

The Commemoration of the Dormition of St. Mary, Mother of God, 2018 A. ✠ D.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Death is common to all men. Like the flesh of Adam, for men there is no escaping death. Within the last week two members of our congregation have suffered physical death. If being faithful and beloved could merit avoidance of death, Keith and Ed would still be with us. But thanks be to God, it has pleased the Lord of the Church to end their earthly trials and to call them to His nearer presence.

Tonight we commemorate the physical death of the Virgin Mary. If anyone would merit being spared death, one would think it would be her. Blessed among women, recipient of the visit of the Archangel, the locus of the Holy Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, she who gave a commendable confession of faith, she who gave birth to God – if works could earn escape from death certainly Mary would have been spared.

But we commemorate this night the sanctified assumption of the church that Mary did die. And if she died, for us there is little hope of avoiding death. The Isaiah passage just read isn't about Mary, it is about Christ and the Church. The Galatians text just read isn't about Mary. It is about Sarah and Hagar. And the Mary named in the pericope from the Gospel of St. Luke you heard read this night wasn't Mary mother of our Lord. We commemorate this night an event not recorded in Holy Scripture.

And that in itself is a very strong statement about the faith of the Church. The Church is the bearer of the Gospel on earth, the very source of life, because Christ is brought to this dying world through the Church. If the Church commemorates the death of Mary, it is a confession that not even she was without sin. For death comes with sin.

Some traditions purport that while being processed to her tomb, Mary was taken up. Others that the Apostles opened her tomb and found it empty. Some of these legends place the so-called "Assumption of Mary" on the third day after her death. Most of these place Mary in Jerusalem, although the best traditions relate that she died of natural causes in Ephesus of Asia Minor, where her adopted son St. John son of Zebedee was Bishop.

Of what is not recorded in Holy Scripture, the Church, quite frankly, isn't sure. And the Church is very much about surety, about confidence. So we would be well served this night to avoid embellished traditions and hear the Word of God, for there is no doubt in His Saving Word – in His Word you may have confidence. And that Word comes to us this night from the Prophet Isaiah, from St. Paul, and from the Evangelist St. Luke.

Isaiah's Words are not unlike the Words the Holy Spirit gave Mary to speak. Mary proclaimed "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Isaiah, 700 years earlier, said "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God..." Both the Mother of God and the Prophet had the same cause to rejoice: God clothed them with the garments of salvation, and covered them with the robe of righteousness. And that God has done for you as well, as His Word and Spirit worked faith in you in your baptism.

There the sin imputed to you from Adam was forgiven. There you died to sin and rose with Christ. There the Spirit that worked the miraculous conception of God's Son, the Spirit that brought forth from Mary her remarkable confession of faith, the Spirit that caused her to confess

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the *Magnificat*, that same Spirit filled you. And that filling brought with it Christ's righteousness, the bedecking of the Bride with the garment of salvation, the robe of righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, the Holy Groom.

St. Paul speaks of that same vesting in terms of childbirth. According to the flesh, you are children of the bondwoman, given birth into bondage, crushed by the weight of the Holy Law of God. But according to Christ you are born from above, a child of Promise, a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Holy Church, which is the mother of us all.

And as proof of that, you are here this night. You, like faithful Mary, forsake the things of the world for the one thing needful - to hear the Word of God. That's what faith does. So while you did not choose Christ, He chose you, and as a chosen one of God you choose the good part, which will not be taken away from you. The forgiveness and salvation and life that He alone can give is everlasting, without end.

Which brings us to the Dormition of Mary. Dormition means "falling asleep." When the Lord learned of the death of His beloved Lazarus, He announced "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." And as He made His way through the mourners to the lifeless daughter of the ruler, He proclaimed "...the girl is not dead, but sleeping."

The one who will be raised by Christ on the last day to eternal bliss does not die in the proper sense. These failing bodies may be found lifeless, but the soul immediately goes to be with the Lord. The body is laid to rest, unaware of the passage of time or the circumstance. You, O Christian, close your eyes, and the very next thing you know is the face of God.

So it is the confession of the Holy Church that Mary sleeps. And so it is the confession of the Holy Church that Lazarus and the ruler's daughter, and all those who have gone before us with the sign of faith – Ed and Keith and the holy martyrs and the Prophets and Apostles and Evangelists and our fathers and mothers in the faith – it is the confession of the Holy Church that they sleep, soon to be called by the Lord that called Lazarus out of death to life.

And this is true for you, dear Christian. You will not die. If it pleases the Lord to return, even to come this night, you will see God. If it pleases the Lord to delay His coming, you will sleep. And you will awake to His voice, your dormition ended, your transformed body united to you soul in paradise, the reward He won for you.

The Holy Church, the Bride of Christ, is one. She has that oneness in the Mystical Union with Her Lord, He the Head, we the Body. So this night you are one with Mary, and Lazarus, and the ruler's daughter, and with Ed and Keith and all those you love who have gone before you with the sign of faith. As you eat the Body and drink the Blood of Christ, you are united to them in One Holy Communion, you here, they there, One Church worshipping the One Lord who gives all of us life.

And soon will the Lord of your salvation call all flesh to rise, dormition ended forever, for as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

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Galatians 4:22-27

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