

This feast celebrates God's great gift to the ancestors of Christ, Joachim and Anna in their old age – the birth of a child. This righteous couple Joachim and Ann felt cursed because they were old and had had no children. In response to her many prayers, an angel announced to Anna that she would conceive a child who would play a very special part in God's plan for salvation, for their daughter Mary would be chosen to bear the Christ – God in the flesh, the long-awaited Messiah, the Incarnate Word of God, the Savior of the world, and so fulfill God's plan for the salvation of mankind. The Maternity of Anna shows us how our God uses even the most unlikely, seemingly impossible people and situations to carry out His Divine will.

The time between The Feast of the Maternity of Anna on 9 December and The Great Feast of the Nativity of The Theotokos on 8 September is one day less than nine months. The decision was made that the time between the two feasts would not be exactly nine months, that the time would be one day less than perfect. The reason is because only God is perfect.

The only feasts of a conception and a birth that are exactly, perfectly nine months apart are the Great Feast of The Annunciation of The Theotokos (25 March) and the Great Feast of Nativity of Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ (25 December). While December 9 is the historical date, the Latin Catholic Church moved it from 9 December to December 8.

We truly believe in that the Theotokos is «*pure, spotless, stainless, immaculate*». The Byzantine Catholic and Orthodox Churches, however, do not make this event dogma because it is not essential for salvation, that is, this event is not seen as specifically bearing on the life and mission of God the Son within the Holy Trinity / Our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The Latin Catholic Church: Pope Pius IX officially proclaimed this privilege of the Theotokos, accepted throughout the centuries, as a dogma in 1854. In the West, this Feast is called the Immaculate Conception and is celebrated on 8 December. Byzantine Catholics considered Pius IX's unilateral declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception imprudent. Since Byzantine Catholics and Orthodox do not understand Original Sin in the same way as the Latins, the concept of the Immaculate Conception makes no sense in Eastern theology. Byzantine Catholics and Orthodox believe that only an Ecumenical Council can declare dogma.

Feast of the Maternity of Saint Anna



9 December

Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

The Propers for this solemn feast are found on pages 277 – 280
in the green pew books.



The Apostolic reading is from Galatians 4:22 – 31

Brethern: Abraham had two sons, one by the slave girl, the other by his freeborn wife. The son of the slave girl had been begotten in the course of nature, but the son of the free woman was the fruit of the promise.

All this is an allegory: the two women stand for the two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, and brought forth children to slavery: this is Hagar. The mountain Sinai [Hagar] is in Arabia and corresponds to the Jerusalem of our time, which is likewise in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem on high is freeborn, and it is she who is our mother. That is why Scripture says: «Rejoice, you barren one who bare no children; break into song, you stranger to the pains of childbirth! For many are the children of the wife deserted – far more than of her who has a husband!»

You, my brethren, are children of the promise, as Isaac was. But just as in those days the son born in nature's course persecuted the one whose birth was in the realm of the spirit, so do we find it now.

What does Scripture say on the point? «Cast out slave girl and son together; for the slave girl's son shall never be an heir on equal terms with the son of the one born free.» Therefore, my brethren, we are not children of a slave girl but of a mother who is free.



The Holy Gospel is taken from Saint Luke 8: 16 – 21.

The Lord said, «No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel basket or under a bed; he puts it on lampstand so that whoever comes in can see it. There is nothing hidden that will not be exposed, nothing concealed that will not be known and brought into light. Take heed, therefore, how you hear: to the man who has, more will be given; and he who has not, will lose

even the little he thinks he has.» His mother and brothers came to be with him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. He was told, «Your mother and your brothers are standing outside and they wish to see you.» He told them in reply, «My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act upon it.»



Anna, whose name means “divine grace”, once cried out in her prayer, asking for a child. She invoked the God and Creator of all, saying: «Lord of Hosts, You know what shame it is to be barren. Heal the pains of my heart. Make my fruitless womb fruitful so that we may offer to You the child who is born as a gift, and that with one mind, we may bless, praise, and glorify Your love through which the world obtains great mercy.»

The Lord swore an oath to David; He will not go back on His word.

Anna was praying with great fervor, beseeching the Lord for a child, when she heard the voice of an angel who told her that God had granted her wish, saying plainly: «Do not doubt, for your prayer has reached the Lord. Wipe away your tears, for you shall be an olive tree bringing forth a beautiful branch. You will bring forth the Virgin from whom will blossom the flower, Christ-in-the-flesh, who will grant great mercy to the world.»

A Son, the fruit of your body, will I set upon your throne.

The barren Anna leapt for joy when she gave birth to Mary the Virgin who in turn will give birth in the flesh to God the Word. Overflowing with happiness, she cried out: «Rejoice with me, all tribes of Israel, for I have conceived and put aside my burden of childlessness as the Creator has deigned. He heard my prayer and healed the pains of my yearning heart.»

Joachim and Anna, the righteous couple, gave birth to the precious heavenly fruit, the ewe-lamb, who in turn will give birth in a manner beyond all understanding to the Lamb of God who is sacrificed for all. Because of this, they offer to the Lord an unceasing and humble hymn of praise. Let us, therefore, celebrate the birth of the one who was born of them, Mary, the Theotokos; because through her, great mercy is granted to all of us.

*Aposticha and Stichera
from our Byzantine Vespers*