

# The Blessed Virgin Mary

## Fervent Defender of Christians

Bishop Alexander (Mileant)

## Honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary

*“All creatures, the assembly of Angels and the human race rejoice in You, O Blessed One.”*

**F**rom the early times of Christianity, the Blessed Virgin Mary, because of Her great virtues, Her help to the needy, and Her preeminent role in God's plan for the salvation of mankind, held a distinct position of admiration and love among Christians.

The honoring of the Holy Virgin began from the time when the Archangel Gabriel greeted Her with the words: *“Rejoice, O Blessed One, the Lord is with Thee! Blessed art Thou among women!”* announcing to Her the mystery of the conception of the Son of God. A few days later with the words *“Blessed is the Fruit of Thy womb,”* the righteous Elizabeth saluted the pure Virgin. St. Luke explains in his Gospel that the Holy Spirit revealed to Elizabeth that Mary had become the Mother of the Lord, the promised Savior of mankind (Luke 1:28-42).

The Orthodox Church expresses reverence toward the Blessed Virgin by the many feast days commemorating the various events in Her life. In prayers the Virgin Mary is called *Theotokos*, which in Greek means the Mother of God, since the One Who was born from Her was at the time of conception and always will be the true God.

Many Christian preachers and poets composed prayers, songs of praise (called *Akathists*) (from the Greek, meaning not-sitting) and inspirational sermons in honor of the Virgin Mary. With all this reverence for the Blessed Virgin Mary, Theotokos, it is consoling and enlightening to learn how she lived, how she prepared herself, and how she blossomed to such a spiritual height as to become the receptacle for the incarnate Word of God.

Several prophecies of the Old Testament foretold of the incarnation of the Son of God and of the blessed Woman who would become a tool for the salvation of mankind. The very first promise concerning the Redeemer, heard by our fallen ancestors Adam and Eve, contained a prophecy about a special Woman. God said to the devil: *“I shall put enmity between thee and the Woman, and between thy seed and Her Seed”* (Genesis 3:15). It should be noted that during the time of the Old Testament the progeny were always called the seed or descendent of a male parent. Only here is the Redeemer-to-Come referred to as the Seed of the Woman, and this was the first indication that He would have no human father. Many centuries afterward the prophet Isaiah added important details to this first prophecy of Genesis. He said that the Woman, Who will give birth to the Messiah-Emmanuel, will be a virgin. *“God Himself shall give you a sign,”* explained the

prophet Isaiah to the disbelieving descendants of king David, — *“the Virgin shall accept into her womb and bear a Son, and shall name Him Emmanuel, which means: God is with us”* (Isaiah 7:14). Even though the word “Virgin” did not seem right to the ancient Hebrews, since a birth without fail conjectured conjugal cohabitation, they did not dare to substitute another more “appropriate” word, for example, “woman.” Another important message in the prophecy of Isaiah about the coming Messiah is that He will be God Himself. Hence the title Theotokos — “birth-giver of God” — given to the Virgin Mary by the ancient Church.

## The Life of the Virgin Mary

As we know from early Christian writings, the Apostle Luke the Evangelist personally knew the Virgin Mary and based several chapters of His Gospel on Her recollections. He even quoted Her exact words several times. He was a physician and an artist, and because of his affection for Her, he painted Her portrait, from which later icon painters made copies.

The Birth of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. As time drew near for the Redeemer of the world to be born, there lived in the town of Nazareth, in Galilee, a man by the name of Joachim with his wife Anna. Joachim was a direct descendant of King David but lived a very modest and simple life. Both he and his wife were God-fearing people and were known for their humility and compassion. They never had children and, being very aged, had little chance at having any. However, not willing to despair, they continued to ask God to send them a child. They even made a vow that if they had an infant, they would dedicate that child to the service of God. At that time, to be childless meant to be punished by God for sins. Childlessness was especially difficult for Joachim since, according to prophecy, the Messiah-Christ was to be born into his family line. Owing to their patience and faith, the Lord finally sent them a great joy: Anna had a daughter. The newborn child was given the name of Mary, which means in Hebrew “Mistress-Hope.”

Presentation to the Temple. When the Virgin Mary became three years old, Her God-fearing parents prepared themselves to carry out their vow: they took Her to the temple in Jerusalem in order to consecrate Her to God. Mary was left to stay at the temple, in a special school for girls. There She, with the other maidens, was taught the Law of God as well as handiwork. She prayed and read the Scriptures. The Blessed Virgin lived at the temple for approximately eleven years and grew up to be deeply pious and obedient to Him, as well as very modest and industrious. Willing only to serve God, She gave a vow to never marry and to remain forever a virgin.

The Holy Virgin Mary at Joseph's. Since Joachim and Anna were in advanced old age, they did not live for long after Her presentation to the temple, and the Virgin Mary was left an orphan. When She reached Her fourteenth birthday, according to the law, She could no longer stay at the temple and had to wed. The High Priest, being aware of Her vow but reluctant to violate the law of marriage, formally betrothed Her to a distant relative of Hers, the widowed octogenarian Joseph, who promised to care for her and protect her virginity. Joseph lived in the town of Nazareth and also came from the lineage of King David. He was not a wealthy man and worked as a carpenter. Joseph had children from his first marriage: Judah, Simon, James (the Lesser) and Joses (Matthew 13:55), whom the Gospels refer to as “brethren” of Jesus. The Virgin Mary led as modest and solitary a life in the home of Joseph as She did in the temple.

The Annunciation. During Her first year in the house of Joseph, about six months after the appearance of the Angel Gabriel to Zacharias (see Luke 1:8-25), as the birth of the prophet John the Baptist was approaching, the forenamed Angel was sent by God into the town of Nazareth to the Holy Virgin with the joyous news that the Lord had chosen Her to become the Mother of the Savior of the world. The Angel, having appeared, told Her, *“Rejoice, O Blessed One! (literally, “filled with grace”) The Lord is with Thee! Blessed art Thou amongst women.”* Mary was puzzled by the words of the Angel and unsure what this greeting was supposed to mean. The Angel continued by saying to Her: *“Fear not, Mary, for Thou hast found favor with God. And therefore, Thou wilt bear a Son and shalt name Him Jesus. He shall be great and shall be known as the Son of the Most-high, and to His Kingdom there shall be no end.”* Still puzzled, Mary asked the Angel: *“How can that be, since I know not a man?”* The Angel replied that this would be accomplished by the power of the omnipotent God: *“The Holy Spirit shall come upon Thee, and the power of the Most-high shall overshadow Thee; therefore, accordingly, that Holy One which shall be born of Thee shall be called the Son of God. Your relative, Elizabeth, not having had any offspring till her very old age, shall soon give birth to a son; for with God nothing shall be impossible.”* Then Mary humbly answered, *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word”* (Luke 1:26-38). After this reply the Holy Spirit descended upon Mary, and She conceived the Word of God. Thus, in the most modest circumstances happened the greatest miracle in the life of mankind! Here the Infinite joined the finite; the Light, unapproachable to Angels, descended into the Virgin's womb!

In discussing this Angelic appearance, the Fathers of the Church underline the wisdom of the young Mary. She was careful not to accept Gabriel's message in haste, remembering what happened to Eve when she believed the serpent. Although God decided to make the Virgin Mary the Mother of the Savior, He wanted Her voluntary consent because He never overpowers or disregards the gift of free will that He gave us.

Visiting the righteous Elizabeth. Having heard that her relative Elizabeth, the wife of the priest Zacharias, would soon bear a son, Mary hastened to visit her. On entering the house, She saluted Elizabeth. Upon hearing Mary's voice, Elizabeth, being filled with the Holy Spirit, recognized Mary to be worthy to become the Mother of the Lord. She cried out aloud and said: *“Blessed art Thou among women, and Blessed is the Fruit of Thy womb! And from whence is such happiness for me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?”*

The Virgin Mary, in answer to Elizabeth's greeting, glorified God with the following words: *“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my savior. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and Holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation”* (Luke 1:46-50). Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned to Nazareth.

When the righteous, aged Joseph learned that Mary was expecting a child, he was scandalized, assuming that something had gone very wrong. Jewish law required unfaithful wives to be mercilessly stoned. But God revealed to Joseph not to be afraid of what had happened and to be kind to Mary. The Angel of God appeared to Joseph in his sleep and told him that Mary would bear a

Son through the action of the Holy Spirit, just as the Lord God had predicted through the prophet Isaiah (Is 7:14) and the Angel commanded Joseph to give Him the name “*Jesus*” Savior — because He shall save people from their sins.

The subsequent Evangelical narratives mention the Virgin Mary in conjunction with the events in the life of Her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, they speak of Her in connection with the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, then His circumcision, the worship of the Magi, the offering brought to the temple on the 40th day, the flight into Egypt, settling in Nazareth, traveling to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover when He reached His twelfth birthday, and so forth. We will not dwell on those events here. It should be noted that though the Evangelical references to the Virgin Mary are concise, they give the reader a clear comprehension of Her great moral eminence: Her humility, great faith, patience, courage, obedience to God, love and dedication to Him, and devotion to Her Divine Son. From these incidental but characteristic references we see why, in the words of the Angel, She became worthy “*to attain favor from God.*”

The first miracle performed by Jesus Christ, at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, gives us an insight into the great kindness of His Mother and into Her influence on Her Son. These qualities made Her a powerful intercessor for all Christians, especially for those who suffer or are oppressed. Having noticed a shortage of wine at the wedding feast, the Blessed Virgin drew the attention of Her Son to that fact, and though the Lord answered Her cryptically “*What is it to Me and You Woman? My hour has not yet come,*” She was not discouraged by this rebuke, being sure that Her Son would not ignore Her plea. She told the servants: “*Whatever He tells you, do this.*” As can be seen from this forewarning to the servants, this undertaking would come to a favorable end.

Indeed, Her intercession drew divine intervention to an event in the life of a poor, little-known family. Thus happened the first miracle of Jesus, after which “*His disciples believed in Him*” (John 2:11).

The Gospels depict the Mother of God as having constant concern for Her Son, following Him in His journeys, always ready to help Him at any time, caring for His well-being and tranquility at home, which He always refused to take advantage of. Finally, we see Her standing in indescribable grief by the Cross of Her Crucified Son, hearing His final words and commandments, entrusting Her care to His beloved pupil. Not a word of reproach or despair left Her lips. She conceded all to the will of God. This was the time of Her supreme greatness.

Again, briefly, there is mention of the Virgin Mary in the Acts of the Holy Apostles when, upon Her as well as the Apostles, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of fiery tongues. After that, according to tradition, She lived some 10 to 20 years. Fulfilling the Lord's will, the Apostle John the Theologian, author of the fourth Gospel, took Her into his home, and with great love, as if being Her own son, he cared for Her till Her very end. When the Christian faith spread to other countries, many Christians came from far off countries to see and hear Her. From that time the Most Holy Virgin Mary became a mother to all of Christ's pupils and a high example of virtue.

The Dormition (called the Assumption by the Roman-Catholic church). Once, as the Holy Virgin prayed on the Mount of Olives (near Jerusalem), the Angel Gabriel appeared to Her, as he had the first time in Nazareth, holding in his hand a branch with a white flower from Paradise, and announced to Her that in three days Her earthly life would come to an end and that the Lord would take Her to Him. The Lord arranged it so that toward that time the Apostles congregated in Jerusalem from the many parts of the world where they were preaching. At the hour of Her end, a bright light illuminated the room in which the Virgin Mary was lying. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, surrounded by Angels, appeared and received Her most pure soul. The Apostles buried Her holy body, according to Her wish, at the foot of the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the cave where reposed the bodies of her parents and of the righteous Joseph. During the burial, many miracles came to pass. By touching the bier of the Mother of God, the blind regained their sight, demons were exorcised, and many diseases were cured.

Three days after the burial of the Theotokos, there arrived belatedly the Apostle Thomas, who had missed the burial. He was very distraught at not having paid his last respects to the Mother of Jesus and wished to see Her body for the last time. When the cave in which the Virgin Mary was buried was opened, Her body was not found, but only Her burial clothes. The Apostles returned to their home in amazement. In the evening during their prayers, they heard Angels singing. Glancing upward, the Apostles saw the Most Holy Virgin surrounded by Angels, in radiant heavenly glory. She said to the Apostles: *“Rejoice! I am with you for all the days and nights.”*

She has been fulfilling this promise to help and defend Christians to the present day, having become our heavenly Mother. For Her great love and all-powerful help, Christians always have honored Her and turned to Her for help, appealing to Her as the “Fervent intercessor for the Christian race, the Joy of all those who grieve, Who did not abandon us after Her Dormition.” From these earliest times, following the example of the prophet Isaiah and the righteous Elizabeth, all Christians began to address Her as the Mother of God or Theotokos, and this title was confirmed during the Third Ecumenical Council (431 AD) in Ephesus.

The Most Holy Virgin Mary serves as great example to all those who are striving for perfection. She was the first who decided to dedicate Her whole life to God and who showed that voluntary virginity is higher than wedded life. From the first centuries, in emulating Her and Her Son and other prophets and apostles, many Christians began to pass their life in virginity, prayer, fasting, meditation and contemplation. Thus, the monastic life arose, and there appeared many monasteries which became sources of inspiration for a pious life and spiritual wisdom. Unfortunately, the present ungodly world does not appreciate and even sometimes ridicules the advancement of virginity, disregarding the words of the Lord: *“For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs (virgins) for the kingdom of heaven's sake.”* To this the Lord added this very unambiguous directive: *“He who is able to accept it, let him accept it”* (Matthew 19:12).

In reviewing the earthly life of the Theotokos, it is essential to emphasize that, just as at the moment of Her greatest glory, when She was chosen to become the Mother of the Savior, as well as at the hour of Her greatest grief, by the prophecy of the righteous Simon, as She stood at the foot

of the Cross when “*a weapon pierced Her soul,*” She displayed complete self-control and faith in God. In all events, big or small, She invariably manifested the strength and beauty of Her virtues: humility, perseverance, patience, courage, hope in the Lord and unbounded love for Him! That is why we Christians hold Her in such high esteem and want to emulate Her.

## Protection of the Holy Virgin

**T**his feast was established in remembrance of Her apparition during the siege of Constantinople [Istanbul] in the middle of the 9th century. The Slavs [Variags], at that time pagans surrounded the city of Constantinople by sea and land with a huge army. Christians inside the city rushed to their churches with prayers for divine help. A beggar in the city, Saint Andrew the Fool-for-Christ's-sake, was in the church of Vlahern praying all night with many other Christians. In the fourth hour of the night, the Saint saw a majestic Woman, the Virgin Mary, coming forth above the royal gates (in the middle of the sanctuary) accompanied by John the Baptist, John the Theologian, and many saints, some preceding and some following Her, singing hymns and praying. Saint Andrew approached his pupil Epiphanius and asked if he also saw the Queen of the world. “I see Her and tremble,” answered the latter. And while they looked, She stood above of the sanctuary and prayed for a long time.

Then the Virgin Mary removed Her veil and spread it over the church and the city. Saint Andrew told the people about this apparition of the Holy Virgin. Encouraged, they made a procession along the walls of the city and submerged in the sea an icon of the Virgin Mary. A few hours afterward a great storm arose and destroyed most of the enemy ships. The Slavs who survived retreated, and the town was saved. From that time many Slavs started to convert to Christianity. Saint Andrew by birth was also a Slav. Perhaps explains why Russians so greatly honor this appearance of the Mother of God to him and dedicate to this miracle the feast of the Protection of the Holy Virgin, which is celebrated each year on October 1/14.

## Some Miraculous Icons of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**I**t is customary to name the miraculous icons of the Virgin Mary according to the towns in which they originated.

**The Vladimir Icon** is one of the most ancient miraculous icons of the Mother of God. In the middle of the 5th century the Icon was transported from Jerusalem to Constantinople, and in the middle of the 12th century it was sent by the patriarch to Kiev, to the Grand Duke Yury Dolgoruky, and was placed in the Dievichy monastery in Vyshgorod. In 1155 Prince Andrew of Vyshgorod, when traveling to the North, took with him the miraculous Icon of the Blessed Virgin. On the way, there were held short divine services praising the Lord (Te Deums), and miracles occurred. On the banks of the Klyazma river the steeds carrying the Icon could not move. The prince called that place Bogolubov, that is, Beloved by God, and built there two stone churches, into one of which the Icon was placed. On September 21, 1160, the Icon was transferred into the church at Vladimir, and from then on it has been known as the “Vladimirskaya.” Since 1395 the Icon has been located in the Uspensky Cathedral in Moscow, to the left of the

royal gates. The Icon became famous due to many miracles performed. Before this Icon Russian tsars were anointed as rulers, and metropolitans were appointed. The feast day of the Icon is celebrated on August 26/September 8, as well as on May 21/June 3 in honor of the liberation of Moscow in 1521 from its bondage to the Crimean Khan.

**The Icon of Kazan.** In 1579, a nine-year-old girl by the name of Matrona, whose parents' house burned down during the 1579 fire in Kazan, saw in a dream the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary and heard a voice commanding her to retrieve a holy Icon hidden in the ashes of the burned house. The holy Icon was discovered wrapped in an old cloth under the stove, where it was buried, most likely during the rule of the Tartars when Christians were forced to conceal their faith. The holy Icon was triumphantly transported to the nearest church, the Church of St. Nicholas, and later to the Cathedral of the Annunciation, where it received renown for curing the blind. A copy was made of the Icon and sent to the tsar, Ivan the Terrible. In honor of its arrival, a special feast day was established on the July 8/21.

**The Icon of Znamenia**, which means “The Sign,” also known as the **Icon of Kursk**. It was found on September 8, 1295, by a hunter at the root of a tree on the bank of the Tuskor River in the province of Kursk. When he took the Icon in his hands, a spring of water came from under the tree. The hunter built a chapel near the tree and placed the Icon therein. From that time the Icon began to perform many miracles. In 1383 the Tartars of the Crimea, devastating the province, cut the Icon into two parts and threw them into opposite directions. They took as prisoner the priest Bogolyub, who performed the services in the chapel. Having been redeemed by the envoys of the Grand Duke of Moscow, Bogolyub found the split pieces of the Icon, joined them, and miraculously they grew together. In 1597 the Icon was brought to Moscow by the will of Tsar Feodor Ioannovich. In view of the return of the holy relic, a monastery was founded which was given the name of the Root Hermitage. Since the time of Tsar Feodor Ioannovich, the Icon has been encased in a cypress board, with the portrayal of the Lord Sabaoth above and of Prophets on the sides.

In 1612 the Icon miraculously saved Kursk from being captured by the Poles. The grateful inhabitants built the monastery of Znamenie, into which the Icon was brought every year and stayed from the 12th of September until the Friday of the 9th week of Easter. The rest of the time it remained at the Hermitage.

On March 7, 1898 the Icon remained unharmed during an attempt by revolutionaries to blow it up in the cathedral of the Znamensky monastery. After midnight a bomb placed under the Icon went off with a terrible noise. Everything around was torn apart and scattered. Only the Icon remained intact. During the revolution the Icon was also stolen in April of 1918, but was miraculously found in a well several months later. Finally the Icon was taken from Russia in 1920 by Bishop Theophan of Kursk and placed in Holy Trinity Church in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. This Holy Image rendered great assistance when Belgrade was bombarded during the Second World War. Bombs never fell on the houses visited by the Icon, although they destroyed the surrounding areas. Presently the Icon resides in the Znamenia Cathedral in New York City, though from time to time it is taken to different temples of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad for adoration. Every year numerous healings continue to flow from this Holy Icon.

**The Weeping Icons.** During the past 100 to 150 years there have appeared several Icons of the Blessed Virgin Mary with flowing tears. These miraculous events most probably point to the grief the Virgin Mary feels toward mankind at the approach of the antichrist.

In February of 1854, in the Romanian Orthodox monastery of Sokol, one of the Icons of the Blessed Virgin Mary began to weep. This miracle coincided with the Crimean war in Russia and drew thousands of pilgrims daily. The weeping sometimes occurred every day, and sometimes at intervals of 2 to 3 days.

In March of 1960, a lithograph of the Icon of the Virgin Mary, known as that of the "Passion," that belonged to a Greek Orthodox family from Long Island, New York, began to weep. When the Icon was transported to the Cathedral of St. Paul, white doves hovered above the Icon. The paper on which the Icon was imprinted became wrinkled from the copious flow of the tears. At times the tears appeared bloody, and pious pilgrims pressed pieces of cotton to the Icon to take home and apply to the ill. Shortly afterward a lithograph of the Icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Iveron that belonged to another Greek Orthodox family in that same area also began to flow tears. These two weeping Icons drew a great number of praying people, and both local and foreign papers have described the great number of miracles emanating from them. One of the Icons has been examined by scientists in order to determine the origin of this fountain of tears, and scholars at the University of British Columbia confirmed the fact that the tears did flow but could not explain this from a scientific point of view (*Orthodox Life*, 1960, n. 8, p. 8).

On December 6, 1986, the Icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the altar screen in the Albanian Church of St. Nicholas the Complaisant, in Chicago, began to weep. This miracle has been attracting up to five thousand people to the church who wished to see this miraculous Icon with their own eyes. The weeping Icon was painted 23 years ago by a Manhattan painter by the name of Constantine Yussis. A specially gathered committee confirmed that "there could be no explanation of this enigma."

**The Myrrh-Pouring Icon.** An Orthodox Chilean by the name of Joseph (Jose), who had been living on Mount Athos since 1981, saw in a monastery a copy of the Iveron Icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary and wished to own it. At first he received a refusal; then unexpectedly the abbot handed the image over to him with the words: "Take it, this Icon must go with you!" Joseph brought the Icon to Montreal. On November 24, 1982, at 3 o'clock in the morning, Joseph's room was filled with a wondrous fragrance: on the surface of the Icon appeared drops of wondrously fragrant myrrh. The Archbishop Vitaly of Canada, now Metropolitan and Chief Hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad, offered to bring the Icon to the Russian cathedral in Montreal. Since then the Icon has Russian Orthodox churches in several countries. Sometimes during services attended by multitudes, the myrrh appeared not only on the icon itself, but on the outer surface of the glass, before the eyes of those praying, and even starting to drip on the floor, filling the church with a wondrous fragrance. It is remarkable that each year during Passion Week the Holy myrrh would stop flowing from the Icon and then resume its flow after Easter. The Icon was responsible for many wondrous cures.

Tragically, on October 31, 1997 while in Athens, Greece, Joseph was murdered and the icon mysteriously disappeared. A copy of this icon resides in St. John the Baptist Cathedral in Washington, DC.

It is impossible to enumerate here all the miraculous icons of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After the revolution in Russia many ancient icons began to restore themselves (become shining, as if newly painted). On occasion, in front of a person's eyes, old and dark icons have lightened as if new. There are thousands of such self-restored icons. The faithful saw in these miracles signs of the forthcoming spiritual revival in Russia.

Miracles and apparitions do not occur without cause. Most likely the miraculous apparitions of the Virgin Mary are meant to awaken our faith in God and a sense of repentance. Unfortunately, many in our day have become deaf to spiritual subjects, are turning their back to God, and choose a pagan way of life. But we, Orthodox Christians, should always remember our Heavenly Mother, our Intercessor at the Lord's Altar, and ask Her guidance and protection. O most holy Theotokos, save us!

## Prayers to the Virgin Mary

**V**irgin Mary, our most gracious Queen and our hope; shelter of orphans, and protector of travelers, joy of the grieving, interceder for the abused! See our distress; see our affliction. Assist us, for we are helpless; direct us, for we are strangers. You know our offense, — ease it as You will. For we have no other help but Yours; no other intercessor, nor gracious consoler but You. O Virgin Mary. Protect us and shelter us for all time. Amen.

**Troparion:** It is truly meet to bless Thee, O Theotokos, the ever blessed and most immaculate, and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim. Thee, who without defilement gavest birth to God the Word, the true Mother of God, we magnify Thee.

**Vesper's Troparion:** Theotokos Virgin! Rejoice Blessed Mary, the Lord is with You! Blessed are You among women, and blessed is the Fruit of Your womb, because You gave birth to the Savior of our souls.

**Some feast days in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary:** Annunciation – March 25/April 7; Dormition – August 15/28; Birth – September 8/21; Holy Protection – October 1/14; Presentation to the Temple – November 21/December 4.

Missionary Leaflet 13E  
466 Foothill Blvd, Box 397, La Canada, Ca 91011  
Editor: Bishop Alexander (Mileant)

For more information on the Orthodox Church, please contact:  
St. Vladimir Orthodox Church ~ Ann Arbor, MI  
(734) 475-4590

[www.stvladimiraami.org](http://www.stvladimiraami.org) ~ [stvladimiraami@yahoo.com](mailto:stvladimiraami@yahoo.com)