



# Holy Assumption Monastery Newsletter – September 2020

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Dear Friends of Holy Assumption Monastery,

Recently, one of the sisters came across a story of a Hawaiian doctor who healed an entire ward of psychiatric patients by consistently envisioning each patient and silently saying “I’m sorry. Forgive me. Thank you. I love you.” That might seem hard to believe, but it’s totally in line with St. Seraphim of Sarov’s saying “Acquire the Spirit of Peace, and thousands around you will be saved.”

You might be thinking, “That might work for someone like St. Seraphim, but I can’t imagine it working for me. How can I say ‘I’m sorry; forgive me’ when the other person is at fault? Why in the world would I THANK them? And how can I say, ‘I love you,’ when what I’d really like to do is to kick them?”

Well, I wish I could say that I’ve never thought things like that, but that wouldn’t be true. Those uncharitable thoughts alone are reason enough for me to honestly be able to say “I’m sorry; forgive me.” The opportunity to see my own sins is enough reason to say “Thank you.” Those two together make it easier not only to SAY “I love you,” but to let the seed of that love begin to take root in my heart. Then that love starts spreading into the heart of the person we were angry at. And once that happens, who knows how far it will spread? Actually, we do know that. It will spread all the way out into the Kingdom of Heaven, where it came from in the first place.

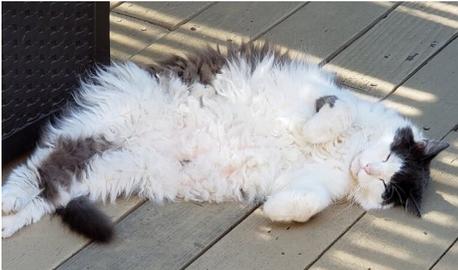
with love in Christ,

*Mother Melania*

*and the community*

*of Holy Assumption Monastery*

## ZOO UPDATE – Staying Cool



*It’s so hot!*



*A drink of water  
would be great...*



*and some shade.*



*Or you could just sit in  
front of a fan.*



## NEW BOOK!



We are branching out from children’s books and have just started a line of guided journals. The first, *In Everything Giving Thanks*, is a gratitude journal for thanking God for everything from the big blessings to the challenges of life. After this we plan to do Bible verse journals on topics such as faith, love, patience, etc.

Please consider buying one (or more) as Christmas gifts at [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com) or from [the Monastery](http://theMonastery.com). Also, if you would be willing to leave a review on its [Amazon page](https://www.amazon.com), that would be immensely helpful. Thanks so much!

**SAVE THE DATE – Saturday December 12, 10:00am-12:00pm ZOOM TALK**  
**His Grace Daniel, Bishop of Santa Rosa**  
**Walking to Bethlehem: A Spiritual Preparation for the Feast of the Nativity**

**SEPTEMBER CALENDAR**

*All Divine Liturgies are open to the parish, but with social distancing, masks, etc. Sadly, parishioners cannot yet join us for meals.*

- Sunday Hours/Divine Liturgy – 9:40 AM/10:00 AM
- Tuesday September 8, Nativity of the Theotokos Hours/Divine Liturgy – 8:40 AM/9:00 AM
- Monday September 14, Exaltation of the Cross Hours/Divine Liturgy – 8:40 AM/9:00 AM



**DORMITION 2020**



*Neither the tomb nor death could hold the Theotokos ...*

We had what we hope was a one-of-a-kind Dormition this year. Due to the pandemic, we weren't able to host our usual large crowd of friends and pilgrims, and we weren't able to provide a feast for those few who did come. Still, it was beautiful in its own way. We were blessed to have Fr. Nicholas Carr celebrate Divine Liturgy with us, and afterwards, we held a Zoom presentation, with talks by Fr. Anthony Roeber and Mother Melania.



*The cross procession*

Fr. Anthony's talk focused on the history of the Church's understanding of "St. Mary of Nazareth." The use of that title reminds us that the Church had to grapple for centuries to clarify the correct teaching and veneration of the Mother of our Lord. From the very beginning, people were falling into opposite dangers – either to minimize or to exaggerate her importance. The tendency to exaggerate her importance generally came from "esoteric" communities who held that "real" Christians possessed "special knowledge" that set them apart from the inferior and misguided majority. Those tendencies manifested themselves in both Egypt and Syria in texts that the Church rejected. For example, the "Gospel of Mary" (2<sup>nd</sup> century) and the "Gospel of Philip" (3<sup>rd</sup> century) both claimed that Christ gave His Mother special, secret knowledge, which He did not give His apostles. The first known reference to the dormition (the death, but literally "falling asleep") of Mary is from the late 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. This text shows these same tendencies to exaggerate her role (e.g. Christ, at the time of her death, gave her secret knowledge that she alone could pass on to the apostles, including a secret prayer that would allow the enlightened few to pass through the "tollhouses" and "cosmic spheres" ruled by demons).

Fr. Anthony drew attention to the crucial work of Professor Stephen J. Shoemaker, who has examined the various surviving esoteric texts in several languages, including the so-called "Protevangelium of James" (4<sup>th</sup> century). This story is misnamed, as it is not a gospel and has nothing to do with James, either. It might instead be called "The Birth Story of Mary," as it purports to follow the life of Mary from her conception till the birth of Christ. "The Birth Story of Mary" makes excessive claims concerning her. Although it rightly asserts that she conceived and gave birth as a Virgin, it also holds that her parents did, too. This claim is part of the text's overemphasis on virginity to the point of denigrating even marital sexuality. The Synod of Gangra (sometime between 341 and 376) rejected this denigration of marriage.



*Fr. Anthony on Zoom*

The most famous Fathers of the early Church maintained almost total silence about St. Mary, in part, we suspect, because of the erroneous teaching coming from these esoteric communities. But even though the "Birth of Mary" story was condemned as heretical in 405 by the bishop of Rome and again in 500, some of the embellishments around what we affirm in the canonical gospels of Luke and John serve a purpose. Fr. Anthony suggested that the story surrounding the Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple (a very late feast by comparison with the Dormition) should be understood as Midrash—the term Jewish scholars use to indicate narratives that "build a fence around Torah." The Lucan and Johannine texts do affirm the virginity of the Theotokos—but they also emphasize her complete humanity as a caring mother (for her own Son, for the couple at the Wedding Feast of Cana—and for the entire Church) and as someone who died, just as all of us must do. Yet the Midrashic details played a part in the Church's elaboration of the Theotokos' role in the history of salvation, which emphasizes both the perpetual virginity of St. Mary and her ordinary conception and birth to parents just like ours, and her death—and later bodily Assumption as the Second Fruit of the Resurrection. She remains a critical component to our understanding of the "New Creation"—the Mystery of the Incarnation that is both her story and, as icon of the Church, ours—the story whose balanced view continues to be proclaimed by the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Mother Melania started her talk by situating the Dormition in the liturgical cycle – as both the last Great Feast of the Liturgical Year (which goes from Sep 1 – Aug 31) and also the center of a series of feasts connecting the old and new Liturgical Year – the Procession of the Cross (Aug 1), the Transfiguration (Aug 6), the Dormition (Aug 15), the Nativity of the Theotokos (Sep 8), and the Exaltation of the Cross (Sep 14). All except the Procession of the Cross are Great Feasts.



*Mother Melania – What was I saying, again?*

The Procession of the Cross is a commemoration of simultaneous miraculous victories by the Russians and the Byzantines (in the 12<sup>th</sup> century) and of annual processions held in Constantinople to pray for protection against illness. Yet God’s protection doesn’t always mean that we will not suffer disaster, illness, etc. because His first concern is the healing and protection of our souls. Takeaway Question – am I letting Christ’s Cross protect me (and thus, protect my soul first and foremost), or am I trying to protect myself (and thus, focusing more on my comfort, self opinion, etc.)?

The Transfiguration, along with Theophany, is a Great Feast of Christ’s glory and of the Revelation of the Trinity. Christ ALWAYS shines with Divine Light. So, at the Transfiguration, He didn’t actually change. What changed was that the apostles were permitted to see His glory. And in seeing His glory, they saw what a human being is really meant to be – a being shining with God’s own light. So, Christ’s glory is always shining, whether we see it or not; and we can participate in that glory if we obey Him. Takeaway question – what is keeping me from seeing and participating in Christ’s glory?

At the Dormition (literally “the falling asleep”) of the Theotokos, we celebrate her passing from death to life. Having entrusted her soul to her Son and God all her life, she entrusts her soul to Him in her death. And He, the God Man, comes to honor His mother and receive her into heaven. So, both Christ and His Mother show us the humble love that is the very atmosphere of heaven. Also, because the Theotokos is the icon of the Church, her Dormition symbolizes our own entering into true life through death (both the little daily deaths of turning away from our own wills and actual physical death). Takeaway question – What deaths do I need to die so that I can live fully in Christ?

The Nativity of the Theotokos celebrates the birth of the Theotokos to her aged, childless parents. Planned by God before time began, her birth brought joy to her barren parents and, because she would bear Christ, to our barren race. Takeaway question – In what ways am I barren and what do I need to do for Christ to be born in me?

The Exaltation of the Cross celebrates two events. First is the finding of the True Cross by St. Helen in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when the Cross was revealed through the resurrection of a dead man and the healing a sick man. Second is the bringing back of the Cross by the Emperor Heraclius from Persian captivity in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. When bringing the Cross into Jerusalem, the Emperor was stopped by an angel and not permitted to continue until he dressed in rags and went barefoot. So, these two events remind us that the Cross is our protection, but we must seek it and bring it back into our lives when our enemies conquer us. Takeaway question – What do I need to do to seek Christ’s Cross and bring it back into the center of my life?

And this whole series of feasts reminds us that our life in Christ starts and ends with the Cross. The Theotokos is the model of accepting the Cross. She alone of all creation had to watch her sinless Son die for us and she accepted this unbearable and unimaginable grief for love of Him and love of us. And as His Mother and ours, she is uniquely able to intercede for us and help us bear our own crosses. This is a great comfort in these very uncertain times.



***HERE & THERE***



*We thank God for the firefighters who risk their lives year after year to keep us all safe. God bless you all!*



*Our properly distanced friends helping with much-needed tree trimming*



*Homegrown tomatoes – a small part of our garden’s production this year.*



*Mr. Squirrel checking out the koi pond.*