Unit 7

Our Church Year

The last unit in the students' textbook offers brief introductions to the major observances in our Church year. These pages are provided for use at the beginning or end of a regular lesson, preferably the week before the observance. Read the icon description while the children look at the icon. Ask the questions noted. In this way the children will stay in touch with the movements of the liturgical year. There are several observances that occur during the summer. You may wish to spend the last class learning about these.

Nativity of the Theotokos .....September 8
Exaltation of the Holy Cross .....September 14
Entrance of the Theotokos.....November 21
St. Nicholas.....December 6
The Maternity of St. Anna .....December 9 (8)
Nativity of Our Lord.....December 25
Holy Theophany of Christ .....January 6
Three Holy Hierarchs.....January 30
The Meeting of Our Lord.....February 2
The Annunciation .....March 25
The Entrance into Jerusalem.....The Sunday before Pascha
Great and Holy Week.....The week before Pascha
Pascha
Ascension.....Forty days after Pascha
Pentecost .....Fifty days after Pascha
Birth of St. John the Baptist .....June 24
Saints Peter and Paul.....June 29
Prophet Elias .....July 20
The Transfiguration of Christ.....August 6
The Dormition of the Theotokos.....August 15
Beheading of St. John the Baptist.....August 29

September 8

NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

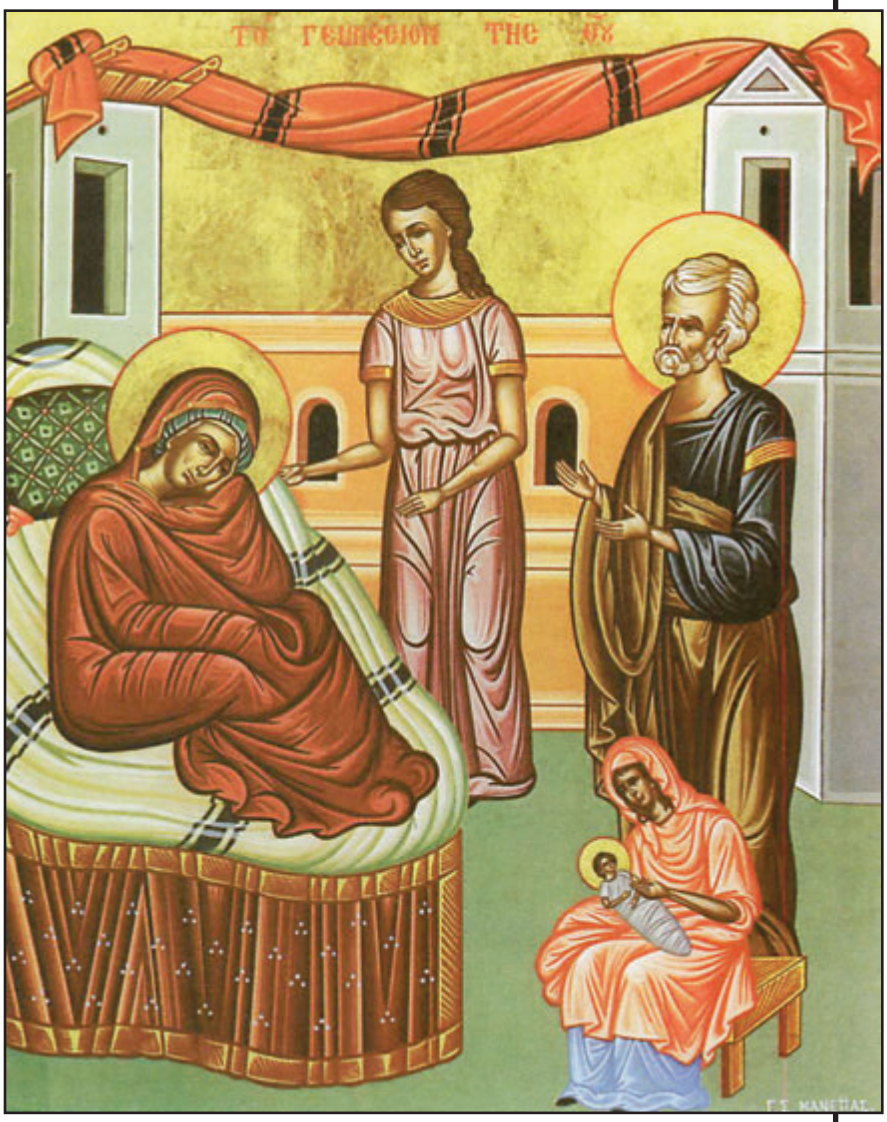
THE BIRTH OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

For a long time St. Joachim and St. Anna prayed to have a child. God finally answered their prayers with a daughter, Mary. Mary became the Mother of God. In the icon St. Anna is lying down. St. Joachim is speaking with her. A servant is holding the infant Mary.

This day recalls the day the Virgin Mary was born to her parents, St. Joachim and St. Anna. God wanted Jesus' mother to be the most special woman in the world. He gave her to parents who would love her and also teach her God's ways.

This feast reminds us how much God loves us. He loves us so much that He sent His Son to us. He gives Jesus a holy Mother so that she would be ready to bring Him into the world.

How does our Church celebrate this feast
We venerate the icon of the feast. In some churches bread, wheat, wine and oil are blessed.



EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

THE GREAT SEARCH

A long time ago, St. Helena went looking for the cross that Christ died on. When she found it, the Bishop of Jerusalem, named Macarius, held it up for the people to see. St. Helena is wearing a crown because she is the mother of the Emperor Constantine.

This day recalls the time St. Helena found the true cross and St. Macarius held it up for all the people to see. This feast reminds us of how much God loves us. He sent His Son who died on the cross to save us for eternal life.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
Many churches place flowers or basil plants around the cross. Some have a procession with the cross on this day.

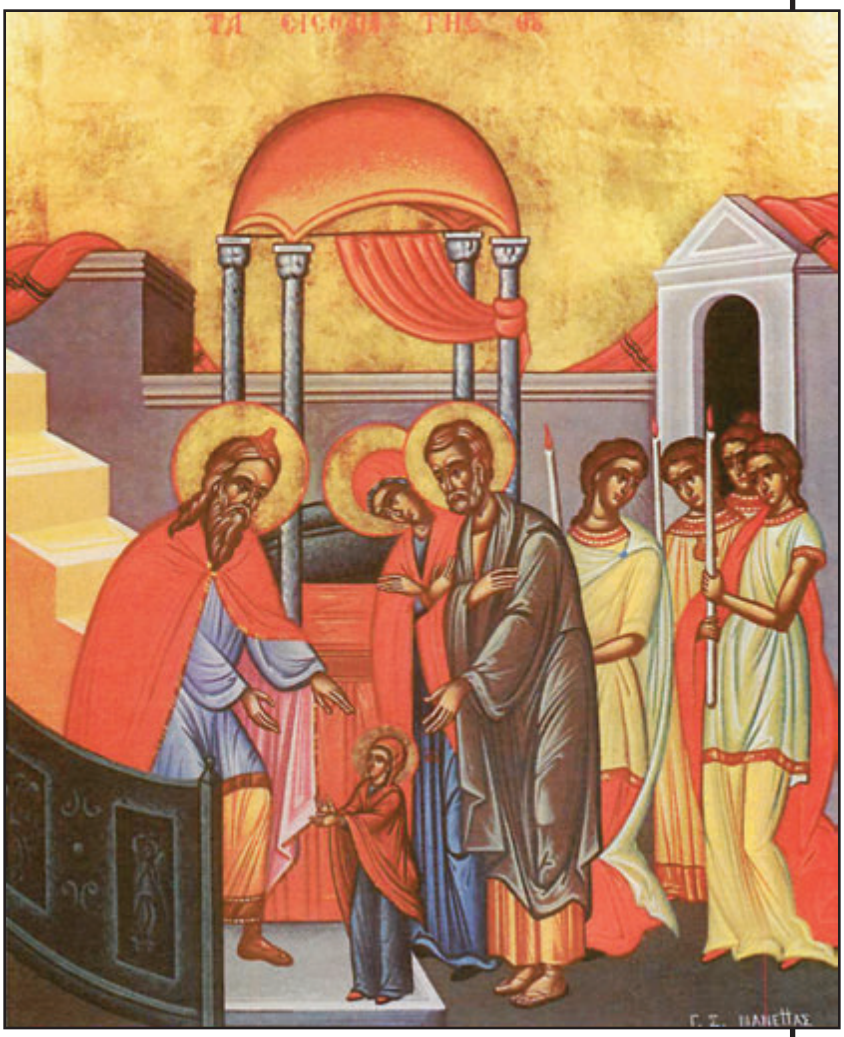
November 21

ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS

A TIME TO PREPARE

God knew that He wanted Mary to become the mother of His Son Jesus. He planned it. Mary had to be prepared. She was brought to the Temple to learn about God. In the icon Mary s parents, St. Anna and St. Joachim, are bringing her to the high priest.

This day recalls the day St. Joachim and St. Anna brought the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, to the Temple to begin learning about God. This feast reminds us that God wanted to prepare Jesus' mother to be ready to bring Him into the world.



How does our Church celebrate this feast?
In some parishes young girls are given a special blessing on this day.

December 6

ST. NICHOLAS

ST. NICHOLAS
THE BISHOP

St. Nicholas was a bishop a long time ago. He was a very good man. He helped the poor and anyone who was in danger, especially sailors.

Before he was chosen to be a bishop, he had a vision. In the vision he saw Christ handing him the Book of Gospels and the Mother of God placing the special bishop s vestment on his shoulders. In the icon the vestment has crosses. It is called an omophorion.

This day honors St. Nicholas, a bishop who helped many people, especially children. This feast reminds us that God wants us to care for one another.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
Many parishes have a party or celebration today. St. Nicholas, dressed as a bishop, visits. In some churches he gives token gifts to the children.

December 9

THE MATERNITY OF ST. ANNA

**THE THEOTOKOS,
THE MOTHER OF GOD,
COMES INTO THE WORLD**

Children come into the world when God blesses the love their parents have for one another. A child is conceived and begins to grow inside the mother. It usually takes nine months for the baby to grow strong enough to live outside its mother's body. This is when the baby is born. This feast reminds us that the Theotokos, the ever- Virgin Mary, was conceived with God s special blessing on her parents' love. In the icon we see Mary's father, St. Joachim, and her mother, St. Anna. They are shown in their room embracing as a sign of their love for one another.

This day recalls when God blessed St. Joachim and St. Anna with the child, Mary. She was born nine months later. St. Joachim and St. Anna didn't think they would have children because they were older. They had prayed to God so that they could have a child. This feast reminds us that all things are possible with God.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?

We venerate the icon of the feast. In some churches bread, wheat, wine and oil are blessed.

December 25

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

God sent His Son Jesus to lead us back to Him. Like a light in the darkness, Jesus shows us the way to the Father. In the icon, Jesus is shown against the dark cave where He was born. He is light against darkness. The Theotokos, the Mother of God, is lying down. St. Joseph is sitting down below her.

This day recalls the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This feast reminds us how much God loves us. He loves us so much that He sent His Son to us. Jesus Christ shows us the way to the Father.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
At matins before the Divine Liturgy, we proclaim the birth of Jesus. We exchange the Christmas greeting, "Christ is born! Glorify Him!"

January 6

HOLY THEOPHANY OF CHRIST

GOD IS THREE PERSONS

Before Jesus began to teach us about God, He wanted to be baptized. He went to His cousin, St. John the Baptist. St. John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. The heavens opened and the voice of the Father said, "This is My beloved Son." A dove appeared above Jesus. The Holy Spirit was in the form of the dove. We know that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This day recalls the day Jesus was baptized by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan River. The Holy Spirit was present in the form of a dove, and the Father s voice said, "This is My beloved Son." The feast reminds us that God is the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
The Church blesses water on this day. Afterwards the priest sprinkles the church and the people with this water. In some parishes the priest blesses the parish-ioners' homes also.

January 30

THREE HOLY HIERARCHS

THREE IMPORTANT BISHOPS

On this feast day we remember three bishops or hierarchs. On the left is St. Basil, in the middle is St. John Chrysostom, and on the right is St. Gregory the Theologian. Each is wearing on their shoulders the special bishop vestment called the "omophorion." Have you heard any of their names before? St. John Chrysostom's Divine Liturgy is the one we celebrate on most Sundays. On Sundays during the Great Fast we celebrate St. Basil's Divine Liturgy. St. Gregory the Theologian was a writer. He helped us understand more about how Jesus was both God and man.

This day honors three bishops or hierarchs: St. Basil,St. John Chrysostom, and St. Gregory the Theologian. This feast reminds us that God will provide the Church with good leaders.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
We venerate the icon of the feast. In some churches bread, wheat, wine and oil are blessed.

February 2

THE MEETING OF OUR LORD

JESUS IS RECEIVED AT THE TEMPLE

St. Simeon and St. Anna helped care for the Temple. Jesus was brought to the Temple as an infant. When St. Simeon held Jesus, he knew Jesus was the Savior for which the Jewish people had been waiting. He said, "Now my eyes have seen the light." He knew that Jesus was the Light of the world and the Savior of all humanity. In the icon St. Simeon holds Jesus. St. Anna is behind St. Joseph, who holds two birds as an offering.

This day recalls the day Jesus was offered to God in the Temple when He was 40 days old. St. Simeon and St. Anna received Him there. They had been waiting for a savior. This feast reminds us that God fulfilled His promise and sent them Jesus to be our Savior.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
In some Churches candles are blessed in honor of Christ, the Light of the world.

March 25

THE ANNUNCIATION

JESUS COMES INTO THE WORLD

It was time for Jesus to come into the world. The Archangel Gabriel came to tell Mary that she would be His mother. The angel said, "Rejoice, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women. Do not fear, Mary. You have found favor with God. You shall conceive and bear a Son and give Him the name Jesus." In the icon Mary is surprised by the angel and his message. Her hand is up as if to ask, "How can this be? " Then she says, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say."

This day recalls the Archangel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that God wished her to bear His Son. Mary said "Yes " to God. The feast reminds us that God wants us to say "Yes" to Him.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
This feast always occurs during the Great Fast. Many parishes chant the Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God on the Fridays during the Fast to prepare for the celebration of the Annunciation.

THE ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM

JESUS HAILED AS KING

Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead. It was now time for Him to go into Jerusalem. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. People hailed Him saying, "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" Saying "Hosanna" was their way to say "Welcome." They wanted Jesus to be the King of Israel. They waved palm branches to give Him glory.

This day recalls when Jesus rode on a donkey into Jerusalem. The people cheered for Him and wanted to make Him a king. This feast reminds us that God wants us to honor His Son.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
We have a procession with blessed palms, pussy willows or olive branches to remember how the people escorted Jesus to Jerusalem

GREAT AND HOLY WEEK

HOLY THURSDAY

Jesus took bread and wine and said, "This is my body. This is my blood." It was the first Holy Communion. This day recalls the Last Supper when Jesus took bread and wine and said, "This is my body. This is my blood." This feast reminds us that God wants us to live united to Him.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?

We celebrate the Vesper-Liturgy of the Lord's Supper.

HOLY FRIDAY

Jesus was crucified at Golgotha. A soldier pierced His side with a spear to make sure He was dead.

Then Jesus was taken from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea. He was wrapped in a linen shroud and placed in a tomb. This day recalls when Jesus was crucified. This feast reminds us of how much God loves us. He sent His only Son who suffered and died to open the gates of heaven to us.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?

We pray Matins and the Great Hours before the cross and listen to the story of Jesus' death. At Vespers we take down Jesus' body for burial. At the Burial Service we carry the shroud representing His body and bury it.

PASCHA

JESUS IS RAISED FROM THE DEAD

Pascha is the most important day of the year. It is the day when we celebrate that Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus opened the gates of heaven for us. In the icon Christ is standing on the cross—a symbol of death. Christ won the victory over death on the cross. He is raising Adam and Eve to take them to heaven with Him.

This day commemorates Jesus' rising from the dead. This feast reminds us that God wants us to live forever with Him.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?

We have a procession outside the church. At the front doors we sing, "Christ is risen..." The priest opens the doors and leads us into the brightly lit church. We also proclaim Jesus' resurrection to the whole world by reading the Gospel in many languages.

HOLY ASCENSION OF CHRIST

JESUS
RETURNS TO HEAVEN

Forty days after Pascha, Christ rose or ascended to heaven to be with His Father. He promised that we would not be alone because He would send the Holy Spirit. In the icon Mary, the Theotokos, is at the center, surrounded by the apostles. Jesus is seated on a throne as He ascends into heaven. Jesus is the ruler of all.

This day recalls when, forty days after His resurrection, Jesus returned to His Father in heaven. Before He ascended, Jesus said to the apostles, "I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world." This feast reminds us that God will be with us always.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
We venerate the icon of the feast. In some churches bread, wheat, wine and oil are blessed.

PENTECOST

THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKES THE DISCIPLES BRAVE

Fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples and the Mother of God were gathered together. Suddenly they heard a noise like a strong wind. Tongues of fire came down upon them. They began speaking in many languages. They told everyone about Jesus. They were not afraid anymore. The icon shows the disciples together. The small man in the middle represents the world. After Pentecost, the disciples told the whole world about Jesus Christ.

This day reminds us that the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples and the Mother of God. Jesus had told the disciples to wait for a helper. The Holy Spirit helped the disciples be brave. The Holy Spirit helps us to be brave. This feast reminds us that God will always help us.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
Some churches are specially decorated with greens and flowers. We pray kneeling and sing the hymn "O Heavenly King."

BIRTH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST IS BORN

St. John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus. Before St. John was born, God sent an angel to John s father, St. Zechariah, to tell him he would have a son. St. Zechariah and his wife St. Elizabeth were too old to have children, so St. Zechariah doubted God. The angel said, "You will be speechless until the day these things happen because you did not believe me." When his son was born, the people wanted to know what to name the child. St. Zechariah wrote "John " on a tablet. On the icon we see the baby John in front. His mother is resting on a couch. His father is on the right side of the icon. He is writing on a tablet "John is his name."

This feast honors the birth of St. John the Baptist. St. John was a cousin of Jesus. St. John's father, St. Zechariah, and his mother, St. Elizabeth, were older. St. Zechariah doubted the angel who told him he would soon have a son. St. Zechariah did indeed have a son, St. John. This feast reminds us that God wants us to believe His word.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
We venerate the icon of the feast. In some churches bread, wheat, wine and oil are blessed.

June 29

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

TWO PILLARS OF THE CHURCH

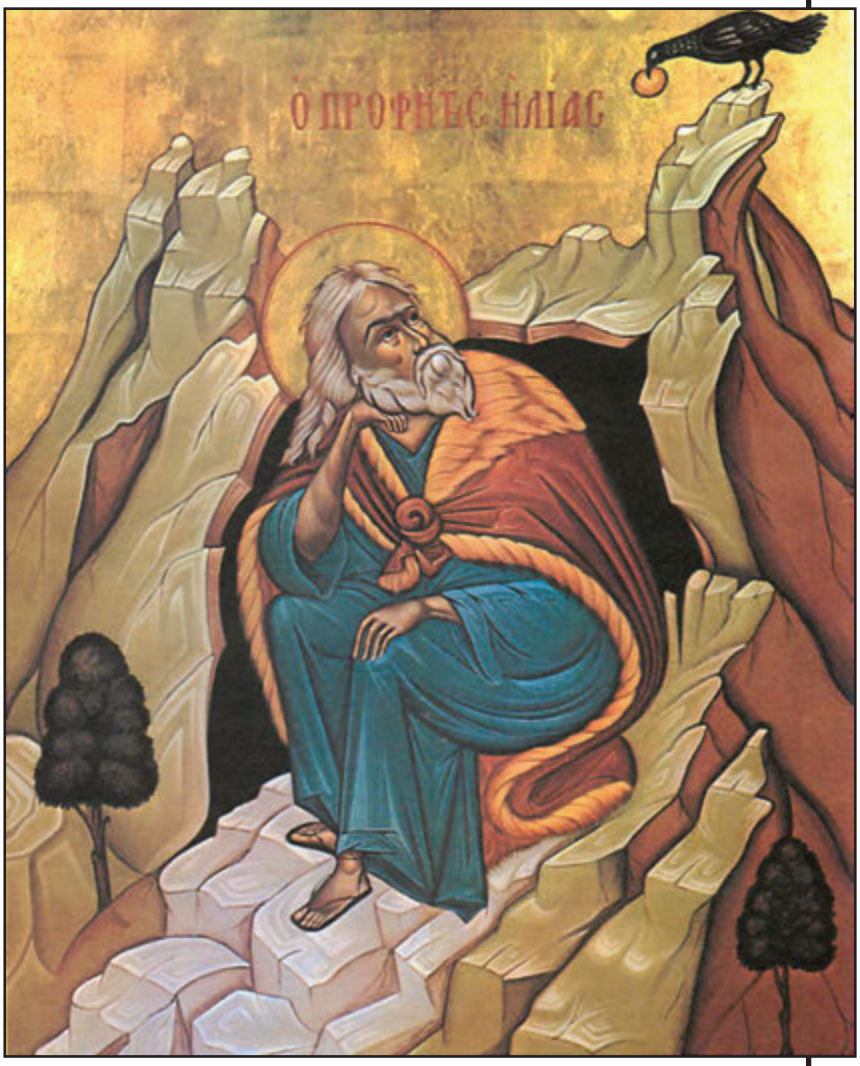
When Jesus was still on earth, Peter told Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus blessed him and said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." In the icon St. Peter is shown holding keys. After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, St. Peter led the apostles and helped them form the early Church. He traveled and preached to people in many countries. St. Paul also traveled and baptized many people. He wrote many letters to the people he baptized. These letters are the epistles that we hear in church. In the letters St. Paul teaches the new Christians how to live like Christ and tells them to be strong in their faith. The epistles are part of the Scriptures or Bible. In the icon St. Paul is shown holding a scroll of the Scriptures. We honor both saints on the same day because they were the pillars on which the early Church was built.

This day honors two great saints who were leaders in the early Church. This feast reminds us that God has always blessed us with good leaders.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
We venerate the icon of the feast. In some churches bread, wheat, wine and oil are blessed.

July 20

PROPHET ELIAS



"THE LORD IS MY GOD"

A long time before Jesus was born, God's people began to worship other gods. God sent prophets to bring these people back to Him. The greatest of these was Elias, who is also called Elijah. His name means "the Lord is my God." His story is found in the Old Testament in the book of 1 Kings. He lived on a mountain in the wilderness. In the icon he is shown in a hairy garment because he did not care about things of the world. Like St. John the Baptist, Elijah only wanted to live close to God and to do God's will. He did not worry about food or water. God sent ravens to bring Elijah food. Elijah did not die! He was carried away in a fiery chariot.

This day commemorates the Prophet Elias. A long time before Jesus was born, God's people began to worship other gods. The prophet Elias brought people back to God. This feast day reminds us that God will always call us back to Him.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
In some parishes cars are blessed for safe traveling on this day.

August 6

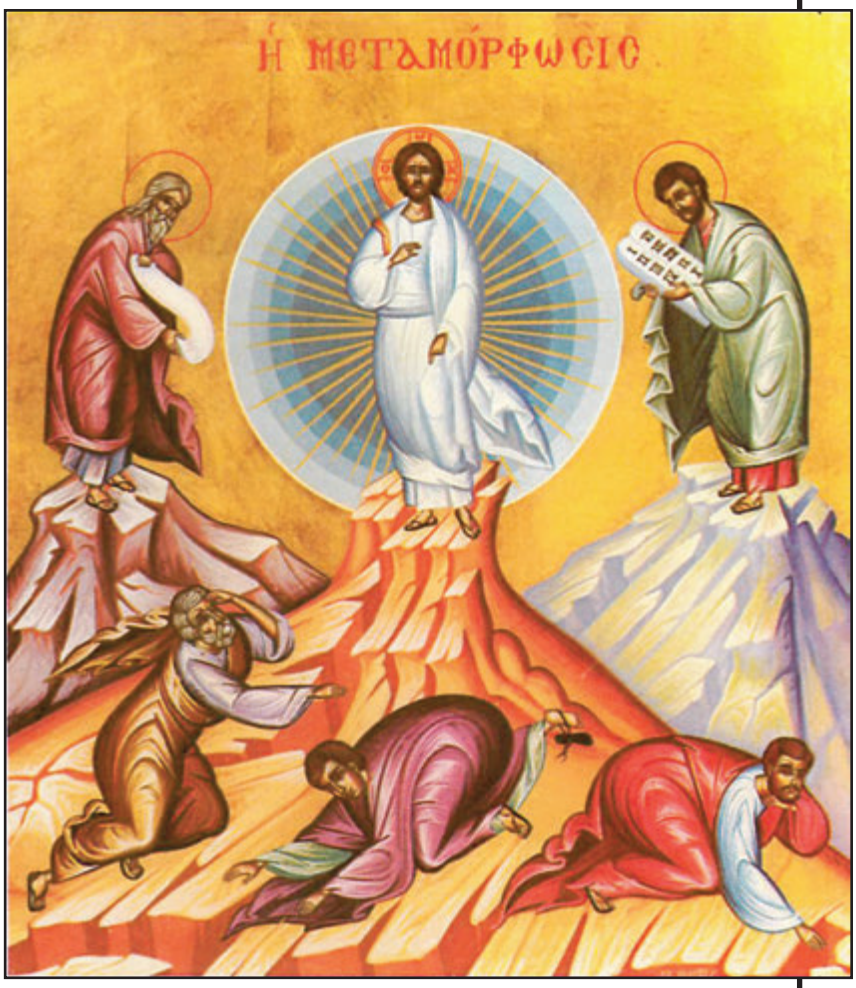
TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST

JESUS IS RADIANT WITH LIGHT

Peter, James, and John did not know what they were in for when Jesus asked them to come with Him one day. Up to a mountain they went. When they arrived, Jesus was surrounded by light. His face was dazzling as the sun; His clothes were radiant with light. The Father s voice said, "This is My beloved Son." On the icon we see Jesus, Moses to His left, and Prophet Elias on His right. Peter, John, and James are below Jesus.

This day recalls when Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the top of a mountain. Jesus was surrounded by light. His face was dazzling as the sun. This event helped the disciples realize that Jesus is God. It gave them strength during Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. This feast day reminds us that Jesus is truly God.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
In some churches grapes or other fruit are blessed, another hint of the transfiguration.



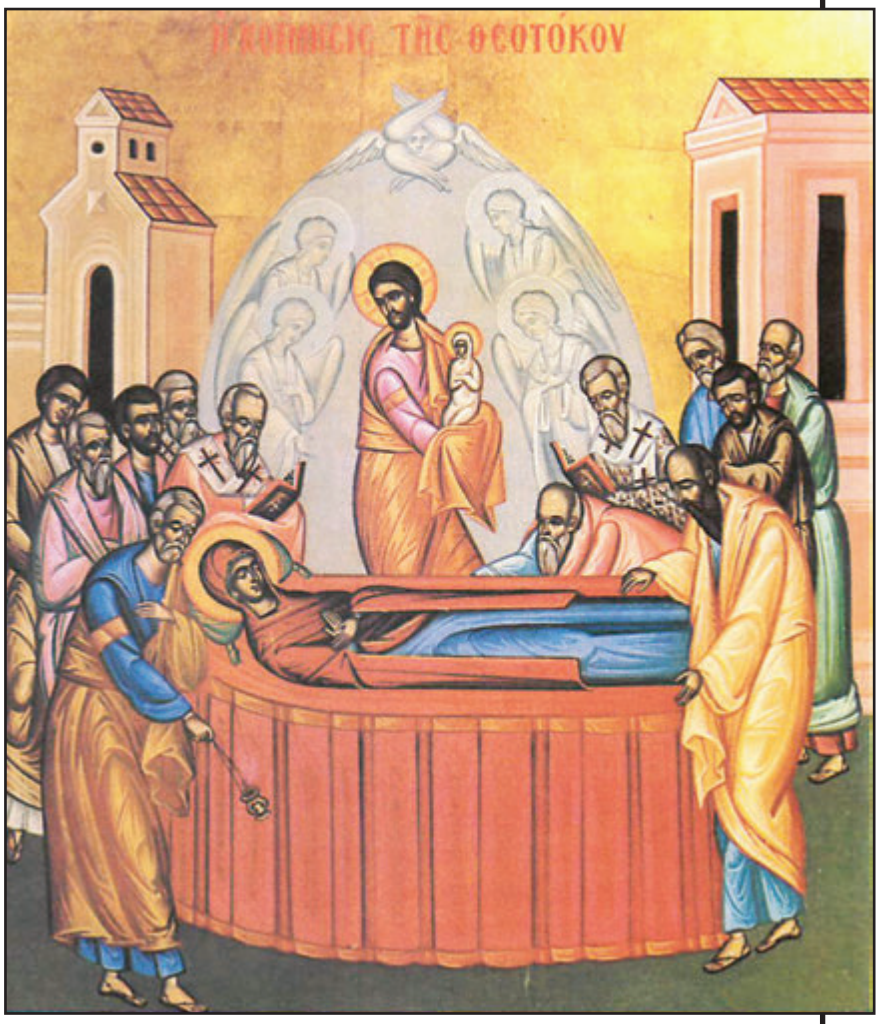
August 15

DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS

THE MOTHER OF GOD IS TAKEN TO HEAVEN

After Jesus died, the Mother of God, the Theotokos, was beloved by the Apostles. When it finally came time for her life on earth to end, they surrounded her. On the icon you also see Jesus. He is holding a little child. The child represents the soul of His Mother. Jesus has taken her to be with Him in heaven.

This day recalls when the Mother of God died and was taken into heaven. Jesus honored His mother and revealed how much He loved her. This feast day reminds us that God wants us all to live forever with Him.



How does our Church celebrate this feast?
In some churches herbs and flowers are blessed on this day. Some parishes have a burial service for the Mother of God.

BEHEADING OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST DIES

God wanted someone to prepare the way for Jesus. He chose St. John the Baptist. St. John did not care about the things of this world. He lived in the desert and wore animal skins for clothing. He ate locusts and honey. St. John lived at the same time as Jesus. He knew he was to prepare the way for Jesus by telling the people to change their lives. He preached, "Reform your lives! The reign of God is at hand." Those are the words on the scroll he holds on the icon. Because he had this special message from God, he was a messenger. He is shown with angel wings because angels are messengers. He was killed because he made the wife of the king angry. His head was cut off. On the icon his head is in a dish to remind us that he was beheaded.

This day recalls the death of St. John the Baptist. St. John worked with God to prepare the way for Jesus. He made Herod's wife angry because he reminded her of her sins. She ordered him killed. He was beheaded. This feast day reminds us that God wants us to be faithful to His way no matter what.

How does our Church celebrate this feast?
We traditionally keep this day as a fast day to remember the sad event of St. John s death.