

HOMILY ON THE BIRTH OF THE THEOTOKOS, SEPTEMBER 8th  
(For Sunday, 6/9/2020)

*“Your birth, Oh Theotokos, brought joy to the whole world, for from you dawned the sun of righteousness, Christ our God. Freeing us from the curse, He gave us His blessings. Abolishing death, He granted us eternal life.”* **Apolytikion** (the Dismissal hymn) of the Nativity of the Theotokos

The birth of the ever virgin and Mother of God, Mary, which is celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, is the source of much spiritual joy. The woman born, who will give birth “in flesh” to the pre-eternal God-the-Word, the Creator and Savior of the world, who abolished death so that we may have eternal life. This joyous feast is not only shared with humanity, but the entire universe, which includes the invisible realm of angels.

If the whole world was jubilant at the birth of the “most gracious” Mary, then we can imagine how her mother, Anna, must have felt, especially with her physical infertility overcome. Additionally, there is her father, Joachim, who saw the fulfillment of his fervent prayers to God by becoming a father, even at an old age. All of this was certainly a miracle! As we know from the Old Testament, God has also blessed other women in this way. We can remember Sara, the wife of the patriarch Abraham; Rebecca, the wife of Isaac; Anna, the mother of the Prophet Samuel. However, the case of Anna and Joachim is different in one key respect. While the above mentioned mothers gave birth to children who were virtuous and holy, Anna and Joachim’s child was to become the holy Mother of God!

Our Holy Mother, as we heard, was born after the persistent and heartfelt prayers of the righteous Ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna. However, in order for this blessing to come, they had to have an unshakable faith and perseverance beyond measure. They cultivated a hope that did not disappoint, as they prayed with confidence that God would answer their prayers. We also need to consider that this childlessness was not for a short time, but as the Tradition teaches it was after fifty years of sterility that Anna gave birth to the Theotokos. The way of the holy Ancestors must become an example for us. Couples unable to bear children should not give up their hope in God, since *“the things which are impossible with men are possible with God”* (Luke 18:27). Miracles of this kind, which we see happening even in our own days, are not a rarity. But what is needed in the face of such struggles, is to look to the Theotokos’ parents for inspiration. As human beings with weaknesses, we become tired and grumble during our own struggle. We complain that our prayers are not heard, and become impatient. In sorrow, our zeal fades, and with it the desire to continue the fight leaves us. Let us not forget the holy Ancestors, Joachim and Anna! Did they stop calling upon God because He did not immediately respond to their prayers? Did they cease asking, knocking and hoping? Truly, theirs was an unwavering patience and resolve over many years! In the end, their faith was

rewarded. In times of suffering, what is needed is faith in God's promises and His will, to come to Him with absolute obedience and hope, so that our prayer will not diminish (see Luke 18:1). God knows when and how it is beneficial for us to receive His priceless and indescribable gift; His divine Grace!

Let us also act as the righteous Joachim and Anna did, and be serene in the face of temptations or hardship, which God allows for our own spiritual benefit and progress. May the Lord, through the intercessions of the Most Holy Theotokos, heal our troubled hearts, which lack faith, hope, patience, trust and spiritual fruit. May He also replenish our souls with His divine and all-powerful Grace, which heals all that is sick and provides what may be lacking, so that humanity is renewed. Amen.