who was Virgin before childbirth, and remained Virgin after bearing child, is offered in the temple” and “the only Virgin without blemish.”⁶⁷ The Western Church accepted the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Mary Virgin. The Venerable Bede (c.673-735) affirms this in a homily for Christmas:

He calls the Lord “first-born,” not that we are to believe that the blessed mother of God gave birth to other sons after him, [since] it is true that she was memorable for her unique perpetual chastity with Joseph her husband.⁶⁸

In his introductory essay to the “Birth and Infancy Gospels” section of his book, Elliott speaks about the doctrine of her perpetual virginity thus:

Virginity *in partu* is combined with a belief in Mary’s perpetual virginity. The siblings of Jesus known from the canonical gospels are explained in PJ [...] as being Joseph’s children of a previous marriage. Subsequent church opinion in the West found such teaching unacceptable: Jerome was instrumental in condemning this teaching in PJ as wrong and he argued that Jesus’ siblings were his cousins. Jerome’s explanations met with papal approval and were responsible for the decline in the use of PJ in the west.⁶⁹

The liturgical texts proclaim both her virginity and her purity. In Great Vespers, she is described as “pure and blessed” and “the holy maid without spot.”⁷⁰ She is also described as “her who is alone undefiled”, “the Queen without blemish” and “the only Virgin without blemish.”⁷¹ In Matins, she is

⁶⁵ *The Festal Menaion*, 178.

⁶⁶ *The Festal Menaion*, 171.

⁶⁷ *The Festal Menaion*, 170.

⁶⁸ The Venerable Bede, *Homilies on the Gospel: Book one Advent to Lent* Laurence T. Martin & David Hurst (tr.) (Kalamazoo, MI Cistercian Publications 1991), 57.

⁶⁹ J. H. Elliot, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford Clarendon Press 1993), 50-51.

⁷⁰ *The Festal Menaion*, 166.

⁷¹ *The Festal Menaion*, 170.

described as “the ewe lamb without blemish, the pure dove.”⁷² These phrases have Biblical roots. The “ewe lamb without blemish” is part of the offering given at the Tabernacle when a Nazirite finishes his time of separation.⁷³ Both lamb and Mary are offered to the Lord at the Temple. The “pure dove” is part of the offering made to the Lord at the cleansing of a leper.⁷⁴ Again we have the sense of offerings made to the Lord. Another and perhaps more significant Biblical echo is the purification of a woman who has given birth to a son.⁷⁵ After a time of separation from the sanctuary, she is required by the Old Testament Law to make offering of a lamb and a young pigeon or a turtledove to the Lord in the Temple.⁷⁶ Here we have an offering which combines a lamb and a dove. Poor people could give two turtledoves or two pigeons in lieu of a lamb. The male child was to be redeemed unless he is the child or grandchild of a priest and not a *mamzer*.⁷⁷ While the Biblical text does not specify that the birds be pure or without blemish, the provisions for sacrificial offerings require that the animals be the best possible creatures. Hence the dove would be pure as the best animal available. St Luke gives us the account of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her spouse St Joseph bringing Jesus to the Temple to present Him to the Lord as the first born male child and to fulfil the provision of the Law for her purification by offering two turtledoves or two young pigeons.⁷⁸ Joachim and Anna did not take offerings to the Temple when they presented their daughter there, while the Theotokos and Joseph did, because by the time Joachim and Anna presented Mary in the Temple, the time of Anna’s purification was long past. The second difference is that Jesus did not stay in the Temple while Mary did. He went back to Nazareth with His parents.

Another important theme in the Liturgical texts is that of the sorrow of barrenness being replaced by the joys of childbirth. Anna and Joachim had no children. In Matins in Ode Six, we read:

⁷² *The Festal Menaion*, 184.

⁷³ Num 6.14, Lev 14.10.

⁷⁴ Lev 14. 22.

⁷⁵ Lev. 12.2-8.

⁷⁶ Lev 12. 6.

⁷⁷ Ex 13.13b, 15; I am indebted to Fr Mark Schram for his assistance with this matter.

⁷⁸ Lev 12.8, Lk 2. 21-39.

He who supports all things with His word, in His Mercy has hearkened unto the prayer of righteous Joachim and Anna: He has loosed them from the disease of barrenness and given them her that is the cause of our joy.⁷⁹

In another place, we read, “When all hope was gone, Joachim and Anna gave birth to the undefiled Virgin.”⁸⁰The significant examples of barren couples in the Bible are Abraham and Sarah and Zacharias and Elizabeth.⁸¹ In each case, a barren couple are given the gift of a child through the mercy of God. Another example is Hannah who is given the gift of a son, Samuel.⁸² The liturgical texts stress the joy that comes with the unexpected birth of a child. In Vespers, we read, “let Joachim the Forefather be glad and let Anna rejoice exceedingly, for they have offered unto God, as a three year old victim of sacrifice, the Queen without blemish.”⁸³ The joy of this miraculous birth is not only for Joachim and Anna but for others as well: “The Saints David and Jesse exult today and Judah is filled with pride for from their root a bough has sprung, the pure Virgin from whom pre-eternal God is to be born.”⁸⁴Joachim and Anna’s response to the miraculous birth of their daughter, as we have seen earlier in this essay, is to offer her to the Lord. This, too, is reflected in the Liturgical texts: “before thy conception, O pure Virgin, thou wast consecrated to God: and now after thy birth thou art offered as a gift to Him, in fulfilment of thy parents’ promise.”⁸⁵ Their daughter is the most precious thing that they have and the unexpected gift from God in their barren old age. Nevertheless, they offer her to God. This action, as we have seen earlier, is foreshadowed by Hannah’s gift of her son, Samuel, to God.⁸⁶ It also reminds us of Abraham’s willingness to offer Isaac, the much loved son of his old age, to God at His command.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ *The Festal Menaion*, 183.

⁸⁰ *The Festal Menaion*, 180.

⁸¹ Gen 17.15-19, 18.11-14, 21.2, LK 1. 5-7, Heb 11. 11-12.

⁸² 1 Sam 1.1-2, 19-20.

⁸³ *The Festal Menaion*, 170.

⁸⁴ *The Festal Menaion*, 188-189, see Isa 11.1 and Rev 5.5. In attributing these references to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the author of this liturgical text is transferring to the Holy Mother honours which properly belong to her Son.

⁸⁵ *The Festal Menaion*, 170.

⁸⁶ 1 Sam 1.24-28.

⁸⁷ Gen 22. 1-19.

Another series of references in the liturgical texts are about light. Mary, the Theotokos, will carry in her womb the Son of God who is light. Hence we read, “thou hast appeared in the sanctuary accompanied by brightly burning lamps, who art the Receiver of the Divine Light that no man can approach” and “for a holy child hath come forth from them, Mary the Lamp that bears the Divine Light.”⁸⁸ These phrases are examples of the intricate relationships of the images of light in the liturgical texts. Mary is escorted to the Temple by maidens bearing torches/lamps of light. She is surrounded by light. Later, when she conceives and bears within her womb her Son who is divine light, she is filled with His light. She can also be called “light” for she radiates His light. We begin this analysis with the *Protevangelium* where Mary is escorted to the Temple by a company of pure maidens who carry torches: “Call the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews, and let each one take a torch, and let these be burning, in order that the child may not turn back and her heart be tempted away from the temple of the Lord.”⁸⁹ This theme is taken up by in the liturgical texts and applied to the congregation of those who keep the holy day: “Celebrating the coming of the Theotokos into the sanctuary, let us too, carrying lamps today in spirit, go in joy with the Virgin to the temple.”⁹⁰ In order to celebrate the Holy Day properly, the congregation must copy the maidens and carry their own lamps of light. In Great Vespers, the Blessed Virgin herself is called “Lamp:”

The young girls rejoice today, and with their lamps in hand they go in reverence before the spiritual lamp, as she enters the Holy of Holies. They foreshadow the brightness past speech that is to shine forth from her and to give light by the Spirit to those that sit in the darkness of ignorance.⁹¹

The light of the maidens’ lamps points first to the Blessed Virgin Mary and then to the light which will eventually be born of her, her son Jesus who is the Light of the World.⁹² This interrelated set of references is repeated in the same passage: “that she may become the divine Throne of the master of all, His

⁸⁸ *The Festal Menaion*, 173.

⁸⁹ Elliott, *Protevangelium*, 7, 60; compare the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, Mt 25.1-13.

⁹⁰ *The Festal Menaion*, 178.

⁹¹ *The Festal Menaion*, 167.

⁹² Jn 8.12, see Jn 1.4-8, Jn 1.14.

palace, His resting place, and His dwelling filled with light.”⁹³ She is His throne when her son sits on her lap. She is His palace, resting place and dwelling when He lives within her womb which is filled with the light of His presence.

Another series of references identify Mary as the gate in the Prophet Ezekiel:

Then he brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east; and it was shut. And he said to me, This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut. Only the prince may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord: he shall enter by the way of the vestibule of the gate, and shall go out by the same way.⁹⁴

In Great Vespers, we find: “For behold, the Gate that looks toward the east, born according to the promise from a fruitless and barren womb, and dedicated to God as His dwelling, is led today into the temple as an offering without blemish.”⁹⁵ A second verse in Matins reads: “the Gate through which none can pass.”⁹⁶ These references point us to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ from a virgin mother and her perpetual virginity after His birth. The author of the liturgical texts presents the Blessed Virgin Mary as the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. This becomes apparent in a list of titles given to her: “The Law prefigured thee most wonderfully as tabernacle, jar of manna, strange ark, veil of the temple, rod of Aaron, temple never to be destroyed and gate of God; and so it teaches us to cry to thee: O pure Virgin, thou art truly high above all.”⁹⁷ The Old and New Testament references are Exodus 26.1, 16.33, 25.10; Matthew 27.51; Hebrews 10.20; Numbers 17.8; 1 Kings 8.13 (Heb); John 2.19; Ezekiel 44.1-3. The reference to the tabernacle reflects the Theotokos’ role as Mother of God. She contains her son, the Son of God, in her womb as the tabernacle contained the presence of God. The veil of the Temple concealed the holy of holies in the temple as the Mother of God concealed the

⁹³ *The Festal Menaion*, 167.

⁹⁴ Ezek 44.1-3.

⁹⁵ *The Festal Menaion*, 169.

⁹⁶ *The Festal Menaion*, 179.

⁹⁷ *The Festal Menaion*, 191 This list of titles is repeated, *The Festal Menaion*, 193.

presence of God's Son present in her womb. The ark contained the two stone tablets of the Law, the jar of manna and Aaron's rod which produced almond buds symbols of God's justice and mercy. The Blessed Virgin Mary's womb contained the incarnation of God's justice and mercy, His Son Jesus Christ. All of these references are associated with the temple in Jerusalem. She is also called "the hallowed Tabernacle, the living Ark that contained the Lord who cannot be contained."⁹⁸

Homilies

We have four homilies written for the feast of Entrance of the Theotokos, two from the eighth century attributed to St Germanos of Constantinople and two by Saint Gregory Palamas (c.1296-1359). They celebrate the narrative of the *Protevangelium* and explore the themes of the Liturgical texts.

We begin with the two homilies attributed to St Germanos of Constantinople.⁹⁹ As we have seen above, St Germanos had understood that the Virgin's entry into the Holy of Holies of the Temple was contrary to the practice of the Jewish Law and had attempted to explain the discrepancy by referring to her purity. His homilies, however, accept the narrative of the event. In his first homily, he writes:

For today she enters the temple of the law at the age of three, she who alone will be dedicated and called the spotless and highest temple of the Lord, [who is] High Priest and Author of consecration of all, having dissipated by the innate radiance of her divinely shining splendour the gloom [which resides] in the letter. Today an infant is offered to the priest, [the infant] who will [later] dedicate the forty-day-old High-Priest God, who alone was made an infant in flesh on our account, holding her arms the Limitless One who is beyond all mortal understanding.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *The Festal Menaion*, 166.

⁹⁹ Mary B. Cunningham (tr., *Wider than Heaven: Eighth Century Homilies on the Mother of God* (Crestwood, NY St Vladimir's Seminary Press 2008)145-162, 163-172. Subsequent references will be Cunningham homily number, paragraph number and page number.

¹⁰⁰ Cunningham, 1, 1, 146-147.

Here we find that St Germanos has associated the feast of the entrance with the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Who is the Son of the Theotokos. He begins his second homily thus:

Behold, yet another festival and splendid feast of the Mother of the Lord! Behold, a procession of the blameless bride! Behold, a first escort of the Queen! Behold a precise sign of the glory that will surround her! Behold, a prologue for the divine grace that is about to overshadow her! Behold, a conspicuous mark of her surpassing purity! For she was brought by her parents for an unbroken sojourn so as to be in the holy, inaccessible [repositories] of grace... ¹⁰¹

Once more St Germanos associates the feast of the Entrance with the Incarnation of her Son thus placing Marian doctrine within the context of Christology using the phrase “the divine grace that is about to overshadow her” to accomplish that. The phrase “her surpassing purity” is a reference to her virginity and a reminder of St Germanos’ explanation for the unprecedented honour which the Blessed Virgin Mary receives when she is allowed to enter the Holy of Holies of the Temple in Jerusalem. There, as St Germanos explains, “she remained in the innermost holy of holies, nourished with ambrosial food by an angel and given divine nectar to drink, until her second stage of life.”¹⁰² Although he has reservations about the account, he accepts its truth.

As one might expect, the homilies take up some of the themes that we have seen in the Liturgical texts. The Theotokos is the temple of the Lord. She dwells in the Temple in Jerusalem which is the dwelling place of God and He dwells in her as in Temple: “for today she enters the temple of the law at the age of three, she who alone will be dedicated and called the spotless and highest temple of the Lord...”¹⁰³ Again we find these words: “how the living temple of the Lord is taken up to the lifeless one [that is, the temple in Jerusalem].”¹⁰⁴ The theme of light appears. She, the Virgin accompanied by maidens bearing torches, is herself the torch and source of light: “thus, the house [of God] is lit up by torches, but it is even more glitteringly illuminated by the brightness of

¹⁰¹ Cunningham, 2, 1, 163.

¹⁰² Cunningham, 2, 7, 169.

¹⁰³ Cunningham, 1, 2, 146.

¹⁰⁴ Cunningham, 2, 3, 165.

one torch and its acceptable appearance is beautified by her entrance.”¹⁰⁵ St Germanos stresses the Theotokos’ status:

Today , she is about to be welcomed by the sanctity of the Spirit into the holy of the holies; she who was raised in a most marvellous way beyond even the glory of the cherubim is stored up in a most holy way and gloriously in the holy of holies for a greater sanctity, at an innocent and impressionable age. ¹⁰⁶

This passage speaks of her entry into the holy of holies and the glory which is given to her by the Holy Spirit. She becomes more glorious than those beings of light who are the cherubim.¹⁰⁷ St Germanos returns to themes which we have seen in the Liturgical texts. He writes:

Thus, when He, who is indeed One of the Trinity that is itself all-holy and beyond all beginning, hastened to be contained, by His own will and by the overshadowing of the all-holy Spirit, in the womb of that girl who was a virgin mother, it was necessary for the one who had been distinguished by the same glory of the number to be splendidly dedicated.¹⁰⁸

This passage speaks of the Incarnation in which Our Lord, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, takes human flesh and dwells in the Womb of the Theotokos.¹⁰⁹ It also speaks of her virginity. In addition there is a very interesting reference to the Theotokos’s role as Protectress of Constantinople: “While crowning your city, which possesses you as its tower and foundation, with victorious prizes, keep watch over it, having girded it with strength.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Cunningham, 1, 7, 153.

¹⁰⁶ Cunningham, 1, 2, 147.

¹⁰⁷ ‘More honourable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim’.

¹⁰⁸ Cunningham, 1, 4, 150.

¹⁰⁹ Jn 1.14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.”

¹¹⁰ Cunningham, 1,19, 162.

St Gregory Palamas

We now will examine two homilies written by St Gregory Palamas (c1296-1359).¹¹¹ Gregory Palamas begins his Homily 52 with a strong statement of the Incarnation of Our Lord for the sake of our salvation affirming that “the co-eternal, express Image of Goodness, the pre-eternal, supraessential and supremely good Word of the Father most high, wished in His ineffable love and compassion for mankind to put on our image, in order to recall our human nature.”¹¹² In this context Palamas speaks of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple:

Becoming like us in all respects for our sake, He [The Son] found the Ever-Virgin, whom we extol and whose mysterious Entry into the Holy of the Holies we celebrate today, to be a most suitable handmaid in every way, able to bestow on Him an undefiled nature from her own.¹¹³

Within the context of the history of salvation, Gregory shows how God chose a number of successive holy people until He chose Joachim and Anna to be the parents of the pure Virgin who would become the earthly and human Mother of His Son:

They were childless, but lived chastely together, and were more virtuous than all those who traced back their noble descent and character to David. With asceticism and prayer they begged God to deliver them from childlessness, and proposed to dedicate to Him from infancy the child to be born to them.¹¹⁴

God’s purpose in the selection of Joachim and Anna and then of their daughter, Mary, was to provide one who was “exceptionally chaste” who then “might

¹¹¹ Saint Gregory Palamas, *The Homilies*, Christopher Veniamin (ed., tr., introduction & notes) with the assistance of the Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex, England (Darlington, PA Mount Thabor Publishing 2014), 407 – 413 & 414 – 444. Subsequent references will be Palamas, Homily, paragraph and page number.

¹¹² Palamas, 52, 1, 407.

¹¹³ Palamas, 52, 1, 407.

¹¹⁴ Palamas, 52, 11, 411; for Mary’s descent from David, see *Protevangelium*, 10,61. The Canonical Scriptures of Matthew (1.1-17) and Luke (3.23-38) trace Joseph’s descent from David. They say nothing of any descent of Mary from David. Fr Mark Schram argues that Mary’s descent is from a priestly family.

become as a result the mother of virginity, that virginity which without corruption brought forth, according to the flesh, the one, who, in respect of His divinity, was begotten before all ages of a virgin Father”.¹¹⁵ The theme of the Theotokos’ role in the Incarnation is repeated in Homily 53: “She also clothed God’s Son Himself in Adam’s garment from her womb...”¹¹⁶ Gregory never separates the Blessed Virgin Mary from the Incarnation of God’s Son and her role in that sacred mystery.

Gregory can then argue that it was appropriate for the one who is to be the Virgin Mother of the Son of God to enter the Holy of the Holies for she is herself the Holy of Holies because she will carry the Son of God in her womb:

In this way, and for these reasons, she who was chosen from the elect of all ages, who was declared the Holy of Holies, whose body was purer and more divine than spirits cleansed by virtue, to such an extent that she was able to receive not just the form of divine words but the person of the only-begotten Word of the Father without beginning, was today justly consigned to the innermost hallowed sanctuary like God’s treasure.¹¹⁷

One of the themes which we have seen before in this study is that of the purity of the Theotokos. St Gregory speaks eloquently about her purity and places it within the theology of the Incarnation. In his opinion, a pure Saviour needs a pure and spotless Mother.¹¹⁸ This is how he presents his argument:

Precise justice demanded that the same human nature which had been willingly enslaved and defeated must fight to win back victory and rid itself of voluntary servitude. For this reason, it was God’s good pleasure to assume our nature from us, uniting it mysteriously with his person. His sublime purity beyond our understanding could not, however, become one with defiled human nature. Only this is impossible for God: to be joined in union with something impure before it has been cleansed. A completely undefiled and most pure virgin was needed to carry in her womb and give birth to the lover and giver of purity. This virgin was marked out

¹¹⁵ Palamas, 52, 11, 411-412.

¹¹⁶ Palamas, 53, 33, 429.

¹¹⁷ Palamas, 52, 14, 412.

¹¹⁸ This view is similar to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Roman Catholic Church in the West. I am indebted to Fr Mark Schram for this reference.

beforehand, brought to perfection and revealed, and the mystery concerning her was fulfilled, by many wonderful happenings from various times in the past converging into one.¹¹⁹

In the Incarnation, divine nature is united to human nature. Palamas insists that the Son of God assumes human nature but he also argues that human purity is required for this union to take place because divine nature cannot be joined to “something impure.”¹²⁰

In another place, Gregory again stresses the purity of the Theotokos:

God was not just born among men, but born of a holy and pure virgin or, more precisely, of this exceedingly pure and most holy of virgins, who was not only above any physical stain, but also far beyond the reach of any defiled, carnal thoughts. Her conception of Christ resulted from the all-holy Spirit coming upon her, not from fleshly desire, and was preceded by the annunciation and her faith in the in-dwelling of God in a manner we cannot describe, as it was outside the normal course of events and beyond words, but not by submission to, or any experience of, passionate desire. Having utterly banished such desire by prayer and spiritual joy, she conceived and gave birth – “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). In order that there would be a virgin equal to this task, God pre-ordained this ever-virgin Maid whom we extol today, and chose her from among His elect down through the ages.¹²¹

In Homily 53, Gregory lavishes praise upon the Blessed Virgin Mary but he makes it clear that the praise is only hers because of her role in the Incarnation. His praise is generous: “the Mother of God, conspicuous in her pre-eminence, the living image of everything good, the human icon of every virtue, the shrine and focal point of divine and human graces.”¹²² Her role in the Incarnation is stressed frequently:

¹¹⁹ Palamas, 52, 6, 409.

¹²⁰ The question of whether the Incarnate Son of God assumed fallen human nature or ‘pure human nature’ from the Theotokos is unfortunately beyond the scope of this essay. It is, however, a most important question since it deals with our salvation and involves the patristic saying ‘what is not assumed is not healed’.

¹²¹ Palamas, 52, 8, 410.

¹²² Palamas, 53, 6, 416.

So later He graciously willed to create this ever-virgin Maid, His palace, if I may use the expression, who was shown to be capable of holding the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col.2.9) on account of her utmost purity, able not simply to contain Him but – O marvellous wonder! – to bring Him to birth and to form for all men, before and after her time, ties of kinship with God.¹²³

The quotation from St Paul's Epistle to the Colossians leads to theological reflections. St Paul wrote, "For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily."¹²⁴ This is a Christological reference affirming that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. The fullness of deity dwells in Him because He is the Son of God incarnate. It does not dwell in the Theotokos. What dwells in her womb is her son who is both human and divine. This is an example of a temptation in this literature to attribute to the Blessed Virgin Mary what truly belongs to her Son. It is her role in the incarnation which enables Gregory Palamas to say, "She was a gift from God, and, to God."¹²⁵

In Homily 53, St Gregory speaks of the Theotokos' life in the Holy of Holies. He is aware that the Holy of Holies was especially God's special place into which only the High Priest could enter and that only once a year:

and the heavenly Queen made her extraordinary entry into the Holy of Holies, the place reserved solely for God, where He once a year received the current high priests when he went in (Exod. 30.10, Lev. 16.2, 34, Heb. 9.7), and where the Virgin Mother entered at three years of age, and stayed for our sake.¹²⁶

He argues that it is appropriate for the Blessed Virgin Mary to remain in the Holy of Holies, God's dwelling place on earth, since her womb will contain God's Son and become His Holy of Holies and dwelling place. He writes:

You [addressing the Theotokos] alone were vouchsafed the gifts of the Spirit in their totality, or rather, you alone held mysteriously in your womb Him in

¹²³ Palamas, 53, 5, 416.

¹²⁴ Col 2.9

¹²⁵ Palamas, 53, 23, 424.

¹²⁶ Palamas, 53, 8, 418, see also Palamas 53, 18, 422, Palamas 53, 20, 423.

whom are the treasures of all these spiritual gifts, and became inexplicably His tabernacle.¹²⁷

Once more Gregory Palamas is placing the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos within the larger realm of the Incarnation.

Gregory identifies one of the qualities of her life in the Holy of Holies as 'holy stillness:'

Seeking after this – for it is absolutely necessary for ambassadors to meet those to whom they have been sent – the Virgin found that holy stillness was her guide: stillness in which the mind and the world stand still, forgetfulness of the things below, initiation into the things above, the laying aside of ideas for something better.¹²⁸

One is reminded of the “still small voice” which spoke to the prophet in the wilderness.¹²⁹ The “holy stillness” which the Holy Virgin finds in the Holy of Holiness is the means by which the Lord speaks to her and transforms her into the chosen vessel of His purpose.¹³⁰ St Gregory calls her “holy stillness” the “contemplation” which “is of a kind that deifies, for it is through contemplation that a person is made divine.”¹³¹ She is made holy so that she may be a suitable person to be the Mother of His Son. Gregory associates stillness with light: “thus those whose hearts have been purified by holy stillness, inasmuch as they have been ineffably permeated by the light that transcends both sense and mind, see God within themselves as in a mirror” (*cf* 2 Cor 3:18).¹³²

This leads us to an examination of the places in Homily Fifty-Three in which Gregory Palamas refers to light. Gregory presents the Blessed Virgin Mary as a source of light: “...she became the highest Queen of all, sending out all around her, from both body and soul, bright and holy rays of light” and “in the same way, He now displayed His ever-virgin Mother as the lampstand of the

¹²⁷ Palamas, 53, 13, 420.

¹²⁸ Palamas, 53, 52, 437-8, compare Ps 46.10.

¹²⁹ 1 Kings 19. 12.

¹³⁰ Compare St Paul, Acts 9.15.

¹³¹ Palamas, 53, 52,438.

¹³² Palamas, 53, 53, 438.

divine, ineffable light of everything virtuous.”¹³³ In another place, he speaks of her “glory” “meaning that it pours forth like light from within her to without, revealing to all those who see it the magnificence stored up within her on account of her complete freedom from passion...”¹³⁴ In a passage which combines references to light and the incarnation, Gregory describes her the way in which the incarnate Son of God came into this world. He writes:

Through her, heaven threw open its gates once more, not to send forth raging torrents of terrible and destructive rain with every blast of wind, but the dew of the Spirit, sweetness for our souls, the unapproachable light beyond our understanding (cf 1 Tim 6:16), “which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John. 1:9).¹³⁵

The light is not Mary but her Son, our Lord. In another place, he describes her as sources of light and grace: “...they long for the outpouring of light and the granting of indescribable divine graces which come through her.”¹³⁶ In yet another place, she prevails upon her Son to “shine upon us with light that never sets...”¹³⁷ As we have seen above, light and holy stillness are associated. Finally, Gregory Palamas states that God is light: “to those who are eternal, that is to say, to those who are like God, He is nothing but light, and as the sun is to visible objects, so God is to what the mind perceives.”¹³⁸

St Gregory applies to the Theotokos a number of Old Testament references. We have seen a sample of this above in the Liturgical texts for the feast.¹³⁹ These are “ark of the bread of life,” “the pot holding the manna,” “the place which had the tables of the law” and “Aaron’s rod.”¹⁴⁰ These references show her as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies and each one may be interpreted as a reference to her role in the Incarnation of our Saviour.

¹³³ Palamas, 53, 10, 418 & Palamas, 53, 11,419.

¹³⁴ Palamas, 53, 17, 421.

¹³⁵ Palamas, 53, 31, 428.

¹³⁶ Palamas, 53, 39, 432, see also John 1: 17 ‘grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’.

¹³⁷ Palamas, 53, 48, 436.

¹³⁸ Palamas, 53, 60, 442.

¹³⁹ Page 11.

¹⁴⁰ Palamas, 53, 43, 433.

Conclusion

In this essay, we have seen how doctrine concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, has been expressed liturgically in the texts and homilies of the Feast of the Entrance into the Temple. We have found a great richness of poetry and piety in the texts and a depth of theological understanding in the Homilies of St Germanos of Constantinople and St Gregory of Palamas. We have also seen that this particular Feast is based upon the *Protevangelium of St James* which became its chief source. The *Protevangelium* is, however, as we have seen, late in date and not without difficulties caused by its failures to understand and to express adequately provisions of Jewish religious law and practices. Its value as an historical source has been condemned by recent scholars.¹⁴¹ This gives it a dubious status as an historical document. Can we view this document as a reliable source for events for which there are no sources in canonical scriptures or early Christian history? This author does not think so. This is, however, not the end of the matter. We must ask ourselves a second question. Do the liturgical texts and homilies of the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos express what the Church believes about the Holy Theotokos? Generations of faithful Orthodox Christians and learned theologians such as St Gregory Palamas agree that the liturgical texts and homilies certainly do express the Church's faith. This is the *consensus fidelium*. Then the *Protevangelium* can be seen as a witness to the faith of the Church despite its dubious historical status. It may be possible to reconcile the gap between historical documents and liturgical documents by postulating an oral tradition upon which both draw. This, in turn, would require further research beyond the scope of this essay. The texts of this Feast do express the most important Marian doctrine, that which concerns her role in the Incarnation. She is, in Fr Anthony Estabrooks words "the willing means of God becoming united with our human nature and of us being deified."¹⁴² This doctrine is found in Canonical Scriptures and proclaimed in the Councils of the Church especially that of Ephesus which gave her the title of Theotokos, Mother of God. This, as we have seen, appears strongly in Palamas' Homilies. The Feast of the Entrance of the

¹⁴¹ See page 2 and fn 16

¹⁴² Pers com.

Theotokos with all its Liturgical texts and Homilies testifies to the Theotokos as Mother of her Son who is Son of God and our Saviour.

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