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The Veneration of the Theotokos in the Christian Church.

The History and Evolution of Theotokos' Feasts

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Abstract

The present study refers to the appearance and development of the Royal Feasts of the Theotokos. Thus, in the Introduction I referred to her veneration from the beginnings of Christianity until after the 5th century, and then I analysed the history and development of the four Feasts of the Theotokos: Nativity, Presentation into the Temple, Annunciation and Her Dormition. At the end I presented some conclusions of the study undertaken.

Keywords

eneration, Theotokos, Church, Christianity, History, Evolution, Feasts

I. Introduction. Theotokos' veneration at the beginning of Christianity and after the 5th century.

The veneration of the Mother of God was expressed in the cult and liturgical life of the Church, since her beginning, that is, since the primary period. New Testament exegetes and liturgical theologians unanimously accept that the Blessed Virgin Mary was honoured by the Apostles, disciples, and

relatives of the Saviour since her earthly life. “Her person has always been naturally associated with that of her divine Son and surrounded by the love and respect of those around Him”¹.

Even though the Theotokos was honoured since the beginning of Christianity, in the first three centuries her veneration manifested in discrete forms, especially in the particular veneration of every Christian from the first Christian community - the Church of Jerusalem, around her tomb in Gethsemane. The penetration of the Theotokos’ veneration in the public cult of the Church and its proper development can be observed according to the freedom granted by the Holy Emperor Constantine the Great to Christendom². This explains the fact that in the 4th century there was already a cult of the Mother of God established in the Church. This fact is proved by the laudatory speeches and homilies addressed to the Mother of God, uttered by the great Fathers of this age, such as St. Ambrose of Milan. He asks in a homily about the Virgin Mary: “Who is more honourable than the Mother of God?”³.

Theotokos’ cult existing since the beginning of the Christian life in the Church, experienced an explosive development in the first half of the 5th century, due to Nestorius’ heresy called dyoprosopism. He claimed that because in the being of Christ there would be two special persons (on the one hand the Divine, and on the other the human), the Virgin Mary gave birth only to the man Christ and cannot be called Giver of birth to God (Θεοτοκος), but only Giver of birth to Christ (Χριστοτοκος), or Giver of birth to man (ανθρωποτοκος). When a bishop, preaching in his Church, where Nestorius was also present, dared to blaspheme those who claim that Mary is also the Mother of God, all the people who listened to him ostentatiously left the church in protest.⁴ This fact amply demonstrates how old and deeply rooted in the conscience of believers was the belief in the theotokia of the Mother of God, or in the fact that the Virgin Mary is truly the Mother of God.

¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală cu noțiuni de Artă bisericească, Arhitectură și pictură creștină*, ediția a II-a revizuită și completată, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1993, p. 186.

² Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 187.

³ “Qui nobilius Dei matre?”, Sf. AMBROZIE, *De virginibus*, II, 2, 7, in: *PL XVI*, 220 B.

⁴ See Pr. Prof. Ioan RĂMUREANU, *Istoria bisericească universală*, ediția a II-a, București, 1975, p. 249.

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The Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned the heresy of Nestorius, formulating the Orthodox teaching about the Mother of God, emphasizing the two major qualities of the Mother of God, according to which she deserves honour or super-veneration. These two qualities of the Mother of God are her θεοτοκία, that is the fact that she gave birth to God in flesh and her απαρτενία, that is everlasting virginity, or her holiness.

As in the case of the other saints, from the beginning the veneration of the Mother of God in the cult of the Church was manifested through several forms or ways of expression. Among them, the first important one is the *establishment of certain feasts* or days during the ecclesial year, dedicated to her special remembrance and honour.

The special veneration granted to the Mother of God in the Orthodox cult can be observed from the large number of feasts dedicated to her celebration. While the other saints are, as a general rule, mentioned only once a year - namely on the day of their death⁵ - the Blessed Virgin is especially celebrated several times during the Church year. There are feasts that honour not only her Dormition or transition to the eternal, but also a few other important moments in her life, as well as some miracles performed by her power, after moving from this life.

From the point of view of their importance, we can divide the feasts of the Theotokos into two categories:

- *The major feasts* (especially celebrated) – four - counted among the Great Feasts;
- *minor feasts* (without special celebration).

All the major Feasts of the Theotokos are counted among the Great Feasts, being painted on the iconostasis of the Orthodox Churches. This is because the Blessed Virgin is also called “Lady or Queen of Heaven”, her cult being closely linked to that of her Son, Jesus Christ. In fact, some of them, such as the Annunciation, although considered between the feasts of the Mother of God, actually refer to the person of the Saviour Christ. It is the celebration of His incarnation or conception within the human body for our salvation.

By the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century, the feasts celebrated by the Church highlighted the glory of Easter and the

⁵ Exceptions to this rule are St. John the Baptist, as well as the saints to whom there are listed the days of finding or moving their relics entered in the calendars (synaxarion).

celebration of Christmas-Epiphany⁶. This corresponded to the teaching of the first Synods.

Returning to the mysteries of the infancy of Jesus and His mother, the Church instituted a series of feasts that explain the Mystery of the Incarnation. Thus, after the Synod of Ephesus, both the teaching of the Synods and popular and patristic literature played a providential role, namely, that of completing the celebration of the Divinity of Christ with that of His humanity. Thus, the liturgical year becomes the unfolding of all aspects of the Incarnation as a whole⁷.

Therefore, as it generally happened with all the feasts of the saints, the veneration of the Theotokos dates long before the establishment of feasts dedicated to her special honour in the Church⁸.

The oldest feasts of the Mother of God appear at first as feasts of the Saviour⁹. They are of newer origin than the actual feasts or the Great Feasts, which refer directly and exclusively to the person of the Saviour Christ. In fact, of these, only the Annunciation is based on a historical event recorded in Holy Scripture (Luke 1, 26-38). The others are based on facts from the life of the Blessed Virgin about which the canonical gospels do not write anything, they are preserved by tradition. Some of them are recorded only in the non-canonical (apocryphal) gospels, such as the Presentation to the Temple, i.e. the bringing to the temple of the Blessed Virgin, which is narrated in the *Proto-Gospel of James* (chapter 7). However, none of them appears among the Christian feasts listed in the *Apostolic Constitutions* (book V, chapter 13 and book VIII, chapter 33). None of the feasts of the Theotokos seems to be older than the fifth century, a century in which, as we have seen, the cult of the Mother of God knows a special development, following the condemnation of Nestorian heresy at the Third Ecumenical

⁶ Until the fourth century, the Nativity of Christ (manifestation of the Godhead, through the Incarnation of His Son) and Baptism (manifestation of the Godhead, through the appearance of the Holy Trinity) were celebrated together on January 6, as they are still now in the Coptic and Armenian Church..

⁷ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, transl. Măriuca and Adrian Alexandrescu, Editura Σοφία, București, 2008, p. 33.

⁸ Testimonies about the legitimacy and antiquity of this cult, at E. VACANDARD, "Marie", in: *Dictionnaire de Théologie catholique*, t. IX, Paris, 1925, col. 2439 ș. u..

⁹ Dr. V. MITROFANOFICI, Prof. Dr. T. TARNAVSCHI and Arhiepiscop Dr. Nectarie COTLARCIUC, *Liturgica Bisericii Ortodoxe*, Editura Consiliului Eparhial Ort. Rom. din Bucovina, Cernăuți, 1929, p. 154.

The Veneration of the Theotokos in the Christian Church. The History and Evolution of Theotokos' Feasts Council (Ephesus 431). It is also interesting to note that in the West, where the cult of the Mother of God will take on even greater development over time than in the East, none of these four feasts is known before the seventh century, the century in which Christians from this part adopts all of Byzantium¹⁰.

II. The Great or Royal Feasts of the Theotokos. Their history and development

The Nativity of the Theotokos

The Nativity of the Theotokos (το γενεθλιον τη Θεοτοκου, *Nativitas Beatae Marie Virginis*, *Rojdestvo Bogorodiți*, in Romanian also called *Little St. Mary*), is celebrated on September 8.

The apocryphal writing *Protoevangelium of James* stops for a long time on the childhood of the Virgin, but describing the event of her birth in just a few lines:

“And her months were fulfilled, and in the ninth month Anna brought forth. And she said unto the midwife: what have I brought forth? And she said: A female. And Anna said: My soul is magnified this day, and she laid herself down. And when the days were fulfilled, Anna purified herself and gave suck to the child and called her name Mary”¹¹.

Other later apocryphals come to add other, and often contradictory details, such as the place where Theotokos was born.

According to Epiphanius the monk¹², the city of Theotokos' birth is Nazareth, the native city of Joachim. St. John Chrysostom has the same opinion¹³.

¹⁰ L. DUCHESNE, *Origines du culte chrétien*, ed. V, Paris, 1925, p. 286.

¹¹ “Protoevanghelia lui Iacob”, V, 2, in: *Evangheliile apocrife*, traducere, studiu introductiv, note și prezentări de Cristian Bădiliță, ediția a III-a revăzută, Editura Polirom, 2002, p. 37.

¹² EPIFANIE MONAHUL, *De vita Beatae Virginis*, in: *PG CXX*, 189.

¹³ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, *Homilia IX De Poenitentia*, in: *PG XLIX*, 354.

However, St. Cyril of Alexandria thought the city where the Mother of Lord was born would be Bethlehem, the city of Anna, Mary's mother.

Other authors consider Jerusalem as the birthplace¹⁴, opinion that seems to be confirmed by the existence of a church dedicated to Saint Anna, built near the Sheep Pool. The Eastern sources speak on this *Dedicatio probatica ecclesiae Deiparae*, about the mission fulfilled by Joachim and Anna by bringing to life the Virgin Mary, from whom Christ the Saviour will be born, a fact which somehow justifies such a hypothesis. This church in Jerusalem was destroyed twice, in 614 by the Persians and in 638 by the Arabs. It is also interesting that in this period the date of Nativity of the Virgin Mary was fixed on September 8. This church, built in Jerusalem above the house where the saints and righteous Joachim and Anna lived according to tradition, is still preserved today, being rebuilt on the old ruins of the Church destroyed by Persians and Arabs. In the basement of this church we can visit the house of the righteous Joachim and Anna.

Just like the feast of Virgin Mary's Dormition, at its origin, the feast of her Nativity was the annual anniversary of the church sanctification in Jerusalem, dedicated to the Holy Virgin, and built between 430-480 on this place where, according to tradition, it had been the house of the Holy Virgin's parents¹⁵.

Some historians see the establishment of this feast as a reaction of the Church against the cult of Ishtar, Isis and Astarte, matriarchal deities worshipped by the pagans who conquered the Holy Places in the seventh century. The celebration of these pagan deities was held on September 8. Or, the victory of Christ over Satan and his followers, who were the heathen, was also fulfilled through Mary, the Theotokos who bore Him in her womb and gave birth to Him. This is why the feasts of the matriarchal deities of the heathen, servants of darkness, have been replaced by Christians with the worship of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who gave birth to Christ the Saviour, who overcame the power of darkness, the devil and his servants.

The feast of Virgin Mary's Nativity also exists in the Eastern heterodox, separated from the Orthodox Church after the Fourth Ecumenical Synod, i.e. the Egyptian Copts (who celebrate it on May 9)¹⁶ and Syrian Jacobites.

¹⁴ Sfântul SOFRONIE, Patriarhul Ierusalimului, *Anacreatica*, in: PG LXXXVII, 3821.

¹⁵ Dr. A. BAUMSTARK, *Liturgie Comparee*, Editions de Chevetogne, 1953, p. 210.

¹⁶ O. H. BURMESTER, *The Egyptian or Coptic Church. A detailed description of her liturgical Services and rites and ceremonies observed in the administration of her Sacraments*, Cairo, 1967, p. 15.

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Considering that they did not borrow anything from the Orthodoxy after their separation from the Ecumenical Church, it means that the feast was already in use in their church before this separation. Therefore, its beginning must be placed between the Third Ecumenical Council (431) and the Fourth Ecumenical Council (451).

Although it appeared early, at the beginning, the Feast of Virgin Mary's Nativity did not have a universal character, being celebrated especially in Palestine and particularly in Jerusalem. That is why, even in the ninth century, it was not yet officially or canonically recognized throughout the Christian Church.

Regarding the service of this Feast and its hymnological compositions from the fifth century, St. Roman the Melodist was inspired by the apocryphal stories that told Mary's childhood, and he composed the Matins Kontakion and Oikos of this Feast.

The service of Matins also has two Canons in its structure, whose authors are John the Monk, that is, probably St. John of Damascus († 749) and St. Andrew of Crete († 740)¹⁷. To honour this feast, St. Andrew of Crete also wrote four sermons¹⁸. Therefore, these texts date from the iconoclastic period, when the honour of the Mother of God was contested. Their composition as a praise to Theotokos thus had an apologetic character, defending her worship from those who challenged it.

In the West this feast of Virgin Mary's Nativity was celebrated in Gaul around year 630. But it was officially introduced by Pope Sergius I (687-701), under the influence of Constantinople. Its generalization was made much later, that is in the 9th-10th centuries.

The day after Virgin Mary's Nativity, that is, on September 9, we celebrate the *Holy and Righteous Ancestors of God Joachim and Anna*, Theotokos' parents, thus honouring those through whom Mother of God came to life.

Entrance of the Theotokos

Every year on November 21, the Church celebrates the *Entrance of the Theotokos* into the Temple (the Presentation) (εισοδος)¹⁹.

¹⁷ The Greek text is in *PG* XCVII, 1315-1330, being translated in Romanian in *Mineiul pe Septembrie*, day 8, Matins service.

¹⁸ Sfântul ANDREI CRITANUL, *In Nativitatem Beatae Mariae*, *PG* XCVII, 805-882.

¹⁹ The exact name of the Feast would be that of "Entrance to the Temple". However, we commonly use the name "Entrance to the Church", since it is the one used by tradition

This feast (*Ἡ εἰσοδοξ Θεοτοκου*, *Praesentatio Beatae Marie Virginis ad Templum*, *Vovidenia* or *Ovedenia*, from Slavonic *Vovidenie vo hram Preasveatīi Bogorodičīi*) is the day when, according to tradition, Saints Joachim and Anna brought their three-year-old daughter Mary to the temple, where she will remain until the age of 14 or 15, as the one who was destined to the Lord by her parents, from the moment of conception.

Although it does not appear anywhere mentioned in the Holy Scripture, the event of Virgin Mary's entrance into the Church, penetrated the consciousness of the Church, and her Tradition. Contemporary Russian theologians accentuate this deep, early settlement of the holy event in the conscience of the Church. They consider that

“... the feast was instituted by the Church's Tradition, who used apocryphal²⁰ to emphasize - this time in the person of the chosen Virgin, who dedicated herself to the service of God – «the fulfilment of the Creator's dispensation» (Troparion of the Feast, tone 4)...; The Church breaks the silence of the Scriptures and shows us the hidden paths of Grace, which prepares the vessel of the Word, «the Mother chosen before ages» (Vespers, Stichera, tone 4), «announced by the prophets» (Kontakion, tone 4), who enters the holy of holies, «Hidden treasure of God's glory» (Hebr. 9, 2-7)”²¹.

This event from the life of Our Lady was taken over in memory of the Church from James's Proto-Gospel. It is easy to understand that the Old Testament readings and the texts of the services that evoked the theological splendour and significance of the Temple in Jerusalem gained a special weight in this framework.

as the general name of the Feast in our Church; see in this regard Egon Sendler, Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 25.

²⁰ Here, of course, the text refers to an apocryphal writing, James' Proto-Gospel, chap. 7 and 8, which describes in detail the event of bringing to the Temple of the Virgin Mary. See this text translated by Pr. Prof. Ioan G. Coman, in his book *Și Cuvântul Trup S-a făcut*, Editura Mitropoliei Banatului, Timișoara, 1993, p. 318, according to the German copy of A. MEYER, *Die Erzählung des Jakobus (von der Geburt der hochheiligen Gottesmutter Maria)*, in: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, pp. 86-93

²¹ Leonid USPENSKY and Vladimir LOSSKY, *Călăuziri în lumea icoanei*, transl. Anca Popescu, Editura Σοφία, București, 2003, p. 166

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This feast is one of the newest of the Virgin Mary, dating from the sixth century, the origin of this holiday being the holy city, Jerusalem. Thus, we know that on November 20, 543, the church that Emperor Justinian built in Jerusalem, near the ruins of the Holy Temple, was consecrated, being dedicated to the Holy Virgin, and called the Church of St. Mary the “New” (η νεα)²². The faithful people and the clergy named this church dedicated to the Theotokos’ Nativity “the New Church”, in order to distinguish it from the ancient place of Mary’s Birth, near the Sheep Pool. Here is how the church building is described:

“Huge polychrome columns supported the interior galleries of the nave; others framed the atrium whose monumental entrance stirred the admiration of the pilgrims. In front there were two buildings facing each other, one for the pilgrims, the other for the poor”²³.

A witness from that time, Gregory of Tours, speaks of Holy Virgin relics which performed great miracles in that place²⁴.

According to Tradition, the day after sanctification, that is to say, on November 21, the feast of this Church began to be celebrated, the feast being dedicated to the Virgin Mary’s Presentation to the Holy Temple²⁵.

This feast was widespread throughout the East before the 7th century²⁶. There is nothing left of this New Church today. Shaken by the earthquakes of the eighth century, its ruins were used by Muslims. In the 12th century, the Crusaders erected a hospital on this site, and in the 19th century, the Jewish inhabitants of the neighbourhood built a large synagogue on this place.

²² “In the heart of Jerusalem, a splendid basilica, erected by Justinian, on one of the highest points of the city, dominated the whole city below and the deserted esplanade of the Jewish temple, defying the arid expanse of Zion” (Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 25).

²³ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 25.

²⁴ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 25.

²⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 192.

²⁶ About this see at B. CAPELLE, “Les fetes mariales”, in: *L’Eglise en priere. Introduction a la Liturgie*, red. par A. G. MARTIMORT, Tournai, 1961, p. 762, quoted by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 192.

Towards the end of the 8th century, Saint Andrew of Crete participates at the celebration of this feast in Jerusalem²⁷. In the same century, Saints Germanus I (†733)²⁸ and Tarasius (†806)²⁹, Patriarchs of Constantinople, gave speeches of praise to this Feast. It spread in the East only after the end of the iconoclastic crisis, when the Virgin Mary's honour experienced a new stage of its development.

Although this feast dates from the eighth century, it is not officially mentioned in the calendar until 1166.

In the West, the feast was first introduced by Pope Gregory IX, apparently under the influence of the Greek monasteries from Italy, first in England (11th century), then in France, at Avignon, in 1371³⁰. The generalization of this feast throughout the West is due to Pope Sixt IV, in 1472. It was then suppressed by Pope Pius V, and then reintroduced by Pope Sixt V in 1585³¹.

In the West, however, the feast never had the importance it has in the liturgical life of the Eastern Church, where it is part of the preparation for the Nativity of Christ the Saviour.

²⁷ See Vladimir LOSSKY, "Intrarea în Biserică" (in Russian), in: *Jurnal Moskovskoi Patriarhii*, vol 11, 1973, pp. 74-75, quoted by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 192; see also Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 166

²⁸ GHERMAN AL CONSTANTINOPOLULUI, *In Praesentationem SS. Deiparae*, in: *PG* XCVIII, 291-320.

²⁹ TARASIE AL CONSTANTINOPOLULUI, *In SS. Deiparae Praesentationem*, in: *PG* XCVIII, 1481-1500.

³⁰ At the proposal made to Pope Gregory XI by Chancellor Philip de Mezieres, former papal ambassador to the island of Cyprus; see about it Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 192.

³¹ Bibliography on the history and evolution of this feast: Dom Pius PARSCH, *Le guide dans l'annee liturgique*, trad. de l'allemand par l'abbe Marcel Gauthier, t. V, Paris, 1936, pp. 402-408; H. KELLNER, *Heortologie oder die geschichtliche Entwicklung des Kirchenjahres und der Heiligenfeste von den altesten Zeiten bis zur Gegenwart*, 3 Aufl., Freiburg im Breisgau, 1911, p. 156; H. LECLERQ, "Fete de la Presentation de Marie", in: *Dictionnaire d Archeologie Chretiene et de la Liturgie*, t. XIV, col. 1729-1731; Prot. Silvestru BĂLĂNESCU, "Sărbătoarea Intrării în Biserică a Preasfintei Născătoare de Dumnezeu", in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, II (1875) 1, pp. 67-72; Mary KISHPAUSCH, *The Feast of the Presentation of the Mary in the Temple. An historical and literary Study*, Diss Washington, Cath. University, 1941; S. VAILHE, "La fete de la Presentation de Marie au temple", in: *Echos d'Orient*, Paris, vol V (1902), p. 221 ș.u.; Alexander SCHMEMANN, *Introducere în Teologia Liturgică*, Editura Σοφία, București, 2002.

The Annunciation

The day of March 25 of each year is dedicated to the Feast of Annunciation of the Saviour, this of course in relation to the Feast of Christ's Nativity, from December 25, so nine months after the event of Annunciation.

The Annunciation (Ὁ Εὐαγγελισμὸς, Ἡμέρα Ἀσποσμαῶ, *Ziua saluțării, Χαριτισμός, Anuntiatio Beatae Mariae Virginis, Blagoveštenia*) is the feast of the day when St. Archangel Gabriel announced to the Blessed Virgin that she would give birth to the Messiah (Luke 1: 26-38), when the Holy Baby was conceived in the womb of the Holy Virgin, by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why in the West this feast was called the Feast of Lord's Conception (*Festum Conceptionis Cristi*). It was settled nine months before the birth of the Lord, that is, on March 25.

We do not know precisely when the Church began to celebrate the good news of Mary or, as the feast of the Feast says, the day that is "the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the eternal mystery". It is certain that the Feast of Annunciation was celebrated even before the Synod of Ephesus (431) which proclaimed the Blessed Virgin as Mother of God – *Theotokos*.

The literary sources of this feast, that is, the canonical gospels, were long known, as well as their poetic interpretations of the apocryphal gospels (*The Gospel of Pseudo-Jacob* and *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*), written at the end of the third century. These writings nourished the believers and enriched the liturgical life of the Church, which took over their information, transposing them into the liturgical texts of these feasts.

If, until the Synod of Ephesus, the feasts celebrated by the Church brought to light the Mystery of Easter and the Feast of Christmas, during the Feast of the Epiphany³², what corresponded to the teaching of the first two Ecumenical Councils that dogmatized on the Deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit, after 431, returning to the mysteries of Jesus' childhood and His Mother, the Church instituted a series of feasts that explain the mystery of Incarnation. After the Synod of Ephesus, both the teaching of the Synods, as well as the popular and patristic literature played a providential role,

³² Until the 4th century the Birth of Christ (as manifestation of God the Father through the Incarnation of His Son) and Baptism (manifestation of God through the manifestation of the Holy Trinity) were celebrated together on January 6, usually kept to this day by Copts and Armenians.

namely to complete the feast of Christ's divinity with that of His humanity. Thus, the liturgical year develops, as a whole, the course of all aspects of Incarnation, emphasizing both the Divinity of the Son and His humanity. Within these aspects related to the divine-human nature of the Saviour, the teaching about the Mother of God has a fundamental role, which also contributed to the development of the Feasts dedicated to her.

The feast of Annunciation is thus the earliest of the Virgin Mary's feasts, confirmed in the documents. It is known that, as early as the fourth or fifth century, a church was built in Nazareth, on the place where there was the house of Theothokos when she received the news from the angel that she would give birth to the divine Child³³. In honour of this feast, the great preachers of the fifth century left us famous panegyrics as following: Proclus, Archbishop of Constantinople (†446)³⁴, Basil bishop of Seleucia³⁵ and Peter Chrysologus, bishop of Ravenna³⁶.

Since the 5th century, the Annunciation was celebrated in the East and the West on different dates. Thus, some celebrated it on the eve of Epiphany, on January 5th. Another tradition, a historical one, respecting the months in which Mary carried her baby to her breast, linked the idea of the Annunciation to Epiphany (January 6), and thus set the date of the feast on April 7. Today the Armenian Church is celebrating the Feast of Annunciation on this date.

Christians in the West, Spain, Gaul and Milan celebrated the Feast of Annunciation on December 18, which is kept until today in the Galician and Mozarabic rites, for the feast of the Virgin Mary, under the name of *Genetricis Dei dies*. The Christians of the East also chose this solution. In this sense, in the Mozarabic calendar, the Annunciation is celebrated during Advent, that is, during the Christmas fasting; in the Syrian calendar, the feasts are worshiped on two Sundays before Christmas, and Nestorians dedicated even four Sundays before the Feast, these Sundays being also called today the Annunciation Sundays³⁷.

³³ About this church see A. LEGENDRE, "Nazareth", in: *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, t. IV, part. 2, Paris, 1928, col. 1527 ș.u.

³⁴ PROCLU AL CONSTANTINOPOLULUI, *Oratio de laudibus S. Mariae*, in: *PG LXV*, 679 ș.u.

³⁵ VASILE AL SELEUCIEI, *Oratio XXXIX, In santissimae Deiparae Annuntiationem*, in: *PG LXXXV*, 425 ș.u.

³⁶ PETRU CHRYSOLOGUL, arhiepiscopul Ravenei, in: *PL LIV*, 508 ș.u., quoted by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 191.

³⁷ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 33.

One of the oldest traditions dating from the third century considers the Annunciation, Crucifixion and the Making of the world as the three united elements in the history of the human salvation, the feast being celebrated on March 25th³⁸.

Taking the Feast of Nativity as starting point, that is to say observing the months when the Mother of Lord carried Christ in her womb, we reach the date of the Feast on the 25th of March. This is the date finally adopted as the date of the Feast, by both Christians in Byzantium and those in the West. A first testimony on the feast of the Annunciation on March 25 is found in the *homily* of Bishop Abraham of Ephesus, in the sixth century, a homily uttered with certainty on March 25³⁹.

The reason for these differences with regard to the date of Annunciation must be found in the theological speculations of the fourth century, which were not based on the same arguments regarding the calculation of the feast date, which gave rise to these multitudes of traditions⁴⁰.

In Rome, the Feast was introduced by Pope Leo II, of Sicilian origin and of Greek culture (681-683). At the beginning it was a local feast named: *The Feast of Nativity Expectation (Faestum Expectationis Partus Beatae Mariae Virginis)*. The variation on the date of Annunciation celebration lasted in the West until the 11th century, when the day of March 25th was widespread throughout the Western world⁴¹.

According to some Western liturgists, the feast of Annunciation is mentioned in Rome for the first time in *liber pontificalis* of pope Serge (687-702). Originally from the East, he was the one who established the date March 25 and also a procession from St. Peter's Basilica to the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, a privileged place to honour the Virgin Mary before the dogma was promulgated by the Synod of Ephesus (431)⁴².

In the East, however, March 25 probably became widespread as soon as the Nativity of our Lord began to be celebrated everywhere on December 25, that is, from the first half of the 5th century onwards. The liturgical difficulties were solved by the Quinisext Council (in Trullo, 692), which

³⁸ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 33.

³⁹ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 34.

⁴⁰ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 34.

⁴¹ Details at F. CABROL, "Fête de l'Assomtion", in: *Dictionnaire d'Arheologie Chretienne et de la Liturgie*, t. I, 1903, col. 2241 ș.u. and V. BUTKUS, *Festum Anuntiationis Beatae Mariae Virginis*, Roma, 1961, pp. 10-86.

⁴² Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 34.

authorized the celebration of the Annunciation during the Great Lent, even if this feast coincides with the Great Friday or Easter Sunday. Since then, this feast is celebrated on March 25 in both the West and the Byzantine East⁴³.

Only in Armenia the Annunciation is celebrated until today in relation to the old date of the feast of Lord's Nativity (January 6), that is, April 7⁴⁴.

The Feast of Dormition

On August 15 we celebrate the feast of Dormition. *Dormition* ('*Ἡ Κοίμησις τῆς Θεότοκου*, *Uspenia*) or *Falling Asleep* is the feast that celebrates the dormition of Holy Virgin. Following a pious old tradition, first known in the West and then later in the East, three days after she fell asleep, the Blessed Virgin would have been translated with her body to Heaven, like her Godly Son⁴⁵. That is why, in the West, in the newer times this feast was named *Assumptio Beatae Mariae Virginis*, that is Translation to Heaven of Virgin Mary⁴⁶. The Western tradition identifies the two moments, by analogy with the Ascension of the Lord ("Ascension").

However, in the Orthodox tradition, a certain distinction is kept between the moment of dormition which was visible, and the moment of "translating her body to heaven", spent secretly and revealed later.

In the New Testament we do not encounter any testimony of how Mary left this world to enter into the glory of her Son.

Therefore, the only historical source of the Dormition mystery remains the tradition of the first centuries and the faith of the first Christians, which has been transmitted from generation to generation and has found its

⁴³ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 34.

⁴⁴ According to an old tradition, especially in the West, the day of March 25 was also regarded as a date of the Lord's death, being inscribed in the old Sacramentaries with the name of *Anuntiatio Sanctae Mariae et Passio Domini*. (See Placide BRUYLANTS, *Les Oraisons du Missel Romain*, vol. I, Louvain, 1952, p. 89).

⁴⁵ Tradition consecrated in *Istoria Bisericii* by Nichifor Callist, II, 21, and XV, 14, in: *PG CXLV*, 809 ș.u., and *CXVII*, 44, apud Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 190. See also the worship books (see *Mineiul pe August*, day 15, Matins, Sinaxarul, p. 186-188). In 1950, the pious legend was decreed dogma in the Roman Catholic Church.

⁴⁶ See also Pr. M. PĂSLARU, "Sărbătoarea «Adormirii Maicii Domnului». Vechimea ei și locul unde se află mormântul Sfintei Fecioare Maria", in: *Glasul Bisericii*, 1960 7-8, p. 585 ș.u.

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expression in the apocryphal accounts. The Fathers of the Church used these stories, but from the beginning they ignored the picturesque elements of popular piety, to deepen the theological elements. There is a certain fact (given) that all the Holy Fathers of the Church have accepted: the fact that the Mother of God fell asleep in Jerusalem and was buried in the garden of Gethsemane.

The folk tales are unanimous regarding the dormition and burial of the Virgin, a proof that their authors have based on a strong tradition. However, there is no tradition regarding her stay on Mount Zion and the date of her fall asleep.

In the opinion of modern historians⁴⁷, the problem of the Blessed Mother's moving from this world began to arise since the end of the second century. During this period, piety to Theotokos began to develop, as evidenced by the testimony of Saint Irenaeus and the paintings in the catacombs. The first references are from Pseudo-Melito, a late apocryphal, who protested against Leucius (2nd century), a Gnostic author of apostle John's life, written in the form of a fabulous story and without theological value. This shows us that the Gnostic circles had begun to spread an account of the Virgin's fall as early as the second century.

The oldest account called *Fragment Wright* and from Cothenet⁴⁸ from the beginning of the third century, shows that this literature is related to an older genre, namely the apocalypse of the apostles dependent on the Jewish apocalypse. This manuscript describes the passing of the Virgin Mary to the life beyond. Her body is taken from the tomb and carried by angels to heaven under the tree of life.

Pseudo-Melito includes the normal dormition of Theotokos at the end of her life. Near the tomb of His Mother, Christ appears surrounded by angels, addressing the Apostles gathered around the tomb and reminding them the promise that on the day of His coming⁴⁹, they will sit on the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. So, they, who are His Church, must decide on the honour that is due to His Mother. Then Peter and the other apostles say:

⁴⁷ J. GALOT s. j. "Le mystère de l'Assomption", *Maria*, VII, p. 163, quoted by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 52.

⁴⁹ The Second Coming of the Saviour Christ.

“Lord, You have chosen Your servant to be Your most pure dwelling ... We, Your servants, believe that it is appropriate that, after you have overcome death, you reign in glory, to revive the body of Your Mother and to take her happy with You, in heaven”⁵⁰.

This tradition seems to be questioned by the testimony of Saint Epiphanius, who spent most of his life in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem and died in 403. He knew the various hypotheses that circulated in his time regarding the passing of the Virgin Mary from earth to heaven and without rejecting any, he expressed his reserve:

“I do not say that she remains immortal, but I do not decide that she died ... In fact, no one knows what her end was”⁵¹. He says that the scripture kept silent the end of the Virgin Mary “the supernatural greatness of the wonder, so as not to overwhelm the human mind”⁵².

Dormition and burial could have hinted that the Theotokos would have known the ruin of the tomb and that her body would not have remained untouched during earthly life. For Saint Epiphanius, “the supernatural greatness of the wonder” was the undeniable proof of the ever-virginity of the Theotokos, on the other hand⁵³.

The Dormition of the Virgin is the oldest feast dedicated to her. The first feast of the Theotokos, “the commemoration of the Virgin Mary”, had a general character and was mainly linked to *theotokia* of the Theotokos. In Constantinople, this feast was celebrated from the beginning of the 5th century, on December 25 or the next day, being associated with the Nativity of our Lord. Its purpose was thus to worship the Mother of the Incarnate Word. Also, in Jerusalem this feast was called “the Day of Mary *Theotokos*”, being fixed on August 15, however. The place of the feast was “the church of Kathism”, of the “fortress of the Virgin Mary”, on the road to Bethlehem, where, according to Jacob’s Protoevangelion, Mary had rested⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ PSEUDO-MELITON AL SARADESULUI, *De transitu Virginis Mariae*, cap. XVI C., in: *PG* V,1238.

⁵¹ EPIFANIE AL SALAMINEI, *Contra hereses*, 78, 11, 24, in: *PG* XLII, 716, 737.

⁵² J. GALOT, “Le mystère de l’Assomption”, *Maria*, VII, p. 163, quoted by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 52.

⁵³ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 52.

⁵⁴ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 55.

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The tradition of Mary's house in the garden of Ghetsimani was lost after the destruction of the old altars by the Persians, and here the role of the apocrypha intervenes. All point to the valley of Jehoshaphat as the place of her tomb. With the reconstruction of St. Mary church, its location was connected to the place of her tomb, while the house of the Dormition was located on Mount Zion, where was also the Feast of the Last Supper. In this evolution, the apocryphals played an important role because they showed the significance of the tomb in Gethsemane and determined its honour⁵⁵.

The theme of the liturgical order during the procession to the tomb of the Holy Mother was the Theotokos' depart from this world. Thus, the emphasis of the feast is on dormition, even if the central idea is the heavenly glory of the Virgin Mary. The Byzantine world retained the name Dormition (κοίμησις) until today.

As for the Holy Fathers' homilies for the Feast of Virgin Mary's Dormition, we must point out that among the oldest is the metric one, composed by Jacob of Serugh (451-521) in the Syrian language. He describes the Virgin Mary's tomb on the Mount of Olives in a supernatural light that surrounds angels and people⁵⁶. Jacob of Serugh is silent about her resurrection and exaltation of her body to heaven⁵⁷.

After the Synod of Ephesus, which focused its attention on the special worthiness of the Virgin Mary with regard to her assuming Christ's conception, from this moment she becomes Theotokos, that is, the Birth-Giver of God, the Christian godliness is faced with the following question: what happened to the Mother of God's body after Dormition?

The sermon uttered in 566 by Theodosius, the monophysite patriarch of Alexandria also belongs to this category. For Theodosius, the doctrinal term of Mary's final glory is in her *virginity* and in her *theotokia*. Thus, Mary's body is presented to the heavenly King accompanied by virgins, allegorically interpreted as virtues and good deeds. And Christ can tell the Father: "My mother came to you clothed in her good ornaments"⁵⁸. When Christ offers the soul of His Mother to the Father and the Holy Spirit, the

⁵⁵ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 55.

⁵⁶ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 56.

⁵⁷ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 53.

⁵⁸ TEODOSIE AL ALEXANDRIEI, quoted by J. GALOT, "La mystere de L Assomtion", in: *Maria*, VII, p. 178, by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 56.

mystery of her motherhood is invoked as an intimate connection with the whole Trinity: because the divine nature of Christ became flesh in His Mother, she bore the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

“Good Father, receive the soul of my most beloved Mother, the one in the world who has received Your Only-begotten Son. Receive the holy temple, which was the dwelling place of Your Holy Spirit, the unity of Your divinity. Receive, my good Father, the burning bush that has received the fire of your divinity in itself and has not been consumed”⁵⁹.

And as Jesus resurrects His Mother, she appears as the dwelling place of His Son in both soul and body. “Get up from your bed, holy body, which you have been my temple, take this soul that has been for me daily ark”⁶⁰. But Mary receives this glory not only for herself, but also for the salvation of the universe. This glory is justified by her intercession for all of us. Theodosius ends his word in this way: “You will find her constantly going to her Emperor and Son”⁶¹. Thus, for Theodosius, divine motherhood is not the ultimate reason for the Virgin Mary’s moving to heaven, but it is fulfilled by sharing the salvation of the whole world through her.

Another homily at the Feast of Dormition is that of Teotecnus, Bishop of Libya in Palestine. Since this episcopacy disappeared during the Arab invasion around 650, we can place Teotecnus between 550 and 650.

Teotecnus begins his homily by evoking the joy that Lord’s Resurrection bring in the souls of Christians. The miracle takes place “after the resurrection from the dead and the Ascension into heaven and the stay at the right side”. Therefore, to a certain extent and taking into account her condition as a creature, there is an analogy between the life of the Virgin Mary and the mysteries of Christ’s life. The glorification of the

⁵⁹ TEODOSIE AL ALEXANDRIEI, quoted by J. GALOT, “La mystere de L Assomtion”, in: *Maria*, VII, p. 179; Panégyrique pour l’Assomption, 6, Éd. Wenger, p. 274, by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 57.

⁶⁰ TEODOSIE AL ALEXANDRIEI, quoted by J. GALOT, “La mystere de L Assomtion”, in: *Maria*, VII, p. 179; Panégyrique pour l’Assomption, 6, Éd. Wenger, p. 321, by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 57.

⁶¹ TEODOSIE AL ALEXANDRIEI, quoted by J. GALOT, “La mystere de L Assomtion”, in: *Maria*, VII, p. 179; Panégyrique pour l’Assomption, 6, Éd. Wenger, p. 314, by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 57.

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Virgin Mary is thus modelled after that of her Son. This perspective shows that the significance of the Resurrection and the Ascension of Christ must be found in an analogous way in the ascension of the Virgin Mary with her body to heaven. The glorification of Christ therefore remains at the centre of salvation and is prolonged in that of His Mother.

Teotecnus' arguments are based on the principle of Virgin Mary's theotokia. He postulated a glorification not only spiritual but also material:

“It was fitting that her most holy body, the body that bore God, the body that received God, the deified, and incorruptible body, illuminated by divine light and full of glory, should be worn by the apostles, accompanied by angels, entrusted to a little while to the earth and raised to heaven in glory together with the soul pleasing to God”⁶².

Teotecnus emphasizes that Divine motherhood places the Mother of God above all creatures, above all the apostles and the people of the Old Testament, because of her perfect purity and holiness. “She, the most holy and the most beautiful, the most blessed, worthy of all joy; mother and virgin, most pure and spotless”⁶³.

Regarding the virginity of the Theotokos, Teotecnus shows that the Lord “took body from a virgin; Mary's breast bore her fruit and her virginity did not get old”⁶⁴. Her body “remaining virgin” could not be subjected to damage in the grave. And finally, the sublime reason of Mary's virgin holiness is based on the union of her being with the persons of the Trinity⁶⁵. In this union she received the fullness of the divine goodwill, which binds her forever to her divine motherhood.

Mary's holiness, the privilege of being the “Mother of God” and the resemblance between her ascension with her body to heaven and the glorification of Christ cannot be regarded as merely miracles performed by God for the benefit of His Son's Mother. The virgin participates in

⁶² TEOTECN, “Panegyrique” 9, *Maria*, p. 276, quoted by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 57.

⁶³ TEOTECN, “Panegyrique” 9, *Maria*, p. 5, p. 274, quoted by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 58.

⁶⁴ TEOTECN, “Panegyrique” 9, *Maria*, p. 32, p. 288, quoted by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 58.

⁶⁵ Union not existential, but participatory though the grace of Her Son.

the movement of divine love for the salvation of men. She is one of its manifestations. Thus, by moving to heaven with the body, Mary becomes the instrument of this love: “The Mother of the Lord has gone to heaven as a mediator of all. And because God listens to her, she brings us spiritual gifts”⁶⁶.

This intercession of the Virgin does not consist only of interventions in favour of the people, but she plays an essential role, as mediator of all graces: we receive the life of grace through her, first assured by the illumination of faith, then by love for God and neighbour, and supported mainly by the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

As can easily be observed, the authors of the homilies express a simple, perhaps elementary, but solid and complete theology, in which they expose the substance of the faith in Theotokos’ ascension to heaven with her body and highlight the dimensions of the mystery.

Starting with the eighth century, we can find the most numerous testimonies in the Byzantine Church, released by the apocryphal stories, and the richest theological reflections. The great preachers and theologians of this era developed the ideas of the preceding centuries and left a large number of homilies on the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. There are famous people like: St. Germanos of Constantinople (†740), St. John of Damascus (†749), St. Theodor the Studite (†826), George of Nicomidia († after 880).

The hymnographic creations of the great Byzantine composers are added to these homilies: Cosmas the Melodist († after 743), author of a Dormition canon, and St. John Graptus (†845), author of the Vigil hymns.

According to historian Nikephoros Kallistos (†around 1328), the Byzantine emperor Mauricius (582-602) set the feast day of Dormition on August 15 following the tradition in Jerusalem. In fact, Emperor Mauricius rebuilt the Church of Our Lady in Gethsemane.

In Syria the feast certainly existed in the fifth century⁶⁷. Its place of origin is probably Jerusalem, because in the old Georgian Synaxaria, the day of August 15th was the annual anniversary of the consecration of Virgin Mary Church built in the 5th century by Ikelia Romana, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, near the place where Rachel’s tomb was and

⁶⁶ TEOTECN, “Panegyrique” 9, *Maria*, pp. 31-32, p. 288, quoted by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 58.

⁶⁷ See FUNK-BIHLMEYER, *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, VI, Aufl., Paderborn, 1911, p. 238, quoted by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 188.

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where, according to tradition, the Blessed Virgin stopped, shortly before the Saviour's Birth⁶⁸.

In the eighth century, Saint Cosmas the Melodist and Saint John of Damascus composed the two canons that are sung at the Matins of the Feast, both mirroring the spirit of the respective era.

In the West the feast is mentioned for the first time as early as the sixth century, at Saint Gregory, the Bishop of Tours, († 593 or 594)⁶⁹, although the Dormition was celebrated there on January 18th, and elsewhere on January 15th⁷⁰. In the beginning, in the West, the feast bears the name "Dormition", but, a century later, during Pope Sergius I, (687-702), which was of Syrian origin, the name is changed to *Asomptiune* (translation to heaven of Theotokos' body). The change happened, of course, because the West considered the translation of the Virgin Mary body to heaven, preceded by the resurrection, as the main object of the new feast, the death passing in the secondary plane.

In the Galican Church, on the contrary, the term "Dormition" was kept, because neither in the Holy Scripture nor in the Holy Tradition was there any basis, the only affirmations in this sense being found in the apocryphal writings.

In the 9th century two writings circulated, one attributed to the Blessed Jerome, the other to the Blessed Augustine. These were the two currents circulating in the West at that time, they were considered authentic until the modern era. Jerome, without denying the resurrection of the Virgin Mary's body, questions it and presents it as a simple pious faith. Augustine, on the contrary, cannot accept that Mary's virgin body had known the ruin of the tomb.

In the tenth century, the holiday acquires more and more splendour in the West.

Towards the fifteenth century, the feast of Assumptio is celebrated with splendour and plays an important role in the Western popular godliness.

⁶⁸ Dr. A. BAUMSTARK, *Liturgie comparée*, III-e éd., revue par B. Botte O.S.B., Chevenotogne, 1953, pp. 209-210.

⁶⁹ Sfântul GRIGORIE, episcopul de Tours, *In gloria Martyrum, Miracula*, I, 4 and 9 in: *PL*, XXXI, 708-713.

⁷⁰ For example, *Misalul* (Liturghierul) of Bobbio and *Missale Gallicanum* indicates January 13. See L. USPENSKII, "Adormirea Prea Sfintei Născătoare de Dumnezeu" (în limba rusă), in: *Jurnal Moskovskoi Patriarhii*, 1974, nr. 8, p. 77-78, quoted by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 189.

The feast was generalized a little later by Pope Theodore I (642-649), who was of Jerusalem origin⁷¹ and which imposed the date of August 15, as in the East.

Only Christians in Gaul and Egyptian Copts celebrate Dormition on the old date (January 18)⁷².

III. Conclusions

1. In the 4th century there was already a cult of the Mother of God in the Church, a fact proved by the laudatory speeches and homilies addressed to the Mother of God, uttered by the great Fathers of this century.

2. The cult of the Mother of God, existing since the beginning of the Christian life in the Church, experienced an explosive development in the first half of the 5th century, due to the dyoprosopism of Nestorius. The Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned the heresy of Nestorius, formulating the Orthodox teaching about the Mother of God, by emphasizing the two major qualities of the Mother of God, according to which she deserves honour or super-veneration. These two qualities of the Theotokos are her θεοτοκία, that is, the fact she gave birth to God in flesh and her απαρτενία, that is, her ever-virginity or holiness. In the fifth century, after the Synod of Ephesus, both the teaching of the Synods and popular and patristic literature played a providential role, namely, that of completing the celebration of Christ's divinity with that of His humanity. Thus, the liturgical year becomes unfolding of all aspects of the Incarnation, as a whole.

3. As in the case of the other saints, the veneration of the Mother of God in the worship of the Church was manifested, from the beginning, through several forms or ways of expression. Among them, the first one of importance is the establishment of certain feasts or days during the Church

⁷¹ Dr. A. BAUMSTARK, *Liturgie Comparee*, p. 210. Details at F. CABROL, "Fête de l'Assomption", in: *Dictionnaire d'Arheologie Catolique et de la Liturgie*", t. I, col. 2996-3001; B. CAPELLE, "Fête de l'Assomption dans l'histoire liturgique", in: *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, III (1926), pp 33-45; A. RAËS, "Aux origines de la fête de l'Assomption", in: *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, (Roma), XII (1946), pp. 262-274.

⁷² See also A. RAËS, *Aux origines de la fête de l'Assomption en Orient*, OCP, XII (1946), pp. 262-274; B. CAPELLE, "La fête de la Vierge à Jérusalem au V-e siècle", in: *Muséon*, LVI (1943), pp. 1-33.

year, dedicated to her special remembrance and honour. These feasts of the Theotokos are considered among the Royal Feasts.

4. The Blessed Virgin is especially celebrated several times during the Church year, with feasts that honour not only her Dormition, but also some other important moments in her life, such as her Nativity, her Presentation to the Temple or the Annunciation received from the archangel Gabriel.

5. One of these Feasts, the Annunciation, although considered between the feasts of the Mother of God, actually refers to the person of the Saviour Christ, being the celebration of the day of His incarnation or conception with a human body for our salvation. This fact shows that her honour is closely connected with that of her Son, Jesus Christ. In fact, the oldest feasts of the Mother of God appear at first as feasts of the Saviour.

7. The cult of the Mother of God is long before the Church establishes feasts dedicated to her special honour.

8. Among the Feasts of the Mother of God, only the Annunciation is based on a historical event recorded in Holy Scripture (Luke 1: 26-38). The others are based on facts from the life of the Blessed Virgin that the canonical gospels do not write anything about, being preserved by tradition, some of them recorded only in the non-canonical or apocryphal gospels. The homilies of the Holy Fathers of the Church, both in the East and in the West, also demonstrate the generalization of the Theotokos cult in the Church, being an expression of the honour that Christians have given to the Holy Mother over time.

9. In the West, where the Theotokos cult will take on even greater development than in the East, none of these four feasts is known before the seventh century, when Christians in this part of Christendom adopted all the rules of Byzantium Church.