

# The Good Word

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THE JOURNEY OF THE THEOTOKOS FROM NAZARETH TO  
THE HOLY OF HOLIES IN JERUSALEM AT AGE 3

ST. DEMETRIOS OF ROSTOV (1651-1709):

**"A NARRATIVE CONCERNING THE ENTRANCE OF OUR MOST PURE, MOST BLESSED LADY, THE THEOTOKOS AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY, INTO THE TEMPLE OF THE LORD"**<sup>1</sup>

When the most pure and divine Maiden, the most blessed Virgin Mary the Theotokos reached the age of three, her holy and righteous parents, Joachim and Anna, remembered the vow they had made when they prayed to be delivered from childlessness, promising to offer their offspring as a gift to God. Therefore, as all the ancient Fathers testify, they called together their relatives living in Nazareth, persons of royal and high-priestly lineage, for the righteous Joachim was of royal stock and his spouse Anna was of the high-priestly line. They also assembled a choir of virgins, for whom they had prepared a large number of candles, and arrayed the most pure Virgin Mary with the splendor befitting a queen. Thus Saint James, the Archbishop of Jerusalem, says on behalf of Joachim, "Summon the undefiled daughters of the Hebrews, that they may take in hand burning candles;<sup>2</sup> and Saint Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, has the righteous Anna speak these words: "To the Lord will I pay my vows which my lips pronounced and which my mouth had spoken in mine affliction."<sup>3</sup> For this reason I have assembled a choir of virgins bearing candles, called for the priests and for my kindred, and said to them, "Rejoice with me, the mother of a daughter betrothed not to an earthly king but unto God, the King of heaven."<sup>4</sup>

Concerning the royal magnificence with which the

divine Maiden was adorned, Saint Theophylact, Archbishop of Bulgaria, writes, "It was necessary that the most divine Maiden should enter the temple in a manner befitting her. It would not have been suitable for the brilliant and costly pearl to be clad in a pauper's rags, rather, royal vesture, which would serve to magnify and adorn her, was meet for the occasion."<sup>5</sup>

When everything necessary had been prepared for the honorable and glorious entrance, the Virgin and those with her departed. Arriving in the city of Jerusalem after a journey of three days,<sup>6</sup> Joachim and Anna proceeded to the Temple and led into it the living temple of God, the three-year old Maiden, the most pure Virgin Mary. She was preceded by the choir of virgins carrying lighted candles. Saint Tarasius, the Archbishop of Constantinople, relates that Saint Anna said at that moment, "Begin the procession, O candle-bearing virgins, and go before me and the divine Maiden!"<sup>7,8</sup>

The parents of the holy Virgin, one on each side, took the daughter given them by God and gently led her

5. Saint Theophylact, Archbishop of Bulgaria, *Homily on the Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos*.

6. [Editor's note: The most direct route, a 3 day 50 mile long trek, went south through Samaria and the cities of Tirzah, Shechem, Shiloh, and Bethel. The alternate route to the east around Samaria crossed the Jordan River, passed through Perea (in modern Jordan), and then crossed back over the Jordan River near Jericho, then climbed up into the hill country to arrive in Jerusalem. It was 80 miles long and took 5-7 days passing through Beth Shean, Pella, Sukkoth, Jericho, Bethpage, Bethany, and over the Mount of Olives. On the 3 day route, they would have approached the northern upper city of Jerusalem to the west of Herod's Antonio fortress (completed before 30 BC) and continued behind the newly remodeled Temple.]

7. Saint Tarasius, *ibid*.

8. [Editor's note: The only Biblical procession in ancient Israel was when King David transferred the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David. It was accompanied by Levites singing and playing instruments, but there is no mention of candles (2 Kingdoms 6; 1 Paralipomenon 15). The *Talmid* and *Mishnah* record that during the Feast of Tabernacles, pilgrims cut willow branches in Motza two miles to the west of the Temple. The myrtle, willow, and date palm branches were securely bundled together with a citron as the "lulavim." A procession up to the sacrificial Altar began with the singing of the 15 Hymns of Ascent accompanied by musical instruments. The *lulavim* were waved by the pilgrims side-to-side and back-to-front on cue -- the priests would say, *Give thanks to LORD, Please LORD bring salvation now*, and *Please LORD bring success now*. But on the 7th and last day of the feast, the *Great Hoshanna*, like Joshua and the Israelites circling Jericho, the priests circled the altar 7 times repeating the above prayers 7 times in hoping the wall separating them from the LORD would be broken down.]

1. St. Demetrios of Rostov, November 21, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints: Volume III November*, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, pp. 478-491.

2. Saint James of Jerusalem, *Homily on the Nativity of the Theotokos (The Protoevangelium)* ¶7. [Editor's note: In traditional Jewish weddings, the bride is escorted to her bridegroom by her parents who both carry a candle with them to the *chuppah*, the wedding canopy.]

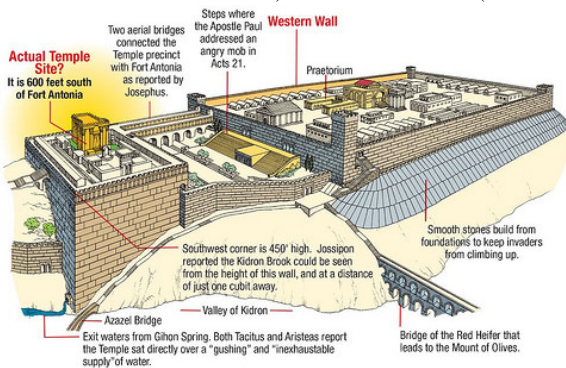
3. Ps. 65:13.

4. Saint Tarasius, Patriarch of Constantinople (AD c.730-808), *Homily on the Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos*.

forward with reverence. The multitude followed, candles in hand, surrounding the most holy Virgin like stars around a brilliant moon, to the amazement of all Jerusalem. Of this, Saint Theophylact writes, “The daughter forgets her father’s house and is led unto the King, Who greatly desires her beauty.<sup>9</sup> She is brought forth in majesty, with splendor and honor, from her father’s house as the people clap their hands, and her kindred and neighbors, bound to her parents by ties of affection, follow. Fathers rejoice with her father and mothers with her mother, while the virgin maidens bearing candles go before the divine Maiden shining like a circle of stars around the moon. All Jerusalem poured out into the streets to behold a procession such as had never before been seen and to gaze upon the three-year old Maiden escorted in great glory, whose coming was heralded by the appearance of numerous lights.<sup>10</sup> But it was not only the citizens of the

9. [c.f. Ps. 44:10.]

10. [Editor’s note: The virgin maidens who accompanied Joachim, Anna, the 3 y/o Most Holy Virgin Mary, and other pilgrims from Nazareth, now with their candles burning brightly, would have been seen by the inhabitants of Jerusalem as the group proceeded southward behind the Antonio Fortress and the old gateless back wall of the Second Temple complex through the upper to the lower city (of David). The current “Temple Mount” has been misidentified for over 1000 years as the site of the Jerusalem Temple. It was the site of the Antonio Fortress built in honor of Marc Antony prior to his death in 30 BC. The Temple was located over the Spring of Gihon (the only water source in ancient Jerusalem) 600 feet further south (see below).



King Herod the Great (73- April 4 BC) began his rebuilding of the Temple Complex in 19 BC. It took 46 years for completion according to St. John 2:20: *Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in 3 days?* If Jesus was born Dec 25, 5 BC to the Theotokos, then a 15 y/o teenager (Abp. Averky, *The Four Gospels*, Holy Trinity Seminary Press, Jordanville, NY, 2015, pp. 12-13), she would have made her trip to the Temple c. 17-18 BC. Herod’s new Temple complex would only have been in its early stages. The former Jewish priest and later Roman historian Flavius Josephus, an eyewitness to Herod’s completed Temple complex, related that the new “Temple itself was built by the priests in a year and six months” (*Ant. XV.XI.6*). It was the first part built. Consequently, the Holy Maiden may have entered the Sanctuary shortly after its remodeling and long before the great expansion of the courtyards, outer walls, and colonnades. The new Temple Sanctuary (the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, although larger,) was built over the same sacred ground as Solomon’s Temple. It was eventually connected to the “Temple Mount” by a 600 foot long double

Jerusalem here below who hastened to behold the wondrous entry of the most pure Virgin Mary, the inhabitants of the Jerusalem on high, the holy angels, likewise assembled, and seeing the procession, were filled with awe, as the Church sings: “Beholding the entry of the All-pure One, the angels were stricken with amazement, seeing how the Virgin entered into the Holy of Holies.”<sup>11</sup>

Joining with the visible choir of pure virgins, the unseen choir of bodiless intellects invisibly accompanied the most pure Virgin Mary to the Holy Place, by the Lord’s command encompassing her who is God’s chosen vessel. Saint George, Archbishop of Nicomedia, writes, “As the Virgin’s parents led her to the doors of the Temple,<sup>12</sup> she was surrounded by

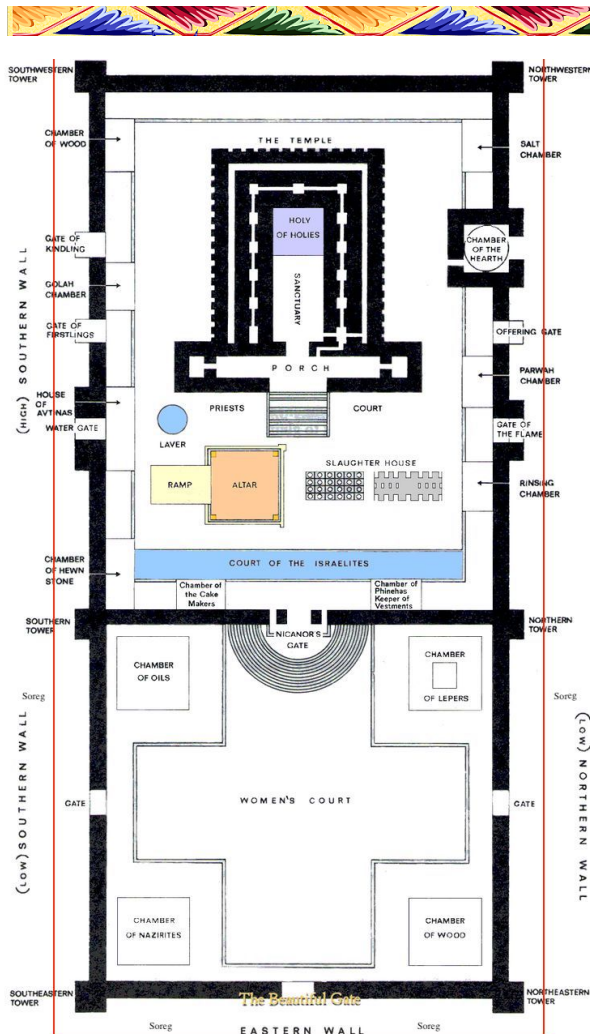
colonnade extending from the southwest corner of the Antonio Fortress to the northwest corner of the Temple complex allowing rapid access by Roman soldiers stationed in the Antonio Fortress to suppress riots in the Temple. Per the *Mishnah* the new Temple platform measured 750 feet square. The complex itself, 600 feet square per Josephus, had very thick walls with external double colonnades. The old Temple complex was significantly smaller, but the entourage from Nazareth would still need to walk over a quarter of a mile through the streets of the upper city of Jerusalem behind the Antonio Fortress and the back Temple wall to reach the its entrance in the southern wall from the lower city of David. Such a route would have provided plenty of opportunity for the procession to be seen in both the upper and lower cities of Jerusalem so as to capture the attention of its citizenry and cause them to pour out onto the streets in awe and amazement, for never had such a procession been seen!]

11. From the canon of the Feast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple, Ode Nine, Megalynarion.

12. [Editor’s note: They would first enter Outer Courtyard, the Courtyard of the Gentiles. They would then come to a 4-foot tall wall which surrounded the Temple proper. This was the *soreg*, the so-called middle wall of separation (Eph. 2:14), beyond which no Gentile was allowed to pass (under the penalty of death). In Herod’s fully completed Temple stone warning markers engraved in Greek and Latin were posted all around to that effect. We would assume that the innermost courtyards of the old Temple were similar in design, but smaller compared to Herod’s Temple whose *soreg* was 15 feet from the walls of the main section of the Temple known as the *Azarah*. The space in between was called the *Cheil*. The first 6 feet of the *Cheil* were on level ground, the next 9 feet consisted of 12 steps 9” high and 9” deep, so an increase in elevation of 9 feet.

The 3 year old Mary, and her candle lit entourage would have to pass through the *soreg* fence and then ascend the steps to reach the entrance gate (*aka.*, the *Lower, Eastern, or Beautiful Gate*) -- the main entrance for all worshippers. In Herod’s Temple the gates were gold plated, the walls of the *Azarah* 7.5’ thick and 15’ high. Inside was the Women’s Courtyard whose inner dimensions were 202.5 x 202.5 feet. At the western end of the Women’s Courtyard there were 15 semicircular steps 9 “ high and 9” deep which led 11.5 feet up to the *Upper Gate* or *Nicanor Gate* which allowed entry into the courtyards of the Israelites and then that of the Priests. Some Jewish sages maintain that women were not permitted beyond the Women’s Courtyard which ended at the *Nicanor Gate*. Others maintain that access beyond that gate was permitted for women to offer their own sacrifices, but they would have to return immediately afterward. These semi-circular steps were known as the *Ascents of Song* where the 15 Songs of Ascent (Psalms 119-133) were sung by the Levites. The new *Nicanor Gate* had two large brass doors also 7.5 feet wide and 30 tall feet which required 20 men to open them. They were only





angels, and all the heavenly hosts rejoiced. Although the angels knew nothing of the power of this mystery, as the Lord's servants they obeyed His command to serve at her entry. They marveled when they saw that the most pure vessel of the virtues bore the tokens of everlasting purity and were amazed that while she was clothed in flesh, no stain of sin could ever draw near her; then they proceeded to do the will of the Lord and to perform what they had been instructed to do."<sup>13</sup>

Thus the all-undefiled Maiden was accompanied not only by men but also by angels into the Temple of the Lord. And this was truly fitting; for if the ark of the Old Covenant, in which manna was placed, being a mere type of the most pure Virgin, was accompanied by all the people of Israel when it was carried into the

opened on Sabbaths, festivals, and the New Moon, or if the King were present in the Temple. Immediately inside the the gate was the 202.5 x 30 foot Courtyard of the Israelites, then four steps called the *duchan* on which the Levites would sing psalms twice each day. These steps led up another 3 feet into the Courtyard of the Priests where all the sacrifices were offered. The Sanctuary (the *Heichel*) lay beyond. (Ref. Rabbi Leibel Reznick, *The Holy Temple Revisited*, Jason Aronson, Inc, Northvale, NJ, 1990, pp. 77-86.)

13. This passage from the homily of Saint George of Nicomedia on the *Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos* is to be found in a homily by Saint Symeon Metaphrastes.

Tabernacle of the Lord,<sup>14</sup> it was surely proper that the living ark, the most blest Virgin, the Mother of God, who carried within the Manna that is Christ, be escorted by both men and angels.<sup>15</sup>

14. 1 Paraleipomenon 14 (1 Chronicles 14)

15. [Editor's note: The Apostle Paul describes the Tabernacle of Moses and its contents in Hebrews 9:2-5: *For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy seat.* This is not the Temple of Herod.

Here the undefiled Maiden is the New Covenant antitype of the Old Covenant Ark with its mercy seat on its top and the jar of manna inside. Consequently, she took her rightful place as the Living Ark of the New Covenant in the new and otherwise empty Holy of Holies built by Herod, carrying in her womb the Heavenly Manna, Jesus Christ (the antitype of the golden *Lxx*/earthenware *MT* jar of manna).

CANON OF THE AKATHIST HYMN, ODE 4, VERSE 3

"Thou, O undefiled Lady, art the **mercy seat** of the world and the ladder raising all men from the earth to the heights by grace. Rejoice, O bridge that does truly lead from death to Life all that praise thy name, and cry, Rejoice, unto thee, O Maid."

Historically, the Ark of the Covenant also contained Aaron's rod that budded and flowered overnight which demonstrated to the Israelites that only Aaron and his descendants were approved by the God of Israel to serve as priests (Num. 17:1-10). Aaron's rod also swallowed up the rods of the Egyptian magicians (Ex. 7:8-10), turned the water into blood in Egypt (Ex. 7:19-21, and summoned the plagues of frogs (Ex. 8:5-6) and that of gnats upon the Egyptians (Ex. 8:16-17). The Virgin Mary's womb also contained Jesus, the antitype of the bud on Aaron's rod:

CANON OF THE AKATHIST HYMN, ODE 7, VERSE 3


"To the Healer of all mankind has thou given birth; rejoice, O Bride of God; **thou art the mystical rod from whom the unfading Rose blossomed and budded forth**; and through thee we men inherit life and, filled with joy, cry, Rejoice, to thee, O Lady."

Jesus was chosen by His Father to be a Priest after the order of Melchizedek, and through the incarnation became a descendant of Aaron through the Virgin Mary, the daughter of St. Anna (daughter of Mary of the tribe of Judah via Nathan the son of David) and Matthan, a priest and descendant of Aaron (St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, Vol. I*, pp. 160-161.). Christ Jesus will allow plagues on unbelieving mankind in the time of the Antichrist like those loosed by Aaron with Moses on the Egyptians.

Christ the *Logos* the Word of God was not only the composer of the Law of Moses but the only one who fulfilled it perfectly -- the perfect Incarnation of the Law. So, we can truly appreciate how the Virgin, even as a young child, was the true Living Ark with its mercy seat, containing the jar of Living Manna, the Blossom on Aaron's rod that budded, and the Incarnate Law. She was consequently worthy to be escorted by men and angels into the Holy of Holies.

It is most curious that the Temple had been missing the Ark and the Tablets of the Law since the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar c. 607 BC. In 537 BC the Jews returned from Babylon after 70 years of captivity, and rebuilt their Temple. Nevertheless, their Holy of Holies remained empty: no the Ark of the Covenant, no jar of manna, no rod of Aaron, and no Two Tables of the Covenant. Josephus writes that in Herod's Temple: "... the inmost part of the Temple of all was of 20 cubits. This was also separated from the outer part by a veil. In this there was nothing at all. It was inaccessible and inviolable, and not to be seen by any; and was called the Holy of Holies" (*Wars. V.V.5*). Where did everything go?

The disappearance of Aaron's rod and of the jar of manna are not



An earthly king, the divine forefather David who reigned over Israel, preceded the Old Testament ark as it was carried into the Tabernacle; but before the living ark, the most pure Virgin, went not to a temporal king but the King of Heaven to Whom we pray every day, “Heavenly King, O Comforter, the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Church testifies in a hymn chanted on this day that it was indeed this King who went before the daughter of the King, for she cries “Led by the Holy Spirit, the sacred and undefiled Maiden is taken to

discussed in Scripture. It is speculated that when the Philistines overran Jerusalem and took the Ark of the Covenant back to their territory during the time of Samuel (1 Kingdoms 4-7), they removed Aaron’s rod and the jar of manna. But the Tablets of the Law were returned with the ark along with 5 golden mice and 5 golden emerods (hemorrhoids, boils, tumors, buboes?) as trespass offerings from the 5 rulers of the Philistines after mice overran their cities and many people had died (suggestive of bubonic plague). However, the Tablets of the Law are mentioned later when King Solomon brought the ark into the new Temple he had just built: *There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt* (3 Kingdoms 8:1-9).

Regarding the Ark of the Covenant: The Talmud records a legend that a priest was sorting wood in the Chamber of the Wood in the northeast Women’s Courtyard, he noticed a loose floor tile that led to a secret passage in which the Holy Ark was hidden during the reign of King Josiah (c. 640-609 BC). The priest sought to crack open the tile with his hatchet, but was suddenly consumed by fire. This was taken as an omen that the Ark should remain hidden -- a prophecy that there was to be no Ark in the Second Temple era (*Mishnah, Shekalim* 6:1). Were the Ark actually hidden there in the cave under the Women’s Courtyard, it would have been found by the Romans when Titus conquered Jerusalem in AD 70. Titus wanted to preserve the Temple, however, it caught fire accidentally and was consumed in the flames. The vast amounts of gold in the Temple walls, doors, and furnishings, as well as in its Treasury (located in and under the Women’s Courtyard) melted and drained deep into the ground. At that point the conquering Roman army, in retrieving all the gold, excavated everything to the base of the Temple walls in the Kedron valley. The Ark was not mentioned as being found in these excavations (Josephus, *Wars*, VI.V.2). Those Temple walls had begun in the floor of the Kedron Valley and rose some 450 feet at the southeastern and 350 feet at the northeastern corners of the Temple. The deepest foundation stones supporting these walls were reportedly 60 feet in length (Josephus, *Wars*, V.V.I) -- much bigger than those in the foundation of the present day “Western Wall”. All the Temple stones were discarded in the Kedron valley including the deepest foundation stones, so that *not one stone was left standing upon another* -- unlike the so-called “Western Wall” of the modern “Temple Mount” -- of Herod’s Fortress of Antonio, whose dimensions are much greater than the 750’ square Temple platform. After crushing the Jewish rebellion led by the false Messiah Bar Kochba in AD 133-5, the Emperor Hadrian repurposed these Temple stones to build his new Roman city Aelia Capitolina, a replacement for Jewish Jerusalem.

In a different scenario recorded in 2 Maccabees 4-5, the Prophet Jeremiah took the tabernacle and the Ark and buried them in a cave on Mt. Nebo, 20 miles to the east of Jerusalem in Jordan: *It was also contained in the same writing, that the prophet, being warned of God, commanded the tabernacle and the ark to go with him, as he went forth into the mountain, where Moses climbed up. 5 And when Jeremy came thither, he found an hollow cave, wherein he laid the tabernacle, and the ark, and the altar of incense, and so stopped the door ...* Those who had accompanied Jeremiah, upon returning, could not find the cave. It remains hidden/unknown to this day.]

dwell in the Holy of Holies.”<sup>16</sup> The ark was translated to the accompaniment of song, since David instructed the chiefs of the Levites to have singers and players of pipes, the psaltery, harp and timbrel sing and play joyously,<sup>17</sup> but the entrance of the most holy Virgin was accompanied not by worldly music, but by the chanting of angels. Escorting the virgin as she went into the Holy Place<sup>18</sup> to serve the Lord, the choirs of heaven lifted up their voices, as the Church chants in the Kontakion for this day: “She bringeth with her the grace that is in the Divine Spirit, and the angels of God chant praise unto her: ‘She is indeed the heavenly tabernacle.’”

Nevertheless, human song was not altogether absent at the entry of the Most pure One, for in the Homily of Saint Tarasius, the righteous Anna says to the virgins who preceded the Virgin, “Chant her praises; play upon the harp; glorify her with spiritual songs; magnify her upon the psaltery of ten strings!” The Church also proclaims, “Joachim and Anna rejoice in spirit and

16. From the 4th sticheron for Great Vespers of the Feast of the Entry  
17. 1 Paraleipomenon (Chronicles), chapter 15

18. [Editor’s note: Once in the Court of the Priests, the Holy Maiden and her entourage would approach the Sanctuary, the *Heichel*, which consisted of the Holy Place (the *Kodesh*) and the Holy of Holies (*Kodesh Kodeshim*).


Josephus writes: “Now the outward face of the temple in its front wanted nothing that was likely to surprise either men’s minds or their eyes, for it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun’s own rays. But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow; for, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceedingly white. On its top it had spikes with sharp points, to prevent any pollution of it by birds sitting upon it.”

The Holy Maiden and her party would have to ascend 12 nine-inch steps from the Court of the Priests to the entrance of the Sanctuary.

According to Josephus, the facade of the Sanctuary was 150’ wide and 150’ high. Its entry gate was covered with gold all over on the outside and through it. The opening was 105’ high and 37.5’ wide and without doors “for it represented the universal visibility of heaven, and that it cannot be excluded from any place.”

Walking through the open gateway of the Sanctuary, the Holy Maiden and her entourage would enter the entrance Hall which contained doorways to priests’ offices and the Knives Chambers on both sides. Ahead of them were the doors to the Holy Place which measured 82.5’ high x 24’ wide and were hidden by a Babylonian curtain of equal size, embroidered with blue and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful. Worked into the curtain was a panorama of the universe. The scarlet denoted fire, the linen the earth, the blue wool the sky, and the purple wool the oceans. “This curtain had also embroidered upon it all that was mystical in the heavens, excepting that of the signs, representing the living creatures.” This veil was visible inside the entry of the Sanctuary from the Mount of Olives over the outer eastern wall of the Temple because of its elevated position in the inner court.

Beyond this door lay the Holy Place, 90’ high, 30’ wide, and 60’ long which contained “three things that were very wonderful and famous among all mankind: the candlestick [menorah], the table [of showbread], and the altar of incense” (Josephus, *Wars*, V.V. 4-5)].



choirs of virgins sing to the Lord, chanting psalms and honoring His Mother.”<sup>19</sup> Thus it is clear that while the choir of virgins walked before the most pure Virgin, they sang the psalms of David, as the composer of the canon for this day indicates, saying to the maidens, “O ye virgins who carry candles in your hands, begin your songs!”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, according to Saint Tarasius, the Virgin’s holy and righteous parents, Joachim and Anna, had this song of David the forefather upon their lips: *Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thine ear; and forget thine own people and thy father’s house, and the King shall greatly desire thy beauty.*<sup>21</sup>

Theophylact says that the priests serving in the Temple came forth chanting at the approach of the divine Maiden who was to become the Mother of the Great High Priest. Saint Tarasius writes that while leading the Virgin to the portals of the Temple, Saint Anna cried, “Go, O daughter, unto Him Who gave you to me! Go, O sacred ark, unto the compassionate Master! Go, O daughter of life, unto Him Who is the merciful Giver of Life! O tabernacle of the Word, enter the Temple of the Lord! Enter the Lord’s Temple, O joy of the World!” And to their relative Zacharias, the prophet and high priest, both she and Joachim said, “Take from us, O priest, the undefiled tabernacle; take, O prophet, the censer that holds the immaterial; take, O righteous one, the spiritual incense”. Again, according to Saint Germanus, the righteous Anna said to the priest, “Take O prophet, the daughter given me by God; lead her unto the holy mountain, the dwelling-place prepared by the Lord and make no curious enquiry concerning these things until He Who summoned her here is pleased to reveal His will concerning her.”

Saint Jerome writes that there were fifteen steps at the entrance of the Temple, one for each of the hymns of ascent.<sup>22</sup> When the priests and Levites climbed the steps to perform their service, they chanted a psalm on each one. The most blameless Maiden was placed on the first step by her righteous parents and made haste to climb the other steps herself, without anyone leading or supporting her. Reaching the uppermost, she stopped and remained standing there, upheld by God’s unseen might, for even at such a tender age, the Lord’s power was at work in her, clearly indicating how great would be the grace revealed in her when she reached womanhood. All were astonished to behold a three-year old girl climb the steps by herself as quickly as if she were a grown woman. The great High Priest Zacharias was especially amazed, for being a prophet,

the Spirit dwelt within him, and according to Theophylact, he understood by divine revelation what would come to pass in the future. Saint Tarasius says that Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out, “O undefiled Maiden. O blameless Virgin! O most fair Maid, adornment of womanhood! O boast of all daughters, *blessed art thou among women!*”<sup>23</sup> Sealed in virginity, you have set Adam free from the curse!” And according to Saint Germanus, Zacharias exclaimed to the holy Anna, “O woman, the fruit of your womb is blessed and surpasses in honor that of all other women! Blessed are your loins, O wise one, and most glorious is she whom you now bring to this place, O beloved of God.”

Saint Germanus also writes that when Zacharias took the Maiden by the hand and joyfully led her into the Holy Place, he said to her, “Come, O performance of my prophecy, come, fulfillment of the Lord’s pledge; come, O seal of His covenant; come, accomplishment of His mysteries, mirror of all the prophets! Come renewal of what has been promised; come, O light of those who lie in darkness, most divine and newest of gifts, and enter into the Temple of your Lord! Now the sanctuary here below is opened to men, and soon that above, which before could not be entered.”

Rejoicing greatly, the Maiden entered the house of the Lord as though it were a bridal chamber. Although she was very young, only three years of age, she was perfect in the grace of God, for He had foreseen before the creation of the world that she was to become His mother and had foreordained her to bear Him.

Then the High Priest Zacharias did a strange thing which caused all to marvel: he led the Maiden into the inner sanctuary known as the Holy of Holies, beyond the second veil, in which [had been] the *ark of the covenant, overlaid round about with gold, and the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.*<sup>24</sup>

Not only women, but even priest were forbidden to enter the inner sanctuary. Only the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies, and that but once a year, yet Zacharias led the most pure Virgin directly into the sacred Tabernacle and permitted her to make use of it as a place of prayer. According to Saints Cyril of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa, the other maidens living in the Temple were permitted to pray in the place between the Temple and the altar,<sup>25</sup> where Zacharias

19. From the 2nd sticheron for Great Vespers of the Feast of the Entry

20. Basil the monk and hymnographer

21. Ps. 44:9-10a.

22. Psalms 119-133.

23. Luke, chapter 1:42a.

24. Heb. 9:3-5. [Editor’s note: This passage refers to the Tabernacle.]

25. [Editor’s note: This altar was most likely the Altar of Sacrifices in the Courtyard of the Priests. It consisted of three platforms stacked to form a pyramid. The top platform measured about 19’ x 19’. In the center was a large pile of ash -- the accumulated remains of the sacrifices. On its southwest side were two basins for use during the water-pouring ceremony on the Feast of Tabernacles. There were



was later slain. None of the other virgins were permitted to enter the altar,<sup>26</sup> this having been strictly forbidden them by the chief priests, but from the time of her entry, the most pure Virgin was allowed to pray whenever she wished beyond the second veil in the innermost altar.<sup>27</sup> The High Priest was mystically instructed by God to consent to this, as Saint Theophylact writes, "At that time, the High Priest [Zacharias] was in ecstasy, filled with the Spirit of God, and understood that the Maiden was the dwelling-place of divine grace and more worthy than he to stand always before God's countenance. He remembered that the Law commanded that the ark be placed in the Holy of Holies, and straightway perceived that this ordinance pertained to the Maiden. Not doubting at all, he did not hesitate to lead her into the Holy of Holies although this was seemingly forbidden by the Law. Thus the Maiden took up her dwelling where she could be seen by no man, where not even the priests entered, but only the High Priest himself, once yearly. For it was not proper that she who was sanctified before she was conceived, made purer than all created beings, and justified from the womb should be bound by the statutes of the Law delivered to a sinful people, since she was higher than

several piles of burning wood there as well. On the Day of Atonement there was a special pile of ash set aside for the burning of incense in the Holy of Holies. The blood of certain sacrifices had to be touched to the upper half of the wall of the Altar. The blood of other sacrifices had to be poured down the lower half of the wall. To the south of the Altar was a ramp that was 48' long and 24' wide.]

26. [Editor's note: Here the altar is presumably the empty Holy of Holies in Herod's Temple, because it is described behind the second veil, the first veil hung in front of the doors to the Holy Place (*Kodesh*). "In the First Temple, a wall 1 cubit (18") thick separated the *Kodesh* from the Holy of Holies. In that Temple the ceiling was only 30 cubits (45') above the floor, and a one-cubit thick wall could be erected to a height of 30 cubits. The Second Temple had a height of 40 cubits between floor and ceiling. A wall 1 cubit thick could not be erected to the 40 cubit (60') height. They did not want to make a wider wall so as not to diminish any area of the *Kodesh* or the Holy of Holies. It was decided that a curtain would be used. The rabbis were not certain if the wall that separated the *Kodesh* from the Holy of Holies in the First Temple was located within the 40-cubit length of the *Kodesh* or with in the 20-cubit length of the Holy of Holies. Therefore, it was decided to build the *Kodesh* a full 40-cubits long and the Holy of Holies a full 20-cubits long. A neutral space of 1 cubit would be placed between them, and marked off by two curtains. One curtain was placed between the end of the *Kodesh* and the beginning of the cubit space. The other curtain was placed between the end of the cubit space and the beginning of the Holy of Holies. The outer curtain was folded back on its southern side and the inner curtain folded back on its northern side (*Talmud, Yoma 51b, 52b*)," *Ref.* Rabbi Leibel Reznick, p. 128.]

27. [Editor's note: Entry was forbidden into the Holy of Holies to all except the High Priest, and he forbidden on all days except for the Day of Atonement. In Herod's Temple the floor, walls, and ceiling of the Holy of Holies were plated with gold just as the Holy Place was. Within the Holy of Holies was a rock that projected above the ground to a height of 3 fingers. The Ark of the Covenant rested on this rock during the First Temple period, *Ref.* Rabbi Leibel Reznick, p. 134.]

the angels and lived not according to the Law, but by the perfection of grace.<sup>28</sup> The High Priests were bound by the Law

Saint Jerome says that when they presented their most blessed daughter to God, the righteous parents brought gifts to the Lord as well. After receiving the blessings of the High Priest and the entire assembly of priests, they and all their relatives returned home where they held a great banquet and gave thanks to God. As for the most blessed Virgin, she was given a place to live in the quarters for virgins,<sup>29</sup> which, according to the ancient Jewish historian Josephus, were built by Solomon and rebuilt by Zerubbabel after the Temple's destruction. There were thirty buildings three stories high erected outside the Temple walls<sup>30</sup> so that all told the dwellings were ninety in number, each one spacious, very beautiful, and and separate from the others. Each structure contained everything necessary for its intended use. Their height was equal to that of the walls of the Temple, and they served as buttresses supporting the walls. There were quarters in the buildings for various persons: in one place lived the virgins who had been consecrated to God's service for a time; in another the widows who had vowed to God to remain chaste until death, like Anna the Prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel;<sup>31</sup> in still another the men called Nazarites,<sup>32</sup> who, like monks, lived as celibates. All these served God in the Temple and were fed from the offerings. In other buildings there were rooms for

28. [Editor's note: The high Priests were bound by the Torah not to enter the Holy of Holies on any day they choose, but only on one day-- the Day of Atonement. "Rabbah b. Bar Hana said: What is the meaning of the passage, *The fear of the Lord prolongeth days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened* (Prov. 10:27)? *The fear of the Lord prolongeth days* refers to the first Sanctuary, which remained standing for four hundred and ten years and in which there served only eighteen high priests. *But the years of the wicked shall be shortened* refers to the second Sanctuary, which abided for four hundred and twenty years at which more than 300 [high] priests served. Take off from there the forty years which Simeon the righteous served, eighty years which Johanan the high priest served, ten which Ishmael b. Fabi served, or, as some say, the eleven years of R. Eleazat b. Harsum. Count [the number of high priests] from then on and you will find that none of them completed his year [in office]" (*B. Talmud, Yoma, 9a*). This was due to immorality and contemptuous treatment of sacred things. Many were defiled and unworthy of the office and died upon entering the Holy of Holies.]

29. Ezra, ch. 3

30. Josephus, *Ant.*, [Editor's Note: *VIII.III.2*: Solomon's Temple had 90 rooms -- 3 stories of 15 rooms on both sides of the Sanctuary.] [*Mishnah, Middot 4.4*. in Rabbi Leibel Reznick, pp. 136-9: Herod's Temple had 38 rooms -- 3 stories of 5 rooms on either side, and 2 stories of 3 rooms plus 1 story of 2 rooms at the back]

31. Lk. 2:36-8

32. [Editor's Note: The Chamber of the Nazarites was in the southeast corner of the Women's Courtyard. They didn't live there, but cooked their peace offerings there. The hair of the Nazarite's was also shorn there and the clippings tossed into the fire over which the peace offering was cooking. Rabbi Leibel Reznick, pp.78-9, 84.]

strangers and pilgrims who had come from afar to worship.

Maidens older than the most pure Virgin Mary, acquainted with letters and handiwork, were appointed as her teachers, so that from childhood the divine Maiden might become familiar with these things. She was frequently visited by her holy parents, Joachim and Anna, and especially by her mother Anna, who often came to see and instruct her most blessed daughter. Soon the Maiden came to know the Hebrew Scriptures well, according to Saint Ambrose and the historian George Kedrinus, and mastered the handiwork taught her. Saint Epiphanius says concerning this: “The Virgin possessed a keen mind and was ever ready to learn. Not only did she study the sacred Scripture; she busied herself with the spinning of wool and flax and embroidery in silk. Her prudence caused all to marvel, and she occupied herself primarily with handiwork that could be of use to the priests in the Temple. Accustomed to such work, she was able to provide for herself in an honorable manner after the birth of her Son: it was she who made the coat without seam, woven from the top throughout, worn by the Lord Jesus.”

Epiphanius also relates that the most pure Virgin was given the same food as the other virgins in the temple. This food, however, she gave to the poor and strangers, while she was fed by bread from heaven, as the Church sings.<sup>33</sup> Thus Saint Germanus says of her, “She was fed sweet food by an angel”; and Saint Andrew of Crete writes, “Dwelling in the Holy of Holies as though in a bridal chamber, she received sweet and heavenly food.”

It is said that the most pure Virgin spent much of her time in the inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, beyond the second veil, rather than in the habitations assigned the virgins. By the time she was approaching womanhood, she had mastered both letters and handiwork, but preferred to spend time at prayer rather than to toil with her hands, so she often passed the whole night and the greater portion of the day praying. She would enter the Holy of Holies for prayer and then return to her handiwork in her quarters, because it was not fitting that she should take her work with her into

the Holy of Holies. This is why all the teachers of the Church say that the most pure Virgin had her dwelling in the Holy of Holies until she reached the age of twelve.<sup>34</sup> Saint Jerome writes: “As a child and young maiden, the blessed Virgin dwelt in the Temple with other maidens of the same age. She lived a very strict life, standing at prayer from early in the morning until the third hour of the day. From the third hour until the ninth, she would occupy herself either with handiwork or the reading of books, and at the ninth hour, returned to prayer, from which she did not desist until the angel who brought her food appeared. Thus her love for God ever increased.”<sup>35</sup>

As the Virgin grew and her spirit daily increased in strength, her love of labor and prayer grew stronger as well, and she passed from strength to strength until the power of the Most High overshadowed her. The High Priest Zacharias saw with his own eyes how the angel appeared, bringing her food, as Saint George of Nicomedia relates: “Day by day, as she grew, the gifts of the Holy Spirit grew in her also, and angels kept company with her. Zacharias learned of this, for when he was performing his priestly service in the altar, he beheld someone of a strange and awesome appearance conversing with the Maiden and give her food. This was an angel, and Zacharias marveled, thinking, “What is this new and strange thing? An angel speaks with the Maiden, and although bodiless, brings food to nourish flesh. Immaterial by nature, he gives the Virgin a basket made of matter. Angels appear here only to priests, and that infrequently; it is rare indeed for an angel to appear to a maiden especially to one so young as this. I would not marvel so if she were a married woman afflicted with barrenness and had prayed that fruit be given her womb, as once did Anna,<sup>36</sup> but this Maiden prays for nothing of the sort, and Yet I see that the angel repeatedly comes to her. Therefore, my astonishment and perplexity grow still greater. What shall come of this? What good tidings does this angel bear? And what is the food he brings? From where does it come? And who was it that baked it? Whose hand prepared this bread? Angels usually do not trouble themselves with what the flesh demands, and if certain persons have been provided with food by angels, what they were given was prepared by the hand of man. While the angel who served Daniel could have



33. From the 3rd Troparion Praises at Matins [Feast of the Entry]

34. [Editor's Note: In St. Demetrius of Rostov's *Homily on the Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos* for March 25 he states: "For about 12 years the immaculate Virgin lived in the Temple, practicing ceaseless noetic prayer, doing handiwork, and immersing herself in the law of the Lord by reading holy books day and night."]

35. From Saint Jerome's *Letter to Heliodorus*

36. 1 Kingdoms ch. 1, [Elkanah's wife Anna (Hannah), mother of the Holy Prophet and Judge of Israel Samuel].

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fed him himself by the power of the Most High,<sup>37</sup> he had Habbakuk take him potage so that Daniel might not be frightened by the sight of an angel bearing strange food. I am amazed that an angel comes directly to this maiden! A child has been deemed worthy to be served by a bodiless spirit! What does this mean? Will the words of the prophets be fulfilled in her? Will she bring our waiting to its end? Will it be from her that He Who is to save our race shall assume our nature? This mystery was prophesied long ago, and the Word was in search of her who would serve for its fulfillment. Who else than this Virgin can it be that was chosen beforehand to serve thus? How blessed is the house of Israel, from which such seed has blossomed! How blessed the root of Jesse, which has put forth the branch that shall bud the flower of the world's salvation! How blessed am I to delight in this sight and to prepare the Virgin for her Bridegroom, the Word!"

George of Nicomedia's words are confirmed by the blessed Jerome, who writes, "Angels visited her every day; and if anyone were to ask me how the most pure Virgin passed her time as a young maiden, I would reply that this is known to God alone and to the archangel Gabriel, her constant attendant, who with other angels often visited her and affectionately conversed with her."

While dwelling in the Holy of Holies, the most pure Virgin resolved to live in angelic purity and to remain ever a virgin. According to the testimony of the holy teachers Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome and others, she was the first maiden to dedicate her virginity to God, for under the Old Covenant it was not the custom to remain unmarried, since wedlock was held in greater esteem

than virginity. The most pure Virgin was the first in the world to regard virginity as loftier than marriage and to betroth herself to God, Whom she served day and night in chastity. Therefore by the goodwill of God the Father, the Most Holy Spirit prepared a dwelling-place in her for God the Word. Unto the Most Holy Trinity, one in essence and indivisible, be glory and thanksgiving, and unto our most pure Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, be honor and praise from every generation unto the ages. Amen.



SUNDAY OF FORGIVENESS: LITY: THEOTOKION, TONE 6

Mystically, we sing they praises, O Mary Theotokos.  
For thou hast been revealed as throne of the great King,  
holy tabernacle more spacious than the heavens,  
chariot of the cherubim, higher than the seraphim,  
bridal chamber of glory;  
for from thee the God of all came forth incarnate.  
Pray to Him for the salvation of our souls.



FRESCO: ENTRY OF THE THEOTOKOS INTO THE TEMPLE, CHURCH OF THE PROTOTON, KARYES, MT ATHOS, GREECE

37. Daniel, chapter 14 (Bel and the Dragon)