



## Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

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### *The Joy of the Resurrection* Week of April 8, 2017

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**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,**

**Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!**

It has been a difficult winter. Terrible things have been reported to us on the television news channels and in our national printed media. We have virtually witnessed in real time actions of a deeply disturbed individual who entered a Florida school and in a few short minutes murdered so many innocent students without provocation or apparent motive. We have learned of an international effort on the part of another nation, our apparent enemy, to disrupt the workings of our own democracy. We turned on the news just the other day and saw a bridge falling on a number of unsuspecting drivers in Miami, killing them. Even on days without the reporting of such exceptional national tragedies we open the newspaper, turn a page and see the faces of so many beautiful people who died. Like you, I too look over the obituaries and shake my head in sorrow over the death of so many people, created in the ineffable beauty of God's own Divine Image and Likeness. Like so many of you who read this column in the paper, I enter my church every Sunday in prayer and supplication on behalf of all who suffer and die to the One Who said to His disciples, "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!"

Truly, it is the case that there is tribulation. Even if every one of us were to escape the brutality of events like those we have witnessed or read about this winter, it must be admitted that each of us will face the moment when our lives on earth come to an end. There is no exception to this truth in a world that has turned away since the very beginning from the One Who created and wills to sustain it. In Holy Scripture each of us has read the story of our first ancestors, Adam and Eve, who were placed in a garden of plenty in which God Himself cared for them. Having chosen to rely not on Him, however, they went their own way, brazenly partaking of the fruit from the tree forbidden of them – forbidden, because it would reveal to them that which they did not know, evil. Scripture tells us that God, in His mercy, cared for them even then, knowing that their actions would lead to the tragedy of death. Their bodies and souls which had been created as a unity to be lived eternally in communion with the God, would eventually be ripped apart; the body would die and be returned to the earth from which it came. The unity of their pristine creation would be shattered, and the tragedy of death would enter the world inflicting its darkness on every living creature. Thus, St. Paul would write those heart rending words in Romans that “all of creation waits with eager longing” for the renewal of all creation, for the Lord to reveal His mercy to all.

The story of Adam and Eve is the story of every one of us. Unfortunately, it is our sad tendency to turn away from these truths. We fill our lives with senseless time consuming entertainments; we spend our days working for the bread that does not satisfy; and, when our loved ones die, we participate in the rituals of our culture that aim to take the tragic reality of the death of our loved ones away. We comfort ourselves with the lie that it is “natural” or that we must forget by throwing ourselves into renewed activity. Deep down inside we think, “It’s not me; I can go on doing what I have been doing; I am still Ok; perhaps it will not happen to me.” But the truth is that it will happen. All of humanity and the entire creation over which the Lord has given us stewardship will know the tragedy of death, brought into the world by our common desire to follow our own will, to turn away from the Will of the Lord, to rely on ourselves rather than on Him.

The Holy Christian faith faces this reality forthrightly and makes no attempt to hide the truth. The death of every person, young or old, is a deep tragedy. It is not God’s will for the soul to be ripped away from the body. As one of my teachers in Seminary would say to us frequently, “God did not create us to be corpses or disembodied spirits.” He created us to be a unity of body and soul, to be sustained in that unity in Communion with Him, the One True God. Thus, in Holy Scripture, in the Gospel of St. John, the beloved disciple reports that the very last thing our Lord did before He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was to visit His friends in Bethany, Mary and Martha, whose brother Lazarus, a close friend of the Lord, had died four days earlier. It’s interesting to note what our Lord did and said, and what our Lord did not do or did not say. He did not say to Mary and Martha, “Buck up and return to your regular lives!” Nor did He say, “It’s Ok; every life must end, and it’s time to accept the end or your brother’s life.” No! The beloved disciple reports in that one verse that all of us learned to be the shortest verse of the Bible, “Jesus wept.” He wept. Of course in grief. But more importantly, in recognition of the tragic and awful truth that creation is subject to death and corruption because of its separation from God – the source of all life and incorruption. He wept. And He ordered the stone to be removed from the tomb of His friend. To the horror of those present, who told Him that Lazarus had already started to

decompose, He entered that tomb, and raised Lazarus from the dead, calling him from death to life, reuniting his God created body with His God created soul, restoring life and incorruption to Him by Grace. That is what our Lord did.

The next day He entered the Holy City of Jerusalem, riding not on a war horse, but on a donkey, a sign of His humility and of the Divine Humility of the Father Himself. He went to the temple during that week and taught us in His final parable to feed the hungry, visit the sick, give comfort to the imprisoned, a summary of His entire Life as the Incarnate God on earth. He ate the Last Supper with His disciples in the upper room, creating the Mystical Supper of Holy Communion, in which His presence would be re-established whenever we gather in that way throughout the ages. He willingly submitted to torment, torture, indignity before Pilate and the religious authorities of that day who bore him false witness. He submitted willingly to the Cross for the Life of the World, praying for forgiveness of those who delivered Him, Love Incarnate, to death. He allowed Himself to experience the tragic separation of body and soul, and descended to the place of the dead, bringing to all the souls since the creation of the world the message of Resurrection and Life, raising our Forefather Adam and our Foremother Eve from the dead as a sign of the restoration of all creation. And then, on the third day, the Blessed Eighth and Glorious Day of the New Creation, He rose from the dead, as St. Paul said, "the First Fruits of those who had fallen asleep."

This, Beloved of Christ, is our Holy Christian Faith. It is what we celebrate on the Great and Holy Day of Pascha! *Christ is risen*, as we proclaimed on the pavement outside of our church on West Main Street at 12:01 AM on Pascha. We sang, *Christ is Risen from the Dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestowing Life*. Thus, when we enter that darkness, the darkness of death, ourselves, He will be there, the Risen Lord, the Truth and the Life. He will take our hand as He took the hand of His friend Lazarus. And a certainty will come to each of us, that the time of tribulation is over, and the restoration of all things has begun! *Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!*

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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