

573 On the fortieth day after Pascha, the Church sings the praises of Christ's Ascension. But Christ does not depart from his Church. On the contrary, those who are in Christ are taken up with him "into heaven."<sup>401</sup> This is why the Holy- Fathers of the First Nicene Council (whom we commemorate on the Sunday of the Holy Fathers) already contemplated the Most Holy Trinity, and in the Creed and in conciliar fashion together pass on the experience of the knowledge of God. Imitating the Holy Fathers, the entire liturgical assembly ascends to the contemplation of the Most Holy Trinity on the day of Pentecost: "Today the nations have acquired wisdom through the glory of the vision of God."<sup>402</sup> The Floral Triodion reaches its climax, attaining this summit of the knowledge of God by commemorating on the Sunday after Pentecost all the saints—the fruits of the Spirit.

*b. The Immovable Cycle of Feasts (the Menaion)*

574 Another series of Church feasts—of the Lord, of the Mother of God, and of the saints—always falls on the same day of the year and they are thus called immovable (fixed) feasts. Chief among the fixed feasts of the Lord are the Birth (Nativity) of Christ (Christmas, December 25/January 7) and Theophany (January 6/19). Their meaning lies in the manifestation of Christ, the Light that overcomes the darkness of sin. On the second day of each of these feasts the Church celebrates the persons principally involved in the salvific events of Christ's Birth and his Baptism in the River Jordan: the Synaxis of the most holy Mother of God and the Synaxis of John the Baptist, respectively (synaxis is a Greek word which means 'gathering' and refers to the fact that we gather for a Eucharist to celebrate their memorial). Moreover, linked to the Birth of Christ is the feast of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God (March 25/April 7), which is nine months before Christmas.

575 Another feast linked to the Birth of Christ is the Birth of John the Baptist. Since he was born six months before Christ (see Lk 1:26), we celebrate his birth on June 24/July 7, and his conception on September 23/October 6. The Christmas cycle of feasts also includes the Circumcision of the Lord (January 1/14), celebrated on the eighth day after Christmas, and the Encounter of Our Lord (February 2/15). The latter celebrates Christ's presentation in the Jerusalem Temple as the first-born Son and the offering of a sacrifice from him on the fortieth

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<sup>401</sup> Liturgicon, The Divine Liturgy of our Holy Father John Chrysostom, Anaphora.

<sup>402</sup> Triodion, Monday of the Holy Spirit, Matins, Sticheron at the Praises.

day after his birth. In this feast, the Church celebrates the meeting or encounter of the Old and New Covenants, in the persons of the elder Simeon and the prophetess Anna with the Mother of God and the Child Jesus in her arms. In the feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor (August 6/19), the Church celebrates the manifestation of the fullness of the divine light, begun at the Theophany in the Jordan. As "our Saviour shone forth to the world, God manifested as light from light"<sup>403</sup> in the Incarnation, so in the Transfiguration "the entire human nature divinely shone"<sup>404</sup> and the Light of Christ effects the transfiguration of all creation. In the feast of the Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross (September 14/27), the Church sings the praises of "the Tree of true life, planted on the Place of the skull" (Golgotha). On it "the Eternal King has rendered salvation in the centre of the earth, and today through its exaltation the ends of the earth are sanctified."<sup>405</sup>

576 With particular love the Church venerates the most Blessed Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary. She is inseparably tied to the salvific work of her Son. In the course of the yearly cycle, besides the feasts of the Mother of God (the Encounter and the Annunciation), we celebrate her Nativity (September 8/21), her Entrance into the Temple (November 21/December 4), and her Dormition (August 15/28). The Nativity of the Mother of God is the beginning of our salvation,<sup>406</sup> the Entrance is its proclamation,<sup>407</sup> and her Dormition is a sign of its fulfilment.<sup>408</sup> Related to the feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God is the feast of the Conception of Saint Anna when She Conceived the Most Holy Mother of God. This feast is also called the Immaculate Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God (December 9/22, nine months before her Nativity). Since in her Dormition the Mother of God "did not abandon the world,"<sup>409</sup> her "standing before us in the Church" and

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<sup>403</sup> Menaion, Holy Theophany of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ (January 6/19), Matins, Sticheron at the Praises.

<sup>404</sup> Menaion, The Fore-feast of the Holy Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ (August 5/18), Kontakion.

<sup>405</sup> Menaion, The Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross (September 14/27), Vespers, Sticheron at Litya.

<sup>406</sup> Menaion, The Nativity of our Most holy Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary (September 8/21), Vespers, Sticheron at Litya.

<sup>407</sup> Menaion, The Entrance into the Temple of our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary (November 21/December 4), Troparion.

<sup>408</sup> Menaion, The Dormition of our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary (August 15/28), Vespers, Sticheron at Litya.

<sup>409</sup> Menaion, The Dormition of our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary (August 15/28), Troparion.