

TEO ISSN 2247-4382
101 (4), pp. 147-161, 2024

The Nativity of the Theotokos as the Beginning of the World's Salvation, Reflected in the Hymnography of the Feast on September 8

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Abstract

This study discusses the Nativity of the Theotokos as the beginning of the world's salvation, as this theological concept is reflected in the hymnography of the Feast on September 8. The introduction presents historical background concerning the origins and development of the Feast. The second and most extensive part of the study focuses on the hymnography of this Feast, emphasizing the theological ideas embedded within it, which highlight the Virgin Mary's birth as the initial act of humanity and the world's salvation. The final section examines the Troparion and the Kontakion of the Feast, which most appropriately summarize the hymnographic content related to the Nativity of the Theotokos as the inception of the world's salvation.

Keywords

Nativity, Theotokos, beginning, salvation, world, hymnography, Feast

I. Introductory Concepts. Historical Considerations on the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos

The Nativity of the Theotokos (τὸ γενέθλιον τῆς Θεοτόκου in Greek, *Nativitas Beatae Mariae Virginis* in Latin, *Rojdestvo Bogoroditsy* in Slavonic), commonly referred to as “Little Saint Mary” in popular tradition, is celebrated annually on September 8.

The first documented mention of this Feast can be found in the apocryphal text *The Protoevangelium of James*. This text elaborates on the childhood of the Mother of God and briefly describes her birth: “After nine months, Anna gave birth. And she asked the midwife, ‘What have I brought into the world?’ The midwife replied, ‘A girl.’ And Anna said, ‘My soul has been magnified this day.’ She placed the child in a cradle, and, when the days appointed by law had passed, Anna cleansed herself, nursed the child, and named her Mary”¹.

Other later apocryphal texts add further details about the Virgin Mary’s birth, though these accounts often contain contradictory information, such as disagreements about the exact location of her birth².

According to the monk Epiphanius³, Nazareth, the hometown of Joachim, is identified as the Virgin’s birthplace. This is also supported by Saint John Chrysostom⁴.

However, Saint Cyril of Alexandria suggests that Bethlehem, the city of Anna, Mary’s mother, is the actual birthplace⁵.

Other authors consider Jerusalem as the location of the Nativity⁶, an opinion seemingly supported by the existence of a church dedicated to

¹ “Protoevangelia lui Iacob”, V, 2, in: *Evanghelii apocrife*, translation, introductory study, notes and presentations by Cristian Bădiliță, revised 3rd edition, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2002, p. 37.

² Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, Editura Sofia, București, 2008, p. 19.

³ EPIFANIE MONAHUL, PG 120, 189, quoted by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 19.

⁴ Sfântul IOAN GURĂ DE AUR, PG 49, 354, quoted by Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 19.

⁵ See Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 19.

⁶ Sfântul SOFRONIE AL IERUSALIMULUI, PG 87, 3821, Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 19.

Saint Anne near the Pool of Bethesda. Eastern sources mention a dedication called *Dedicatio probaticae ecclesiae Deiparae*, referring to the mission fulfilled by Joachim and Anne, through the birth of the Mother of God, from whom Christ the Savior would come. This place, known as *Ecclesiae Deiparae* in Jerusalem, is the church built between 430 and 480 on the site traditionally believed to have been the home of Saints Joachim and Anne. The church was destroyed twice: first by the Persians in 614 and later by the Arabs in 638. It was also during this period that the date of the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos was established as September 8, the date of its consecration⁷. This church still stands today, having been rebuilt on the ruins of the one destroyed by the Persians and Arabs. The crypt of this church, believed to be the home of Joachim and Anne, remains a site of pilgrimage.

From Jerusalem, the Celebration of the Nativity of the Theotokos was adopted in the 7th Century in Constantinople, through Saint Andrew, Archbishop of Crete, who was of Jerusalemite origin, the Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God spread from Jerusalem to Constantinople in the 7th century⁸.

According to Joseph Bryennios, the Nativity of the Theotokos is the “first feast of the year”, while her Dormition is “the last of all feasts” because the year “appropriately begins with the birth of the Sovereign Lady and ends with her ascension to heaven”⁹.

Some historians interpret the establishment of this feast as a response by the Church to the cults of Ishtar, Isis, and Astarte, the pagan matriarchal deities who had taken over the Holy Places in the 7th century¹⁰. The celebration of these pagan deities occurred on September 8. The victory of Christ over Satan and his servants, the pagans, was also fulfilled through Mary, the Mother of God, who carried Christ in her womb and gave birth to the Savior. Thus, the Christian faithful replaced the worship of these pagan

⁷ Dr. A. BAUMSTARK, *Liturgie comparee*, ed. III, revue par B. Botte, OSB, Chevetogne, 1953, p. 210.

⁸ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥ ΦΙΛΙΑ, Οι Θεμητορικες εορτες στην λατρεα της Εκκλησιας, Ed. Γρηγορη, Atena, 2014, pp. 45-47.

⁹ Iosif Vriennios, quoted by IEROTHEOS, Mitropolit al Nafpaktosului, *Praznicele Maicii Domnului. O perspectivă istorică și teologică*, Editura Bonifaciu, 2019, p. 72.

¹⁰ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 20.

deities with the veneration of the Holy Virgin Mary, who bore Christ, who triumphed over the power of darkness and the devil.

The Feast of the *Nativity of the Theotokos* is also observed in the calendars of the Eastern heterodox churches that separated from the Orthodox Church after the Fourth Ecumenical Council, such as the Egyptian Copts (who celebrate it on May 9)¹¹, as well as among the Syrian Jacobites. Since these groups adopted very little from the Orthodox after their separation from the early Christian Church, the Feast was evidently already familiar to them before this division. Consequently, the origin of this feast can be placed between the Third Ecumenical Council (431) and the Fourth Ecumenical Council (451), councils that played a fundamental role in defining Orthodox teachings about the Mother of God¹².

Although established early, the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos did not initially have a universal character, being primarily celebrated in Palestine, and especially in Jerusalem. As a result, even in the 9th century, it had not yet been officially or canonically recognized throughout the entire Christian Church.

Regarding the service of the Feast and its hymnographic compositions, Saint Roman the Melodist in the 6th century drew inspiration from apocryphal accounts of Mary's childhood to compose the Kontakion and Ikos for the Matins service of the Nativity.

The Matins service also features two Canons attributed to John the Monk, likely Saint John of Damascus († 749), and Andrew of Crete († 740)¹³. Saint Andrew of Crete also delivered four sermons in honor of this feast¹⁴. These texts, dating from the iconoclastic period when the veneration of the Mother of God was contested, served an apologetic role, defending her cult against detractors.

¹¹ 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.

¹² See also Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 1993, p. 191.

¹³ The Greek text can be found in PG 97, 1315-1330, translated into Romanian in the *Menaion for September* day 8, Matins.

¹⁴ Sfântul ANDREI CRITEANUL, PG 97, 805-882, quoted by Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 192.

In the West, the Feast of the Theotokos was first celebrated in Gaul around the year 630. Officially, it was introduced by Pope Sergius I (687–701), under the influence of Constantinople. In Rome, the feast became known only by the late 7th century¹⁵. However, its generalization throughout the Western Church took place much later, during the 9th-10th centuries¹⁶.

The day following the Nativity of the Theotokos, on September 9, is dedicated to the *Synaxis* (commemoration) of *Saints Joachim and Anna*, her parents. This commemoration honors the couple through whom the Holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, came into the world.

II. The Nativity of the Theotokos as the Beginning of the World's Salvation, Reflected in the Feast's Hymnography

The liturgical text of the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos elaborates a profound Marian and Christological theology. This study seeks to briefly capture some theological aspects that present the Nativity of the Virgin Mary as the beginning of the world's salvation.

1. The Birth of the Virgin as the Beginning of the World's Salvation

The salvation of humanity became possible through the miraculous Birth of Christ from the Virgin Mother. The hymnography of the Nativity Feast emphasizes this point: "When You, O Master, willed to clothe Yourself with human nature, You allowed that Your Mother be born from one who was barren, O Lord"¹⁷. This indicates that the Birth of the Mother of God was not random but occurred precisely when God determined to fulfill His eternal plan for humanity's salvation. Therefore, from the very birth of the Child Mary, we glimpse the beginning of God's salvific work and His divine economy's realization for humanity. Saint Epiphanius of

¹⁵ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, p. 20.

¹⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, *Liturgica Generală*, p. 192.

¹⁷ *Menaion for September*, day 11, Matins, at the Stichera, stichera 2, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2003, p. 166.

Salamis speaks about the Mother of God's role in the work of salvation through the conception and birth of Christ, the Savior, highlighting:

“Through you, humans became angels; through you, humans were called friends and servants and sons of God; through you, humans were made worthy to be co-servants and companions of the angels... through you, people have boldness before the Most High in heaven... through you, death was trampled, and Hades was plundered; through you, we have known the Only-Begotten Son of God”¹⁸.

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas further emphasizes that the Virgin Mother revealed God and His immense love for humanity:

“She alone, among all people from the ages, stood against evil from the beginning to the end, restored to God the untainted beauty He had given us, and used all the power and all the arms bestowed upon her... She revealed God and His ineffable wisdom and His profound love for mankind”¹⁹.

In this sense, the stichera of the Little Vespers of the Feast proclaim the nearness of salvation, saying: “Today, from Anna, like a divinely planted flower, the Mother of God, the salvation of humanity, has blossomed, from whom the Creator of all, being born beyond thought, cleanses all the corruption of Adam with His goodness”²⁰. This text emphasizes that the Mother of God is called “the Theotokos”, a title that has deeply permeated patristic theology since the earliest Christian centuries. While early patristic theology affirmed that Christ, the Son of

¹⁸ Sfântul EPIFANIE DE SALAMINA, “Cuvânt de laudă al celui între sfinți Părintelui nostru Epifanie, episcopul cetății Constanția din Cipru, la Sfânta Născătoare de Dumnezeu”, in: *Omilii*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2012, p.122.

¹⁹ Sfântul NICOLAE CABASILA, “Cuvânt la Preaslăvita naștere a Preaslăvitei Doamnei noastre de Dumnezeu Născătoarea de preînțeleptul și prea eruditul și între toți preasfântul domn Nicolae Cabasila-Chamaetos”, in: *Cuvântările teologice: la Iezechiel-Hristos-Fecioara Maria. Scrieri I*, Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2010, p. 183.

²⁰ *Menaion for September*, day 8, Little Vespers, at “Lord, I have Cried”, stichera 2, p. 111

God, entered the world through the Virgin Mary, making her the Mother of God, the term “Theotokos” became firmly established in the patristic literature by the late 4th and early 5th centuries. This was significantly due to the theology of Saint Cyril of Alexandria and later writings by other Church Fathers.

The Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos is rich in liturgical texts that highlight how the birth of Christ, the Son of God, from the womb of the All-Pure Mother unravels the bonds of the disobedience of our forebears, Adam and Eve. One such hymn declares: “The daughter of Joachim and Anna, the Virgin, has appeared as the release of all people from the bonds of sin”²¹. Another text proclaims: “The shadowy mountain indeed has revealed itself as the barrenness of Anna, through whom the salvation of all the faithful is given”²².

Saint Nicholas Cabasilas beautifully articulates that through the birth of the Virgin Mary from the righteous Joachim and Anna, the Son of God prepared His Mother, from whom He would take human nature. He writes:

“...blessed couple (Joachim and Anna), who were deemed worthy for God to use you in the most excellent, greatest, most wondrous work, and one of the utmost benefit to all ages: for taking from you His Mother, God clothed Himself in flesh and was born among humans... God used you as instruments or collaborators, or whatever better term must be used, in His love for humanity, when He desired to bestow this wondrous gift upon the world”²³.

Saint John Damascene emphasizes that the birth of the Virgin brings the breaking of the curse of humanity’s disobedience, conquers the dominion of evil in the world, and restores all goodness. He writes: “Let us celebrate,

²¹ *Menaion for September*, day 8, at the Stichera, stichera 1, p. 111.

²² *Menaion for September*, day 8, at the Stichera, stichera 2, p. 112

²³ Sfântul NICOLAE CABASILAS, “Cuvânt la Preaslăvita naștere a Preaslăvitei Doamnei noastre de Dumnezeu Născătoarea de preaînțeleptul și prea eruditul și între toți preasfântul domn Nicolae Cabasila-chamaetos”, in: *Cuvântările teologice: la Iezechiel-Hristos-Fecioara Maria. Scrieri I*, pp. 176-177.

therefore, the dissolution of human barrenness, for the affliction of all lack of goodness has been undone”²⁴.

The miraculous birth of the Holy Virgin is not an arbitrary act of God’s will that suddenly interrupts the flow of history but should be viewed as a step forward in God’s loving movement toward humanity to bring salvation. It is a mystery that unfolds into a greater mystery, when all creation, through the Theotokos, consents to become the “ark of God, the chamber of the King”. Since the name Mary encompasses the entire history of divine life in the world, her ancestors, from David to Joachim and Anna, are rightly called “the bodily Ancestors of the Lord”²⁵.

The Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God marks a new path for human life because our nature, once earthly and mortal, receives anew the beginning of eternal life, signifying the start of the process of deification²⁶.

2. Breaking the Curse of Adam and Eve’s Disobedience

Other hymnographic texts of the Feast develop themes related to the beginning of the world’s salvation through the birth of the Child Mary. One verse declares: “The All-Pure Virgin and Mother of God, who contained God, the praise of the prophets, the daughter of David, is born today from Joachim and the wise Anna, and the curse of Adam that lay over us has been driven away by her birth”²⁷. The birth of the Virgin brings hope for redemption from Adam and Eve’s sin, which had catastrophic consequences for the entire human race: “The predestined Queen of all, the dwelling place of God, came forth today from the barren womb of Anna; the divine habitation of the eternal essence; through which brazen Hades has been trampled, and Eve, along with all her offspring, is brought to life”²⁸. The same idea is echoed elsewhere: “The Virgin, who contained God, and the

²⁴ Sfântul IOAN DAMASCHIN, “Cuvânt la nașterea Preasfintei Stăpânei noastre de Dumnezeu Născătoare și Pururea-Fecioarei Maria”, în: *Cuvântări la sărbători împărătești, la sărbători ale Maicii Domnului și la Sfinți*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2010, p. 167.

²⁵ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, pp. 22-23.

²⁶ See IEROTHEOS, Mitropolit al Nafaktosului, *Praznicele Maicii Domnului - o perspectivă istorică și teologică*, Editura Bonifaciu, Bacău, 2019, p. 91.

²⁷ *Menaion for September*, day 8, at “Lord, I have cried”, stichera 3, p. 111.

²⁸ *Menaion for September*, day 8, Great Vespers, at the Litia, stichera 4, p. 115.

All-Pure Mother of God, the praise of the prophets, the daughter of David, is born today from Joachim and the wise Anna; and the curse of Adam that lay over us has been removed by her birth”²⁹.

The world’s deliverance from the ancestral curse becomes a cause for celebratory joy: “We celebrate, O All-Pure One, and in faith we bow to your holy birth, for we have been freed from the ancestral curse through Christ, who appeared from you”³⁰. The breaking of the chains of Adam and Eve’s disobedience is also a reason for glorifying this mystery by the Church’s faithful: “What spiritual songs shall we offer you, O All-Pure One? For, after your birth from the barren one, you gave birth to the Word, sanctifying the entire world, unbinding Adam from his chains, and healing Eve from her pains...”³¹.

In other liturgical texts, the mystery of the removal of the ancestral curse is interpreted even more clearly, as the only true reason for the world’s joy: “The Virgin Mary, truly the Mother of God, like a cloud of Light, has shone upon us today and has come forth from the righteous for our praise. Adam will no longer be condemned, for Eve has been loosed from her bonds. Therefore, let us proclaim boldly, addressing the one who is pure: Joy announces your birth to the whole world”³². “Today, Eve is freed from condemnation, and Adam is released from the ancient curse, through your birth, O Most Pure, proclaiming: Through you, we have been saved from corruption”³³.

Thus, the Virgin Mary becomes the New Eve³⁴, who reverses the curse of the first mother into a blessing. Saint Irenaeus of Lyon illustrates the

²⁹ *Menaion for September*, day 7, Vespers, at “Lord, I have Cried”, stichera 3, p. 98.

³⁰ *Menaion for September*, day 8, Matins, Canon II, Ode 7, troparion 2, p. 127.

³¹ *Menaion for September*, day 10, Vespers, at “Lord, I have Cried”, stichera 2, p. 145.

³² *Menaion for September*, Day 8, Matins, Sessional Hymn of the Canon, p. 120.

³³ *Menaion for September*, Day 8, Matins, Canon II, Ode 5, Troparion 4, p. 122.

³⁴ Saint Justin Martyr and Philosopher (†167) was the first to compare the Holy Virgin with Eve, drawing a parallel between the old Eve and the Virgin Mary, just as Origen did (*Apologeti de limbă greacă*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1997, p. 192). Similarly, Saint John of Damascus states that through the birth of the Virgin Mary, all of humankind was reintegrated into its original state, as she turned the sufferings caused by Eve into joy, for she brought the beginning of the world’s salvation (see Diac. Constantin VOICU, “Sfântul Ioan Damaschin, despre Maica Domnului”, in: *Îndrumător bisericesc*, Sibiu, 1971, p. 161).

relationship between the disobedience of the first Eve and the humble obedience of Mary, the second Eve, in this way: "...the fruit of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience. For the bondage into which Eve led us through unbelief was changed into freedom by faith through the Virgin Mary"³⁵. In another place, Saint Irenaeus states: "Just as humanity fell into the bonds of death through a virgin, so too is it saved by a virgin; virginal disobedience being healed by virginal obedience. In the same manner, the sin of the first man created was corrected by the First-Born"³⁶. In another work, Saint Irenaeus writes:

"Since man was struck (by the serpent) through the disobedience of a Virgin, he fell and died, yet through the obedience of the Virgin (Mary), who obeyed the word of God, man rose again and, through Life, received eternal life. He (Jesus) did not have another body except that of this Virgin, who is a descendant of Adam... Adam was recapitulated in Christ, so that what caused death might be swallowed and absorbed by immortality. Eve was recapitulated in Mary, and the Virgin became the advocate of the other virgin, abolishing and nullifying the disobedience of one virgin (Eve) through the obedience of the other"³⁷.

Saint Theodore the Studite offers a theological interpretation of the breaking of Eve's disobedience curse through the birth of the Holy Virgin and the bringing of blessings into the world by conceiving in her virginal womb the Son of God. He writes:

"Once, death entered through our ancestress Eve and took dominion over the world. Now, being struck with blessed dread, it

³⁵ Sfântul IRINEU DE LYON, *Adversus haereses*, III.22.4, PG 7, 960, quoted by Pr. Marius ȚEPELEA, *Mariologia primelor trei secole. Fecioara Maria în Tradiția Bisericii primare*, Editura Emia, Deva, p. 174

³⁶ Sfântul IRINEU DE LYON, *Adversus haereses*, V.19.1, PG 7, 1175, quoted by Pr. Marius ȚEPELEA, *Mariologia primelor trei secole. Fecioara Maria în Tradiția Bisericii primare*, p. 175

³⁷ Sfântul IRINEU DE LYON, *Epideixis*, chap. 33, coll. *Sources Chretiennes*, t. 62, col. 83-87, quoted by Pr. Marius ȚEPELEA, *Mariologia primelor trei secole. Fecioara Maria în Tradiția Bisericii primare*, p. 175.

has been vanquished, driven away from where it had gained its power. Let womankind rejoice, for it has inherited glory instead of disgrace. Let Eve be glad, for she has been freed from the curse and carries Mary, the fruit of blessing. Let all creation rejoice, mysteriously bathed in the waters of the virginal spring that has quenched the thirst for death”³⁸.

By conceiving Christ in her womb, the Virgin lifted the curse cast upon Eve: “When a woman bore Emmanuel in the flesh, who is Life, the strength of the curse was loosed, and with it, the sorrowful birth pains of earthly mothers were annihilated”³⁹. Saint John of Damascus explains how the Theotokos transforms the world from corruption to incorruption through her humble obedience, in contrast to Eve’s ancient disobedience and pride. While the first Eve brought the curse through her disobedience, the Mother of God, the New Eve, brings the breaking of the curse and descends God’s blessing into the world: “If the first Eve became a transgressor of the commandment and thereby death entered, serving the serpent and not her ancestor (Adam), Mary, serving the Divine will and deceiving the deceiving serpent, brought incorruption into the world”⁴⁰.

Saving the world from corruption and death, the Virgin Mary becomes the first daughter of God by grace, for she is the very cause of the world’s salvation, through whom, by grace, we have all become sons of God again. The holy hymnographer states in this sense: “Today, barren Anna gives birth to the daughter of God, the one chosen beforehand from all generations, as a dwelling place for Christ God, the King of all and Creator, fulfilling the divine plan; through whom we mortals have been rebuilt and renewed from corruption unto everlasting life”⁴¹.

³⁸ Sfântul Teodor Studitul, quoted by TEOCLIT DIONISIATUL, *Maica Domnului în teologia și iconografia Sfinților Părinți*, Editura Bizantină, București, 2002, p. 74

³⁹ Sfântul CHIRIL AL ALEXANDRIEI, *Comentar la Sfânta Evanghelie de la Luca*, Editura Pelerinul Român, Oradea, p. 17

⁴⁰ Sfântul IOAN DAMASCHIN, “Cuvânt la nașterea Preasfintei Stăpânei noastre de Dumnezeu Născătoare și Pururea-Fecioarei Maria”, in: *Cuvântări la sărbători împăratești, la sărbători ale Macii Domnului și la Sfinți*, p. 176.

⁴¹ *Menaion for September*, Day 8, Great Vespers, at “Lord, I have cried”, Stichera 6, p. 113.

The birth of the Virgin thus foretells the forgiveness that will be given to humankind and the deliverance from the ancestral curse through the birth of Christ the Savior from her. The liturgical text indicates that through the Virgin's birth, forgiveness was granted to us: "Loosening Anna's bonds of barrenness, the Most Pure Virgin emerged, granting forgiveness to humankind"⁴².

3. The Reopening of the Gates of Heaven and the Collapse of Hell through the Birth of the Virgin Mary

The Birth of the Mother of God thus foretells the beginning of the salvation of humanity, announcing the coming of the Savior, the salvation of mankind, and the reopening of the gates of Heaven. The hymnographic text of the Feast emphasizes this point: "Behold, the holy place of God has shone; the glorious city of the King has been built; the paradise full of rays of light has been opened; that which is the mediator of paradise, and the approach of people toward God"⁴³.

In the vigil service, the Old Testament readings introduce us to the mystery of Mary's life. Thus, in the first Old Testament reading of the Feast, the Virgin Mary is likened to the ladder seen by Jacob in his dream (Genesis 28, 10-17), being the link between heaven and earth. Jacob's ladder reveals the Theotokos, through whose intercession our prayers rise to the Father, pouring out abundant grace. Saint John Damascene explains the mysterious image in which the ladder seen in Jacob's dream prefigures the mystery of the Virgin, who, by the birth of the Son of God, will link heaven and earth, herself taking the place of the ladder:

"...The Word, the creator of all... built Himself the living ladder, whose foundation rests on the earth, and its top reaches to heaven itself, where God rests (whose image Jacob saw), on which God descended unchanged, rather He descended, appeared on earth, and dwelt with people... the thinking ladder, the Virgin, rests on earth; because her birth is earthly. But its top is in heaven"⁴⁴.

⁴² *Menaion for September*, Day 8, at Sticheron, Stichera 3, p. 112.

⁴³ *Menaion for September*, Day 7, Canon of the Forefeast, 9th Ode, Troparion 2, p. 108.

⁴⁴ Sfântul IOAN DAMASCHIN, "Cuvânt la nașterea Preasfintei Stăpânei noastre de

Another reading, the second one is from Ezekiel 43, 27 – 44, 4, and describes the closed gate of the Temple through which only the Lord will pass: another image of the Virgin who will belong entirely to God and through whom He will be revealed to the world. The third reading is taken from the Proverbs of Solomon: the divine Wisdom built a house for herself, which we identify with the Virgin Mary. Justice, truth, and the fear of God unite in her like in a wonderful harmony. Thus, in the Old Testament, the image of the one who would receive the highest dignity ever conferred to a human creature, that of the Mother of God, is already taking shape (Proverbs 7 and 9)⁴⁵.

In another text, the mystery of the salvation of the world through the contribution of the Mother of God and the collapse of the gates of hell through her birth is explained even more profoundly. The liturgical text states: “The most preordained queen of all, the dwelling place of God, from the barren womb of the blessed Anna, today has come forth the divine celebration of the Being who is ever eternal; through her, the shameless hell has been trampled and Eve with all her descendants has been brought to life. To her, let us cry out in worthiness: Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb”⁴⁶. Or in another text, we hear: “The bridge of life is born today, through which people, being lifted from the fall of hell, glorify Christ, the Giver of Life”⁴⁷.

The beginning of the work of salvation for mankind is already anticipated at the birth of the Theotokos, for Christ the Redeemer of the entire human race would be born from her. The role of the Holy Mother in the work of the world's salvation thus lies in the quality she possesses, that of being the Mother of God. In this sense, referring to the role of the Mother of God in the salvation of the world, as the Mother of the Son of God, Saint Maximus the Confessor writes:

Dumnezeu Născătoare și Pururea-Fecioarei Maria”, în: *Cuvântări la sărbători împărătești, la sărbători ale Maicii Domnului și la Sfinți*, p. 170.

⁴⁵ Egon SENDLER, *Icoanele bizantine ale Maicii Domnului*, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁶ *Menaion for September*, Matins, at the “Glory... and Now...”, p. 110.

⁴⁷ *Menaion for September*, September 8, Matins, Canon I, Ode I, Troparion 4, p. 118.

“We confess and venerate the Holy, Most Glorious Virgin in the true and proper sense of being the Mother of God, for she did not become the mother of a mere man... but truly of the Word of God, the One of the Holy Trinity, Who was incarnate from her through an unfathomable conception and became a true man”⁴⁸.

III. Conclusions. The Synthesis of the Theology of the Feast: The Birth of the Virgin Mary as the Beginning of the Salvation of the World, Reflected in the Troparion and Kondakion of the Feast

As in the case of other Great Feasts, the Troparion and Kondakion of the Feast of the Birth of the Mother of God wonderfully summarize the message and theological content of this feast, especially regarding its significance for the beginning of the work of salvation for mankind and the world in general.

We will now present the content of the Troparion: “Your birth, O Virgin Mother of God, announced joy to the whole world; for from you arose the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God. And by breaking the curse, He gave a blessing; and by destroying death, He granted us eternal life”⁴⁹. As can easily be seen from the content of the Troparion, the Birth of the Mother of God brings joy to the whole world, anticipating or revealing the coming into the world through the Incarnation of the Son of God, for the salvation and redemption of it. The coming of the Holy Child Mary to the world announces to humanity the near coming of the Son of God, who will transform the curse of the disobedience of the first parents into blessing and salvation. Christ is called in the troparion of the feast “The Sun of Righteousness”, because “He shone in the world and gave it back its first glory and beauty, saving it from the terrible darkness of ignorance”⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ Sfântul MAXIM MĂRTURISITORUL, *Scrieri*, partea a II-a, coll. *Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești*, vol. 81, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1981, p. 94.

⁴⁹ *Menaion for September*, September 8, Great Vespers, Troparion, p. 112.

⁵⁰ IEROTHEOS, Mitropolit al Nafaktosului, *Praznicele Maicii Domnului – o perspectivă istorică și teologică*, p. 85.

The same theological ideas are emphasized in the Kondakion of the Feast: “Joachim and Anna, from the disgrace of not having children, and Adam and Eve, from the corruption of death, have escaped, O Pure One, in your holy birth. This is what your people celebrate, and from the guilt of sins being saved, they cry out to you: The barren one gives birth to the Mother of God and the Nourisher of our lives”⁵¹. It is very interesting how the Kondakion text establishes a link between the dissolution of the sterility of Anna’s womb through the birth of the Virgin Mary, and the dissolution of the curse that was upon the human race due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve, through the coming into the world of Christ, precisely from the Virgin Mary, the fruit of the pure prayers of Joachim and Anna.

⁵¹ *Menaion for September*, September 8, Matins, Kondakion, p. 123.