



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

306 W. Main Street
2nd Floor Loft
Emmitsburg, MD 21727

The Rev. Fr. Elias Yelovich, Pastor

<http://EntranceMission.org>

The Beheading of the Holy Glorious Forerunner and Baptist John September 11 (August 29 in the Church calendar)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

The glorious beheading of the forerunner/ was part of God's dispensation,/ that he might proclaim to those in hades the coming of the Savior./ Let Herodias, who demanded the iniquitous murder, therefore lament;/ for she loved not the law of God nor the age of life,// but rather this false and transitory one.

The Kontakion for today's **Commemoration of the Beheading of the Holy Forerunner** is stunning. When I chanted it at the Liturgy last evening I had to pause from the sheer shock of what it was saying. God permitted the awful crime against the Prophet so that he could enter Hades and proclaim Christ there, among the souls in bondage. Indeed, the *Gospel of Nicodemus* says that the Holy Forerunner preached the coming of Christ to those who were bound there; he prepared the Lord's way to virtually all human beings who had died from Adam to very day of our Lord's descent into the Hades on the Great and Holy Sabbath, the Saturday before the first Pascha. That Gospel also relates that John met the Lord at the entrance to Hades, and that the *Trisagion* Hymn that we sing together at every Liturgy, the *Thrice-Holy*, was chanted by those who greeted the Savior at the gates of Hades. The Lord permitted His servant, the

Holy Forerunner, to serve in ways far beyond what I am quite sure he himself could ever have imagined. John lived his entire life in deference, in humility, in submission to the Lord. And the great honor of his witness, his martyrdom for the Lord, was that he prepared the way even there for the Lord Who would set free all who were bound. The victory of one man's faith gave hope to so many who were bound by the sin of the world.

The life martyrdom of St. John the Forerunner serves as a stunning reminder of the one central contrast of life: the love of God versus love of the world. The love of God is hope and certainty and life and security – the only security there is; the love of the world is false and transitory. The one is represented by the Holy Forerunner, the other by Herodias who jealously sought justification for her adultery by calling for his death.

This is the great contrast before us, Brothers and Sisters. Do we love the Lord, or do we love the world? Do we trust in the One Who gives us forgiveness and mercy and life without end? Or do we trust in the false and transitory promises of the world. The first gives security, peace and life; the latter gives disappointment, anxiety and death. And our sacrifice of service to the Lord will be taken by Him to become the means of salvation for many. This is what the Commemoration of the Martyrdom of the Holy Forerunner and Baptism John shows us so clearly. Let each of us follow his great example in every action, for truly God is glorified in His Saints!

Remember what the LORD has done for you! Give Him thanks and praise! *Glory to His NAME for all things!* Pray for me, His most unworthy of priests.

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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717-817-1669