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You Carry the Burning Coal without Being Burned. The Mother of God in the Liturgy

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Abstract

The liturgy of Pentecost offers a systematic vision of the mystery of the Church. It is the community anointed by the Spirit. The Mother of God occupies a central place in the community of the anointed, as both patristic writings and liturgical texts make clear. The *Panaghia*, moved by the *Panaghion* or the Holy Spirit, is more luminous than the ardent Seraphim. She is the incandescent woman, the woman clothed with the sun. In her, the mystery of the burning bush is realized in an admirable way.

Keywords:

Feast of Pentecost, Holy Spirit, Church, Theotokos, Roman-Catholic Liturgy, Orthodox Liturgy

“Commemorating our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, with all the saints, let us commend ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God”.¹

¹ “The Litany of Peace” or “Great Litany”, in: *Saint John Chrysostom Liturgy*: Τῆς Παναγίας ἀχράντου, ὑπερευλογημένης, ἐνδόξου Δεσποίνης ἡμῶν Θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας μετὰ πάντων τῶν Ἀγίων μνημονεύσαντες, ἑαυτοὺς καὶ ἀλλήλους καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ παραθώμεθα.

In the present article, I delve into the mystery of the Mother of God, chiefly from the perspective of Holy Spirit in the celebration of the Pentecost. In doing so, I analyze texts from the Roman-Catholic and Orthodox liturgies.

Pentecost is the feast of the Christian actualization of the Jewish Feast of Pentecost. In it, our ancestors in the faith made present again the joy of the community before the gift of the *Torah*, the Law on the part of Yahweh in the Sinai, fifty days after the exit of Egypt in that wonderful night.

However, on that day, an event took place in the community of the apostles that radically transformed it. It is the full and unmeasured manifestation of the Spirit in the community. In this divine injection into the world, the prophecies are fulfilled. Indeed, *today*, as the liturgy will emphasize again and again, the Spirit of God has been poured out upon all flesh. To understand this outbreak more fully, let us take advantage of the richness of the Christian celebration of Pentecost.

Because of the solemnity of this birth of the Church, the feast is also endowed with a vigil, in keeping with Easter. We have, therefore, two Masses: that of the vigil and that of the day of Pentecost. I would now like to briefly present the most significant passages of the prayers, chants and readings of the Eucharistic celebrations and of the Liturgy of the Hours.

I. Liturgical Texts

A. Eve of Pentecost's Mass

Entrance antiphon

"...because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us who dwells in our hearts"(Rom 5, 5; 10, 11).

Collect prayer

"let the splendor of your glory shine upon us".

Reading of Genesis

To "reach heaven", to reach God and be like Him.

Reading of Exodus

“I have borne them on eagles’ wings and brought them to me”. Priestly people and holy nation. ‘The Lord had descended upon him in the form of fire’.

Reading of Ezekiel

“I will infuse them with my spirit and they shall live”.

Reading of Joel: Fire. “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh”. “All who call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved”.

Psalms: “Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and you will renew the face of the earth”.

Reading of Romans: “His Spirit intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings”.

Alleluia: “kindle in them the fire of your love”.

Reading of the Gospel: “out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water”.

Final Prayer: “May the communion we have just received communicate to us the same ardor of the Holy Spirit that so wonderfully inflated the apostles of your Son.”

B. First Evening Prayers (Vespers)

Hymn (Veni Creator)

“Fill the hearts which Thou hast made (Imple superna gratia, quae tu creasti pectora) ... To Thee, the Comforter, we cry, To Thee, the Gift of God Most High, The Fount of life, the Fire of love, The soul’s Anointing from above (Qui Paraclitus diceris, Donum Dei altissimi Fons vivus, ignis, caritas, et spiritalis unctio) Finger of the Hand Divine. (Dexteræ Dei tu digitus)”.

Second Antiphon: “Tongues as of fire appeared before the apostles, and the Holy Spirit came upon each of them, alleluia...”

Introduction to Our Father: “The Spirit of the risen Lord”.

C. Morning prayer (Laudes)

Invitatory: “Hallelujah. The Spirit of the Lord fills the universe ...”

Hymn:

The Spirit of the Lord descends into the heart of the church. “The Lord who burns it and pierces it with his flame kindles the universe.... Drunk with the Holy Spirit... God descends to Sinai and in flame and in the impetus of love moves the mountain.... The Wind is breeze and force of hurricanes, and the living Water moves the oceans; ... the joy transfigures their countenances Spirit, end of the promises, O Holy One”.

First Antiphon: “Lord, how good and how gentle is your Spirit dwelling in us. Alleluia!”

Psalm 62: “My soul shall be filled as with a banquet”.

Psalm 149: “Sing to the Lord a new song!”

Antiphon of the Benedictus: It is the “forgiveness of sins”.

D. Mass of the Day of Pentecost

Reading of Acts

“A sound like the blowing of a violent wind ... tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.... all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit... each one heard their own language being spoken... we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues! ... drunk”.

Reading of I Corinthians

“No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit ... baptized in one Spirit to form one body.... we have drunk of the same Spirit”.

Reading of the Gospel of John

“Fear - shalom - they were filled with joy...As the Father sent me, so I send you...sins will be forgiven”.

Prayer over the offerings: The Holy Spirit manifests the mystery and the truth to us.

Final prayer: The Holy Spirit is “the” gift.

E. Second Evening Prayers (Vespers)

Antiphon of the Magnificat:

“Today the days of Pentecost have come to an end, alleluia; today the Holy Spirit appeared to the disciples in the form of tongues of fire and enriched them with his gifts, sending them out to preach to the whole world and to bear witness that whoever believes will be baptized and be saved. Alleluia!”

Intercessions

“You who filled the universe with your Spirit, grant that humans may build a new world in justice and peace”.

II. Systematic Vision of the Mystery of the Church, at Pentecost

The Holy Spirit gathers a great multitude². In other words, he constitutes in unity what before was dispersed. The narrative of *Acts* is presented, explicitly, as the reverse of Babel. It is the constitution of a single people, out of the multiplicity, a priestly people and a holy nation³. And we are made one people, by drinking of the same Spirit⁴. Only in him we can proclaim God’s marvels⁵, for he puts on our lips a new song⁶. He alone

² “Reading of Exodus”, in: *Pentecost Vigil Mass*.

³ “Reading of Acts”, in: *Pentecost Mass*.

⁴ “Reading of 1 Corinthians”, in: *Pentecost Mass*.

⁵ “Reading of Acts”, in: *Pentecost Mass*.

⁶ Third Psalm of the *Morning Prayer*.

makes us call upon the Name of the Lord⁷, ineffably⁸. But the Spirit is not only the Unifier, but also the Fire that Christ came to kindle on earth. He descends into the heart of the Church and kindles with his flame the universe⁹. In the liturgy, we find a marked insistence on understanding the experience of the Spirit as an experience of fire¹⁰. It is the Fire of God, the sacred fire that makes our heart burn, that comes from above, that burns and consumes us, transforming us into Fire, Light, Life.

And it is fire because it is the very Love of God in our hearts¹¹. It makes us burn with passion for God, in the strongest *divine eros*.

Because it is an experience of fire and *eros*, it is also an experience of unspeakable beauty, for it makes the splendor of God's glory shine in us¹². He is the sweetness of God¹³, the delicacy of God¹⁴. Through him we become drunk with God and joy transfigures our faces¹⁵, filling us with joy¹⁶.

He is the Life, who makes us truly live¹⁷, as he made the Lord Jesus rise, for he is the Spirit of the Risen Lord¹⁸, who, in turn, flows from the Paschal Mystery¹⁹, and who brings the forgiveness of sins²⁰, the Water²¹ that satiates and purifies us. Therefore, since Pentecost, his outpouring fills the universe²², recreating and renewing everything²³ and impelling us to build a new world in justice and peace²⁴.

⁷ "Reading of Joel", in: *Pentecost Vigil Mass*.

⁸ "Reading of Romans", in: *Pentecost Vigil Mass*.

⁹ Hymn of the *Morning Prayer*.

¹⁰ Cf. Readings of Exodus, Joel and the Alleluia of the *Pentecost Vigil Mass*.

¹¹ "Entrance Antiphon" of the *Pentecost Vigil Mass*.

¹² "Collect" of the *Pentecost Vigil Mass*.

¹³ "First Antiphon" of the *Morning Prayer*.

¹⁴ First Psalm of the *Morning Prayer*.

¹⁵ Hymn of the *Morning Prayer*.

¹⁶ "Reading of the Gospel of John", in: *Pentecost Mass*.

¹⁷ Readings of Ezekiel and of the Gospel, in: *Pentecost Mass*.

¹⁸ Introduction to *Our Father*.

¹⁹ "Reading of the Gospel", in: *Pentecost Mass*.

²⁰ "Antiphon of the Benedictus", in: the *Morning Prayer*.

²¹ "Reading of the Gospel", in: *Pentecost Vigil Mass*.

²² "Antiphon of the Invitatory" of the *Liturgy of the hours*.

²³ "Responsorial Psalm", in: *Pentecost Vigil Mass*.

²⁴ "Intercessions" of the *Second Evening Prayer*.

The Holy Spirit is the wings that make us fly and lead us to the Father²⁵. For this reason, he is the great revealer of the Trinitarian Mystery²⁶. Thus, it is understood that he is the great eschatological gift²⁷ and the full realization of all the promises²⁸.

It is the Fire that makes us burn in the fire of the Triune Love. He transfigures us in fire and in light. Eventually, he divinizes us, for he makes us become like God²⁹.

Thus, the Church formed by the Spirit is the new creation, the ultimate meaning of human being and the cosmos, to become all fire, to be transfigured by the gentle power of the Spirit. He makes the inaccessible Light of the Risen One shine on the face of the human being (and of matter), the radiance of Tabor. In the Spirit, the community lives the same Trinitarian life, becoming the bonfire where the Fire of God burns and transfigures the whole world, transforming it into a burning bush. In this way, the Church is ... the space of the radiation of the Holy Spirit.

III. The Holy Spirit

We have seen in the analysis of the liturgy of Pentecost how this eschatological penetration of God into the world is the final “gift”. The whole history of salvation tends to make creation spiritual. This is not to be understood in the sense of being opposed to matter, but as the whole cosmos, every part of matter, every element scattered in space, is penetrated by the power of God. This is the ultimate meaning of reality. If we wanted to understand what man is, we could only understand it in man transfigured by the Spirit, completely transparent to the glory and the unapproachable light of the Blessed Trinity. Throughout the history of salvation, the Spirit has been at work in creation, covering it and incubating a transfigured world. He has created “new heavens and a new earth”.

²⁵ “Reading of Exodus”, in: *Pentecost Vigil Mass*.

²⁶ “Prayer over the offerings”, in: *Pentecost Mass*.

²⁷ “Final Prayer”, in: *Pentecost Mass*.

²⁸ Hymn of the *Morning Prayer*.

²⁹ “Reading of Genesis”, in: *Pentecost Vigil Mass*.

The Spirit is the moment of God's maximum immanence in creation. We can say, with St. Augustine, that through him God becomes *intimior intimo meo*, more interior than my own interiority. Salvation no longer works from the outside, as it had to do from Adam's exteriorization. In fact, Adam is expelled from the Holy Land and God, in a way, from the heart of man.

In the fullness of time, the Holy One of God, Jesus, appears as the Christós, as the one anointed by the Spirit of the Father. He is the man already transfigured, the man totally obedient to the Spirit, in whose face, as on Tabor, the inaccessible glory of God is reflected. Jesus of Nazareth is the spiritual man, the man who lives completely in the Spirit. Not only this, but the whole mystery of Christ can be understood in the light of Pentecost. Christ is revealed as the "great forerunner" of the Holy Spirit. The whole economy of Christ is thus oriented towards the insertion of the Spirit into the heart of creation, into the heart of the world. He is the fire he came to kindle on earth. And his whole paschal mystery is nothing other than the passage to existence in the Spirit.

And the Spirit is in the Church the great memory and remembrance of the Lord. He makes him present. As Paul insists, only in the Spirit can we approach the Lord Jesus, only in Him can we pronounce the Holy Name. The presence of Jesus of Nazareth becomes the interiorized presence of the Lord Jesus, in the Spirit.

Pentecost is not only the dynamic and divinizing presence of the Trinity in the ecclesial community, but also the presence of the community in the Trinity. The Spirit becomes the sphere through which we access the reality of God. It is the temple in which we come to the living God. It is no longer the Garizim or Jerusalem, but the Spirit where the Lord is to be worshipped, as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman.

That is why all spirituality tends to live consciously the mystery of the Spirit. And that is why the true goal of the spiritual life and of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Spirit, as a holy Russian monk, St. Seraphim of Sarov, clearly points out. All other practices lead to this gift:

“Prayer, fasting, vigils and all the other Christian practices”, he says, “though very good in themselves, are by no means the end of the Christian life: they are only indispensable means to reach that end. For the true end of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. As for fasting, vigils, prayers, almsgiving and other good works done in the name of Christ, these are the means of acquiring the Holy Spirit. Note this well: only good works done in the name of Christ bring us the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Other works, if they are not done in the name of Christ, even if they are good, could not bring us the reward in the life of the age to come, nor could they give us the grace of God in the present life. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ said: «He who does not gather with me scatters»”.

The Spirit, Fire of God, makes us igneous.

“Abba Joseph says to Abba Lot: «You cannot be a monk if you do not become all flaming like a fire» Lot replied, «Father, according to my power, I occupy myself with my office, with my modest fasting, with prayer and meditation, I keep recollection, and according to my power I remain pure in my thoughts. What remains for me to do?» The old man stood up, stretched out his hands toward heaven, and his fingers became like ten lamps of fire, and said to him, «If you will, you can become all flame»” (Apophtegms, Joseph, 6-7).

And the Church is the new people, the community of the anointed, of the new Christs, of men who have become fire and light, of men drunk with God, of those who have been caught up into the Trinitarian Mystery.

IV. Mary, the incandescent

And what is Mary's place in this community? Is she outside this people of the *anointed*? Does she have a destiny apart from these igneous human beings?³⁰ Does she stand above the Church, as an intermediary between God and his friends? Not at all.

On the contrary, Mary is the full realization of the Church. She is her most exalted member. She is the elder sister who has reached the goal³¹ in an unsurpassed and incomparable way³². She is the most glorious fruit of God's Redemption. And if she has been preserved from all sin, this does not place her outside the Church. On the contrary, in her the common destiny of the Church has been fulfilled in advance, and this destiny is revealed with great splendor on the feast of the Assumption-Dormition of the Mother of God: "O Mother of God, in giving birth you preserved your virginity, in your dormition you did not abandon the world. You presented yourself to Life, being the Mother of Life, and by your prayers you save our souls from death"³³.

She is the noblest part of the Church³⁴, the one that has become the most splendid reflection of the glory of God, and can therefore be considered the

³⁰ Cf. P. ARGÁRATE, *Portadores del Fuego. La divinización en los Padres griegos*, Bilbao, 1998.

³¹ Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 65: "in the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she is without spot or wrinkle".

³² *Lumen Gentium* 68: "just as the Mother of Jesus, glorified in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come".

³³ *Byzantine Liturgy*, "Troparion of the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God".

³⁴ Second Vatican Council. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 53: "the Mother of the Son of God, by which account she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace, she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth. At the same time, however, because she belongs to the offspring of Adam, she is one with all those who are to be saved. She is „the mother of the members of Christ . . . having cooperated by charity that faithful might be born in the Church, who are members of that Head. "Therefore she is hailed as a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, and as its type and excellent exemplar in faith and charity. The Catholic Church, taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother".

type, model and norm of every Church³⁵. St. Athanasius says: “The Word has assumed the flesh so that we can receive the Holy Spirit, God became *sarcophoros* (bearer of the flesh) so that man can become *pneumatophoros* (bearer of the Spirit)”.

Mary’s existence is permeated and magnetized by the mystery of Christ³⁶. In this sense, Augustine can say: “*Beatior est Maria percipiendo fidem Christi quam concipiendo carnem Christi*” (“Mary is more blessed because she embraces faith in Christ than because she conceives the flesh of Christ”).³⁷.

Mary is the *Panaghia*³⁸, the Most Holy, that is, the holiest. What does this mean? It means that after Christ, in no other human being did the Holiness of the Living God radiate as much as it did in Mary³⁹. She is the creature wholly possessed by the Holy One, by the Sanctifier, by the Spirit of God. No one like her has been covered by the fecundating action of the Spirit⁴⁰, therefore, and with the clear exception of Jesus, no one has been in such a vital relationship with the Spirit as this woman of Nazareth, so that she is called “the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit”⁴¹. She is the woman of the mystery, the one pierced to her flesh by the almighty and

³⁵ Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 63: “As St. Ambrose taught, the Mother of God is a type of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ”.

³⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 492: “The «splendor of an entirely unique holiness» by which Mary is «enriched from the first instant of her conception» comes wholly from Christ: she is «redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son»”.

³⁷ St. AUGUSTINE, *De virg.* 3: *PL* 40, 398, cited by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 506

³⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 493: “The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God «All-Holy» (Panagia), and celebrate her as «free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature»”.

³⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 66: “Placed by the grace of God, as God ‘s Mother, next to her Son, and exalted above all angels and men, Mary intervened in the mysteries of Christ and is justly honored by a special cult in the Church. Clearly from earliest times the Blessed Virgin is honored under the title of Mother of God, under whose protection the faithful took refuge in all their dangers and necessities”.

⁴⁰ “Prayer over the offerings”, Fourth Sunday of Advent: “May the Holy Spirit, O Lord, sanctify these gifts laid upon your altar, just as he filled with his power the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary”.

⁴¹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 53.

tremendous action of the Spirit of the Father⁴². Hence Nicolas Cabasillas can say that God, insofar as he had not found a mother, was like a king in exile, like a foreigner “without a city”. It was only because a young girl, in her sovereign freedom, accepted the angel’s announcement that God could become flesh, enter the heart of his creation, and recreate the world from within⁴³. Through the *dynamis* of the Holy Spirit, Mary contains in her womb the Incontainable One. Thus sings the Byzantine liturgy: “Thou hast begotten the Son without a father, this Son who was born of the Father without a mother”. All the great mystery of God is contained in the weakness of a woman. And he whom even the seraphim did not dare to look upon is carried in the arms of Mary of Nazareth. Thus, in a hymn of the Byzantine liturgy still in use, probably dating from the fourth century, Symeon sings to the Theotokos during the Presentation of the Lord:

“I see thee, Virgin, more venerable than the cherubim; you bore as a throne the God of before ages, and I tremble at this mystery, Seeing thee like the throne of God, O Virgin, I am overwhelmed with fear,

How do you not burn, while in your hands you bear God? Like a pincer of fire, you carry the burning coal without being burned, Therefore, we acclaim you, admiring your giving birth”⁴⁴.

Mary becomes more luminous than the Burning Ones (*Seraphim*).

“It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos, ever-blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without defilement you gave birth to God the Word. True Theotokos we magnify you!”⁴⁵.

The Mother of God “shed upon the world eternal light, Jesus Christ, our Lord”⁴⁶.

⁴² Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 56.

⁴³ O. CLÉMENT, *Questions sur l’homme*, Paris, 1972, p. 51.

⁴⁴ Hymn in use in the byzantine liturgy.

⁴⁵ “Theotokion of Matins of Great Monday”, in: *Byzantine Liturgy*.

⁴⁶ “Preface” I of Saint Mary Virgin.

For this reason, she can be called the “crown of all dogmas,” the living dogma and the truth about the realized creature, because she has brought the flesh to the incandescence of the Kingdom. It is her [Mary’s] humanity, her flesh that becomes the one of Christ, the Mother becomes “consanguineous” to her, and she is the first to realize the ultimate end for which the world was created: “the limit of the created and the uncreated”⁴⁷.

In her, creation is deified and the world becomes a revelation of the glory of the Risen One. Christ is the “way” and the “door”, God-man, the only one. The Virgin is the first, she precedes humanity and all follow her, “good direction”, “guide” and “pillar of fire”, she leads them all to the new Jerusalem. She is the first to pass through death, made powerless by her Son. The Church sings in her this world that has already become “the new creature”. “Rejoice, crown of dogmas” - the divine truth about the creature realized. Mary implies the newness of a transfigured creation. She becomes the new heaven, the true Paradise, the Virgin-Mother.

“What shall we call you, O full of grace? A heaven, for you have borne the Sun of Justice? A paradise, for you have brought forth the Flower of immortality? A virgin, for you have remained undefiled? A mother, holding in her holy arms the Son who is God of all? Intercede with him for the salvation of our souls”⁴⁸.

The Virgin-Mother is the revelation that nothing is impossible for God. This is the great sign. God is not resigned to the death of the human being. She is the burning bush, the parcel of matter, the enclave burned to the ground by the glory of God. She is the *holy land*, before which one must take off one’s shoes.

“The shadow of the Law passed, once grace came; for as the burning bush was not consumed, so you, being Virgin, gave birth and remained Virgin; instead of the pillar of fire, the Sun

⁴⁷ Saint GREGORY PALAMAS, *PG* 151,472B.

⁴⁸ “Troparion of the First Hour”, Tone 1, Great Friday, in: *Byzantine Liturgy*.

of justice shone for us; and instead of Moses, Christ, who is the salvation of our souls”⁴⁹.

She is the manifestation of an incomparable Beauty, full of light, for she is “the woman clothed with the sun”. “She (Mary) has the glory of Lebanon, the beauty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the beauty of our God”⁵⁰. She becomes the human face of the Holy Spirit, of his ineffable Beauty. And all this because she is the Theotókos, the Mother of God. The very name of the Theotokos, Mother of God, “contains the whole mystery of the divine Economy”⁵¹. For this reason, and in the mystery of Christ, she is the most complete and best creature that we can offer to God. So sings the Christmas liturgy: “What shall we offer you, O Christ ... the heaven offers you angels, earth brings you its gifts, but we men offer you a Mother-Virgin”. Or as follows:

“Today the Virgin gives birth to him who is above all being,
and the earth offers a cave to him whom no one can approach.
Angels with shepherds give glory,
and magi journey with a star,
for to us there has been born
a little Child, God before the ages”⁵².

She brings joy to the universe:

“Your Nativity, O Virgin, has proclaimed joy to the whole universe! The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, has shone from you, O Theotokos! By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing. By destroying death, He has granted us eternal Life”⁵³.

⁴⁹ “Theotokion of Easter Sunday Eve”.

⁵⁰ “Antiphon of entrance” of the solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

⁵¹ Saint JOHN DAMASCENE, *De fide orthodoxa* III,12, PG 94, 1029C.

⁵² “Kontakion of the Nativity of the Lord”.

⁵³ “Troparion of the The Nativity of our Most Holy Lady the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary”.

Following the example of the Mother of God, the Church continues in history by giving birth to the Holy One. The Church is thus portrayed in her function as a mystical womb, as a perpetual begetter, as a perpetual Theotokos.

To sum up what has been said so far, Mary appears as the first and most sublime realization of the mystery of the Church. In her we contemplate in an incomparable way the splendor of the realized Church. Thus, she has an indissoluble solidarity with us, her brothers and sisters. Her holiness, her whole being imbued with the energy of the Trinity, draws us into the mystery of God. In this way she leads us into the mystery of her Son, being the model of divinization to which the whole Church aspires. And Mary has achieved all this not outside the Church, but on the contrary, by living the mystery of the Church, by being pierced by the Spirit, as no one has ever done or will ever do.

She is the woman clothed with the Sun, as the Apocalypse says, that is, she is the transfigured creature, clothed, glowing fire, which Christ came to light on earth. In this woman, the divine has burned everything. In her, the mystery of the burning bush is admirably realized.