

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Every year, on the second day of February, the Church celebrates the Great Feast of The Meeting of the Lord. We read the account of this event in the early life of the Lord in the Second Chapter of the Gospel of Saint Luke (Luke 2:22-29). As we read in the Gospel, our celebration recalls the event that took place in Jerusalem on the 40th day after the birth of Jesus: His presentation in the temple. This is one of the occasions when the liturgical season reflects historical time: February 2 is, in fact, 40 days after December 25, the Solemn Feast of the Nativity of the Lord.

In the Orthodox Church we most commonly refer to this feast as the “Meeting” of the Lord, for through our feast we recall that the Lord God, the “Word made Flesh,” has now come to “meet” His people and reveals Himself in the Temple in Jerusalem, the place of God’s presence among His people. The Lord Himself comes as one of His own to make, if you will, his “debut” before the eyes of those He has come to save.

In the Gospel passage relating this event, we note that it was not the rich, powerful, or influential who recognized the presence of the newborn Messiah; rather, it was the humble, simple, “just and righteous” Simeon and the humble widow and prophetess Anna who recognized the Infant carried in His mother’s arms as the long-awaited Messiah. Their simple faith, trust, and hopeful perseverance were rewarded as they beheld the Messiah for whom they had prepared. (Simeon is even referred to as the “God-bearer,” for he carried God in his very own arms!)

The words spoken by the aged Simeon reveal the mission of the Child brought to the temple by Mary and Joseph, His foster-father. Simeon proclaimed: "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). To Mary, the Holy Theotokos, Simeon said: "yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35). The hymns that were sung by the angels in the fields of Bethlehem only forty days ago have now been silenced. The Cross of Golgotha is already foretold; and this “glimpse” of the Cross is foreseen in the temple, the place where sacrifices are offered in expiation for the sins of the people. The event we are commemorating today is thus a bridge as it were, linking the two most important seasons of the Church's year: The Lord’s Nativity which we celebrated forty days ago and the season of Lent that leads us to Golgotha and, from Golgotha, to the Empty Tomb.

This observation is not without meaning. It means that the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord creates a sort of transition which both separates and joins the initial phase of His life on earth, His birth, and beginning and then the culmination of His earthly life and mission, which is His death and resurrection. As we celebrate the Meeting of the Lord, we definitively leave the Nativity behind us and begin to move towards the Great Fast, which begins in a few short weeks.

Although we are called to “live in the present,” it is also appropriate for us to prepare for the future. And so I invite each of you to already begin to prepare for the Lenten season so that when Lent arrives we may be able to enter into it fully, prepared to fully enter into that time of preparation. With Simeon and Anna, let us recognize the presence among us of He who is the “Light to the nations” and the “Glory” of His people.

With love in the Lord,

Father David