THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Metropolitan Hilarion: The Most Holy Mother of God embraces the whole world and every human being with Her motherly love



On September 21, 2021, the feast of the Nativity of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, the Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Moscow church of "Joy to All the Afflicted" icon of the Mother of God on Bolshaya Ordynka street.

Clergymen of the church assisted the Archpastor.

During the Litany of Fervent Supplication, petitions were offered up for deliverance of the coronavirus infection.

After the Litany, Metropolitan Hilarion lifted up a prayer recited at the time of the spread of baneful pestilence.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the Archpastor addressed the audience with the following sermon:

"In the name of the Father andThe Son and the Holy Spirit!

The Gospels do not say anything about where the Blessed Virgin came from, who Her parents were, or how She was raised. In the Gospel of Luke, we read about how the archangel Gabriel was sent to Nazareth to the Virgin called Mary, to proclaim to Her the good news of the Savior who would be born of Her. The Gospel of Matthew tells us how the Nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ took place from the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. But who the Virgin Mary was, who Her parents were, what preceded this coming of an angel to Her, the Gospel does not mention.

It is the Church Tradition that tells us all this.

According to the Church tradition, the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary were righteous Joachim and Anna. Joachim, the priest of the temple in Jerusalem, was childless, which was perceived in the Old Testament as a heavy punishment from God for some sins. For many years, he and his wife Anna prayed that the Lord would grant them offspring.

When Joachim and Anna were already in a rather old age, the Lord heard their prayer, and from the pious couple came the One who was destined to become the Mother of the Incarnate God and the Instrument of our salvation.

The Most Holy Lady Theotokos, according to the Church tradition, was brought up in the temple of Jerusalem. She spent all her time in prayer, reading the Holy Scriptures, doing needlework, and preparing Herself to become the Mother of the Lord. But, of course, when an angel appeared to the Most Pure Virgin and announced this, She was confused. "How will it be since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34), Mary asked. But the angel said to her, "The Spirit of the Holy One will come upon You, and the power of the Most High will overshadow You "(Luke 1:35).

Why did the Lord choose this pious Jewish girl to be His Mother? Why not someone else? And why did He have to be born of a Virgin in the first place? Surely He could have come down from heaven just as He ascended to heaven after He died on the cross and rose from the dead?

Neither the Holy Scriptures nor the Sacred Tradition will give us the answer to these questions. The Lord came to this world through an ordinary human birth, ordinary because it was the same as other people's. But at the same time, the birth of Jesus Christ cannot be called ordinary, because Christ was not born of a husband and wife, but of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. Mary's virginity was preserved, She did not lose it when She gave birth to the Lord Savior. And when we think about all this, our mind and our heart are in contact with a great mystery that cannot be described in human words.

We cannot answer the question of why the Lord appeared this way and not otherwise. Why did He choose this particular method of birth, and not some other? We only know that God wanted to be close to us. He wanted to descend from His heavenly height to immerse himself in our human life with all its sorrows, problems, with all which not only pleases us, but also weighs down our heart and soul.

The Lord became one of us in order to save us, so that just as He came down from heaven to earth, we might, guided by Him, ascend from earth to heaven. But our ascent from earth to heaven will not happen overnight, not at once, not after our death. It happens already here and now when we come to Church, when we participate in the divine Liturgy, when we pray to the Lord, His blessed Mother, the angels, the saints, and especially, when we partake of Holy Communion, taking inside the Body and Blood of God Incarnate. That's when our ascent from earth to heaven begins. And in this ascent, our Helper and Intercessor is the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary.

The Most Holy Mother of God has granted our Church a special favor, and She is with us through Her miraculous icon "Joy to All who Sorrow". Whenever sorrow strikes us, we can come to this icon, venerate it, and pray to the Blessed Virgin, and we will always receive relief and help. Even if not immediately, we will certainly receive it anyway, because the Most Holy Theotokos hears our prayers, being our Intercessor and Helper. She prays for us before the throne of God the Almighty.

Some claim that all the stories about the Birth of the Virgin Mary from Joachim and Anna, claims that She was brought up in the temple in Jerusalem are unreliable, because they are not found in the Holy Scriptures, and in general it could not be that a little girl was brought up in the temple. In particular, such things are claimed by all sorts of Protestant preachers, Baptist preachers, Pentecostals – those who profess Christ to be God and Savior, but at the same time reject the Church tradition, do not pray to the Most Holy Theotokos and do not venerate Her.

To such people we answer with all firmness and humility: the mystery of the Most Holy Theotokos is the mystery that was revealed to the Church. It was open to it. And over the centuries, it has been revealed to all believing hearts. We can't imagine the worship of God and veneration of Jesus Christ as God and Savior without simultaneously honoring the Virgin Mary as His Most Pure Mother, as the Most Blessed Lady Theotokos.

In the fifth century, when one zealous theologian decided to change the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary, claiming that She gave birth not to the Eternal God but to the person of Jesus Christ, so that we should call Her Christotokos rather than Theotokos, the Church in its fullness, the common people and clergy, bishops and theologians have rebelled against this wickedness, because the Blessed Virgin is truly the Mother of God. She gave birth to the God-Man Christ, and therefore, in all justice, She is called the Mother of God. We pray to Her as our own Intercessor, as to the One who prays for us before the throne of God the Almighty. Our hearts respond to Her presence in our lives, but most importantly, She responds to our prayers, hears us, loves us, and embraces the whole world and everyone with Her motherly love.

On the feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos, let us pray to our Most Pure Lady that She may preserve us from all evil, preserve our Fatherland and all the peoples of the earth, and that as soon as possible the evil that has been sent to us by God's permission will cease. Let us glorify our Lord Jesus Christ and His Most Pure Mother, our Lady, in the silence of our hearts. Amen.

I congratulate you all on the feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos! God bless you all."

DECR Communication Service

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