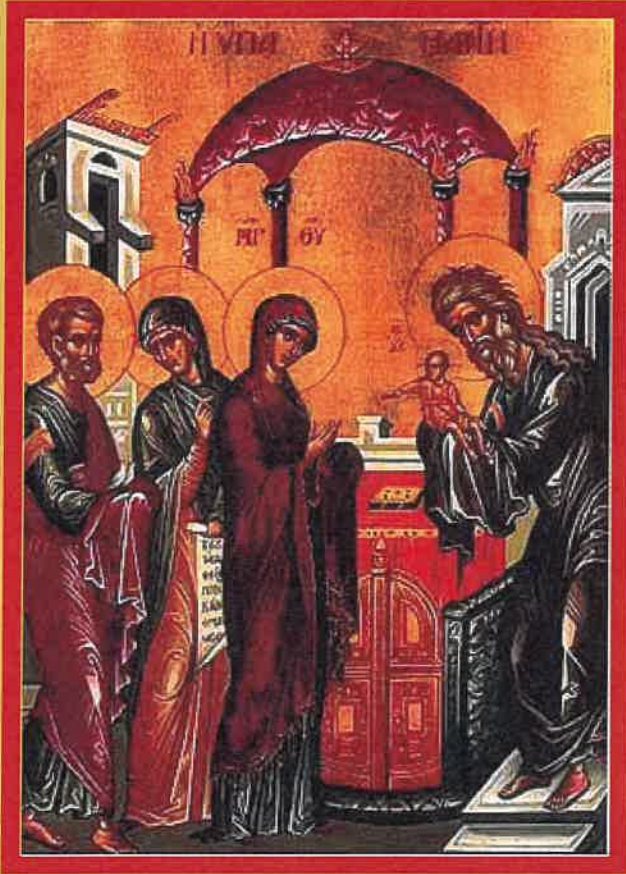


***The 40-day Blessing
of new mothers and their children***



***The Presentation of the Lord Jesus
to the Temple in Jerusalem***

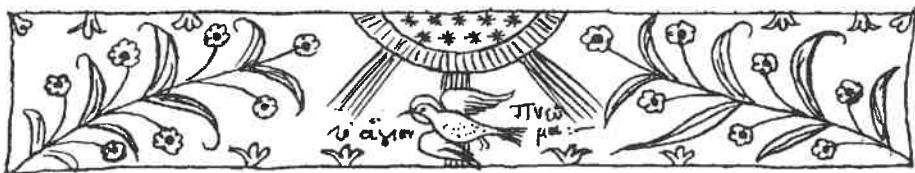
**The Presentation of the Lord to the Temple
and
The 40-Day Blessing of new mothers and their children**

The Christmas/Epiphany season in the Orthodox Church comes to an end on February 2nd, 40 days after our celebration of Christ's birth, with the celebration of the feast of "The Presentation of Christ to the Temple in Jerusalem." One of the 12 great festivals of the Church's annual liturgical calendar, the events celebrated on this day are recorded in Luke 2:22-38. It is this event in the life of the Lord Jesus that also forms the basis for the tradition of the 40-day blessing of new mothers and their children. It is yet another step in conforming the pattern of our lives to the life of Christ Jesus.

Luke 2:22-38

When the days of her purification according to the Law of Moses were completed, they brought the child Jesus up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be dedicated to the Lord" (Exodus 13:2, 12), and to offer a sacrifice in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (Leviticus 12:1-8). Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Symeon and this man was righteous and devout. He was awaiting the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. In the Spirit, he went to the Temple. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him what the custom of the Law required, Symeon took Him in his arms and blessed God and said: "Now let Your servant depart in peace, O Master, according to Your word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of Your people, Israel." And His father and mother marveled at what was said about Him. Then Symeon blessed them and said to Mary, His mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against – and a sword will pierce through your own soul, also – that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

Continued on back cover



PRAYERS FOR THE CHURCHING OF A MOTHER AND CHILD AFTER FORTY DAYS

Priest: Blessed is our God always, now and forever and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (3 times)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

All holy Trinity, have mercy on us.

Lord, forgive our sins.

Master, pardon our transgressions.

Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for Your Name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father Who art in heaven

Hallowed be Thy Name

Thy Kingdom come

Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

Priest: For Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, of
the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now
and forever and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen.

*Then the hymn honoring the feast of the
Presentation of Christ to the Temple is sung:*

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy
Spirit.

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, full of grace!

From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our
God, enlightening those who sat in darkness.

Rejoice, and be glad, O righteous elder Symeon, for
you held in your arms the Redeemer of our souls, who
grants us the resurrection.

Now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Through the prayers, O Lord, of all the saints and of
the Theotokos grant us Your peace and mercy, for
You alone are merciful.



The priest lays his hand upon the mother's head and says:

Priest: Let us pray to the Lord

People: Lord, have mercy.

The First Prayer for the Mother

Priest: O Lord God Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: by Your Word You fashioned every creature, both rational and without reason. You brought all things out of nothing into being. By Your will You have preserved from the dangers of childbirth Your servant (*Name*) who now comes to Your holy Church. We pray to You and beg You: cleanse her from every sin and from all stain that she may be found worthy to receive the holy Mysteries of Your Body and Blood without condemnation.

The First Prayer for the Child

Bless also this child that has been born of her. Increase him (*her*)! Sanctify him (*her*)! Give him (*her*) understanding and a prudent and virtuous mind! Lord, You alone have brought him (*her*) into being, and have shown him (*her*) that light which our eyes perceive, that he (*she*) may also be found worthy to see the true Light of Your Christ and be numbered among the holy flock of Your Church; through Your only-begotten Son, with Whom You are blessed, together with Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen.

Priest: Let us pray to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy.

The Second Prayer for the Mother

Priest: O Lord our God, through the incarnation of Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, You came among us for the salvation of the human race: come also to

this Your servant (*Name*), and through the prayers of Your honored presbyters, deem her worthy to find refuge in Your holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and enter once again into the Temple of Your glory. Deem her worthy to partake of the Precious Body and Blood of Your Christ. In the fulfillment of the forty days, wash away from her every impurity of body and stain of soul. Make her worthy to enter Your holy Temple and glorify with us Your all-holy Name, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen.

Priest: Let us pray to the Lord.

People: Lord, have mercy.

The Second Prayer for the Child

Priest: O Lord our God, on the fortieth day You were brought as an infant into the Temple of the Law by Your holy Mother, the virgin Mary, and carried in the arms of the righteous Symeon. All-Powerful Master: bless this infant, brought here this day to be presented to You, the Creator of all things. Bless this child and increase in him (*her*) every good work that is pleasing to You! Remove from him (*her*) every opposing power by the signing of the mark of Your most precious Cross. Lord, You keep watch over infants: deem this child worthy of holy Baptism, that he (*she*) may obtain the portion of the elect in Your Kingdom, and be protected with us by the grace of the Holy Trinity, one in essence and undivided.

For to You do we offer up glory, honor and worship, together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy,

good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen.

Priest: Let us bow our heads to the Lord.

People: To You, O Lord.

Priest: O God, the Father Almighty: by the loud voice of the prophet Isaiah You foretold to us the incarnation from a Virgin of Your Only-Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, our God. In these last days, by Your good pleasure and with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, You chose, because of Your measureless love, to become a child of Mary for the salvation of the human race. In accordance with the custom of Your holy Law, after the fulfillment of the days of purification, You submitted to be brought to the Temple, for You are a true lawgiver, and condescended to be carried in the arms of the righteous Symeon. Of this mystery we have a prototype declared in the Prophet Isaiah by the taking of coals with tongs from the altar, and of which we faithful have an imitation in grace. Lord, You watch over infants: bless (+) this child, together with its parents (*Names*) and sponsors (*Names*), and account him (*her*) worthy, at the proper time, to be born again of water and the Spirit. Number him (*her*) with Your holy flock of rational sheep, called by the Name of Your Christ.

For You are He who dwells on high, and gives regard to those who are humble, and to You do we offer up glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen.

Taking the child, the priest lifts it up in the sign of the Cross before the gates of the Temple, saying:

The servant of God (*Name*) is called out of the world, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

And he carries the child down the center aisle into the Temple, singing a verse from the Psalms:

I will enter Your house. I will worship in Your holy Temple in fear of You. *Psalm 5:7*

Coming to the center of the church, the priest again lifts up the child and says:

The servant of God (*Name*) is called out of the world, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

Continuing down the center aisle, the priest sings another verse from the Psalms:

In the midst of the congregation I will sing praises to You. *Psalm 22:22*

Then he brings the child to the solea and standing before the holy doors of the altar, says:

The servant of God (*Name*) is called out of the world, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

The Song of the Righteous Symeon

Priest: Now let Your servant depart in peace, O Master, according to Your Word. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel. *Luke 2:29-32*

The priest hands the child back to its mother

and then concludes the service

The Dismissal

Priest: Glory to You, our God and our hope, glory to You

May Christ our true God, who submitted to be carried in the arms of the righteous Symeon for our salvation, through the intercessions of His most pure and holy Mother, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary; by the power of His precious and life-giving Cross; the protection of all the angelic powers of heaven; the prayers of the holy, glorious prophet and forerunner, John the Baptist; of the holy, glorious and praiseworthy Apostles; of the holy, glorious and victorious martyrs; of our venerable and God-bearing Fathers; of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna; *of the saint whose name this child has taken*), and of all Your saints, have mercy on us and save us.

Through the prayers of our holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us.

People: Amen.



Exodus 12:51-13:1-3, 11-16

On that very day that the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt, the Lord spoke to Moses saying: "Consecrate to Me every firstborn male. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, whether human or animal, belongs to Me." And Moses said to the people: "Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, because the Lord has brought you out by the strength of His hand.

You shall therefore keep His law. And so it shall be, when the Lord has brought you into the land of the Caananites and has given it to you, as He swore to you and your ancestors, you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your livestock that are males shall be the Lord's. Every firstborn male among your children you shall redeem. When in the future your children ask you what this means, you will tell them that by the strength of His hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery, and that when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed all of the firstborn of Egypt, from human firstborn to the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord every male that first opens the womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem. This shall serve as a sign on your hand and as a frontlet on your forehead that by the strength of His hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt.

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher: she was of great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity and as a widow until she was 84. She never left the Temple, by prayer and fasting, worshipping night and day. And, coming up at that very hour, she gave thanks to God and spoke of Him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

So, this event in the life of Christ has its roots in the Old Testament and in the fulfillment of the commandments given to ancient Israel. The infant Jesus, “the Word made flesh” (*John 1:14*), is carried in the arms of the righteous Symeon: He who gave the Law in the Old Testament now comes as a small child to the Temple in Jerusalem in order to fulfill that Law in the New Testament.

In ancient Israel, God commanded that the first-born son (“who opens the womb”) be “dedicated to the Lord” in remembrance of the Lord’s sparing of the lives of the first-born sons of the Israelites during the 10th and last plague that killed all the first-born sons in Egypt, “from the pharaoh’s son, who was heir to the throne, to the son of the prisoner in the dungeon” (*Exodus 12:29*). So, because the first-born son of each Israelite household was spared on the night of that first Passover, the first-born son of subsequent generations was to be consecrated to God’s service in a special way, in gratitude for His mercy. This command of God in the Old Testament is brought to fulfillment in a new way in the bringing of the Christ child to the Temple by the Theotokos and Joseph and is still celebrated in the life of the Church today, thousands of years later.

We Orthodox Christians, in order to fully participate in the process of conforming our lives and the lives of our children to the pattern of the life of Christ Jesus – “in whom there is neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, male and female” (*Galatians 3:28*) – bring not only our first born sons but all our children to the Temple of the Church in order to consecrate them to God and to offer prayers of thanksgiving to Him for the new life He has given. New mothers are also prayed over, thanking God for having preserved them through the dangers of childbirth, and asking for the forgiveness of their sins in preparation for receiving the sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Savior in the Eucharist.



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