



## The Dormition / Assumption of the Holy Theotokos

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The Dormition of the Mother of God is one of the important feasts of the Holy Orthodox Church. 15 days of a fasting period (Aug. 1 - Aug. 15) is what leads one to this great feast.

August 15th marks the culmination of our fasting, commemorating the Dormition of the Mother, who bore the One who bears all creation.

Death, in the Orthodox Church, has two dimensions. This bi-dimensional understanding is founded upon the Tradition of the Holy Scriptures. (Yes, the Bible itself is a handed down tradition!

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The first kind of death is the physical death of the body, which involves the separation of the soul from the body and the dissolution of the body into the earth. This fulfills the words of the Creator: "for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). This physical death should be understood in light of an everlasting one.



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It is this understanding of life after death that gives us the impetus to live our earthly life without being negligent of our spiritual calling. In fact we engrave it in our minds and hearts that we are spiritual beings on an earthly journey as opposed to the idea of being earthly beings on a spiritual journey. St. Paul, in his first epistle to the people of Corinth, stressed the point that without the Resurrection of this physical body (i.e. the coming back of the soul to body and being whole again), the Gospel and Faith are in vain (1 Cor. 15:13-14). We stand before the dreaded seat of judgment as complete human beings, meaning that the body and the soul are united with each other a second time.

The second dimension of the death is the separation of a human being from God. This separation is the irreversible separation of the good and the bad, which happens after the Final Judgment of Christ our Lord (St. Matthew 21: 41 - 46; Revelation 20:10; Philippians 3:20-21; II Corinthians 5:10; I Thessalonians 4:13-18). With that being said, we should not forget the time where the body remains separated from the soul. This, in the scriptures, in the very words of Christ our Lord, has been called as a time of "being asleep" (Read - St. Mark 5:35-39; St. Luke 8:55; St. John 11:11-13).

Even St. Mary experiences this falling asleep. Dormition is a Latin word which means: 'to be asleep'. She was then, in her resurrected body, taken up into heaven, where she enjoys the glorified state, which all the other righteous saints will enjoy after the Second Coming and the Final Judgment. At the time of her dormition, all the apostles were miraculously brought to Jerusalem, except for St. Thomas who was delayed for about three days. While St. Thomas was on the way to Jerusalem, he was blessed to see the Virgin in the sky and also receive her girdle as a blessing. There are points of contention that have been countered by the Church Fathers:





"We have no historical data to indicate how long the Mother of God remained on earth after the ascension of Christ into heaven, nor when, where, or how she died, for the Gospels say nothing of this. The foundation for the feast of the Dormition is to be found in the Sacred Tradition of the Church dating from apostolic times, apocryphal writings, the constant faith of the People of God, and the unanimous opinion of the Holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church of the first thousand years of Christianity" (cf. Fotopoulou Sophia).

Let us be glad and consider ourselves blessed that we belong to a Church and a tradition that honors the Mother of Christ our Lord, as opposed to so many other traditions and modern day beliefs that do not deem it worthy to honor the Queen of Heaven and Earth, the Holy God-bearer (Theotokos). The Feast of the Dormition is one of oldest feasts attributed to our Blessed Mother. The earliest celebration of this feast can be traced back to Jerusalem shortly after the Council of Ephesus. It was Eastern Orthodoxy that impacted this feast to be popular even in the West. The Roman Church accepted this feast (ca. 687 –701), and from Rome it later passed to other European countries. This feast speaks volumes for us in our daily lives. The Blessed Mother teaches us that we will have to stand before Christ one day. Therefore, it is necessary for us to be prepared for this awe inspiring and dreaded meeting. In the words of St. John of Kronstadt:

"This preparation for the meeting of the heavenly King before the dreaded judgment seat, after death, is essentially the person's preparation throughout the whole of his life. This preparation means a change in all his thoughts, and the moral change of all his being, so that the whole man would be pure and white as snow, washing clean everything that defiles the body and spirit, so that he is adorned with every virtue: repentance, meekness, humility, gentleness, simplicity, chastity, mercifulness, abstention, spiritual contemplation, and burning love for God and neighbor."



Our preparation for meeting the heavenly King and for the inheritance of eternal life in heaven should consist of these things. The heavenly King desires souls adorned with immutable virtue, souls prepared so that the Very Lord Himself could abide in them. Do not marvel that the Very Lord wants to live in us. In fact the human soul is more spacious than the heavens and the earth, for it exists in the image of God. And if one removes sins from the soul, the Lord of all will settle in it and will fill it with Himself. “‘We will come to him and make our dwelling with him’ (John 14:23), says the Lord about the souls who love Him.” (Sermon on the Dormition of the Holy Theotokos)

May the prayers and blessing of the Holy Mother be a stronghold for our souls.

