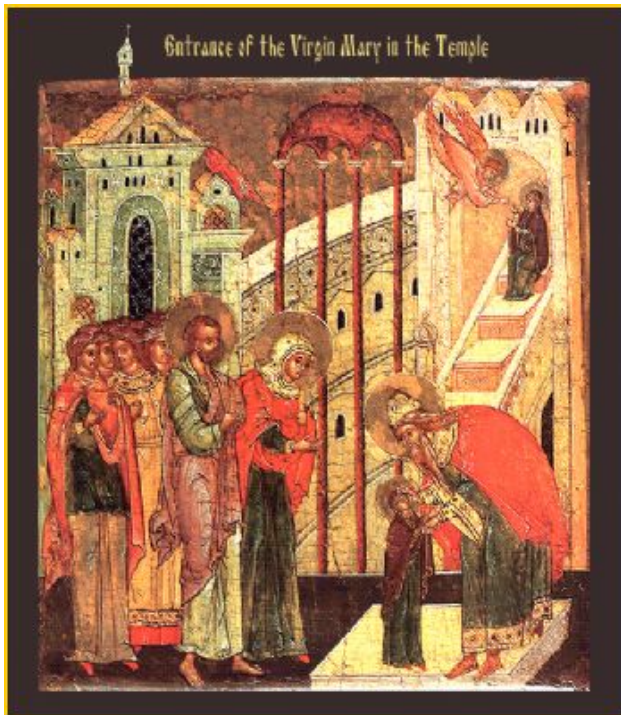


Hell Cannot Hold Him Nor Can a Bag

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On November 21st we celebrate the feast of the Entry of the Most-Holy Theotokos into the Temple. The coming of Jesus Christ into the world is so important that everything surrounding it, including the event this feast commemorates, is also important.

For years before Jesus' birth, His Mother was prepared for her role. While she was still very young, her parents and neighbors took her to the Temple, singing holy songs and carrying candles. She walked up the steps of the Temple and was met by the high priest. She entered the Holy of Holies with him as a sign of her special destiny. Normally nobody entered that place except the high priest, once a year. Then Mary grew up and matured spiritually among holy people, until God was ready to send His Son to us and to have her give Him birth.

We celebrate and revere the people and events surrounding the Incarnation because we believe it alone tells the truth about God. Only Christians teach that God's Divine Son came among us to offer us life through His death and resurrection. That is why we can't go along with those who say that every religion is basically the same, and leads to God.

Among those who say this is Rick Steves, the well-known travel writer and TV personality. Though Steves is a committed and community-serving Lutheran, he apparently shares the idea that all religions are equal and the same.

He describes with admiration a man he met in a remote Turkish village. The man had an embroidered bag hanging in a place of honor on a wall of his small house. The bag, he told Steves, contained a copy of the Qu'ran as well as a Bible and a copy of the Talmud. Though a devout Muslim himself, the man felt that he honored all three faiths by keeping their holy Scriptures together in one bag.

This man is an example, Steves writes, of the way we should all be. How appropriate, how good a symbol of unity it would be if we could all have bags with the various holy Scriptures in them.

But this day's feast reminds us that Christians cannot settle for such a tidy solution to the problem of spiritual disunity among human beings. We are not "people of the Book" because we worship a God who did infinitely more than give us a sacred Scripture. He was born from the long-prepared Mary as a Man, and when grown He burst the walls of hell asunder. If hell could not contain Him, certainly a bag can't do it.

Troparion - Tone 4

Today Anna bequeaths joy to all instead of sorrow by bringing forth her fruit, the only ever-Virgin. In fulfillment of her vow, today with joy she brings to the temple of the Lord the true temple and pure Mother of God the Word.

Kontakion - Tone 4

Today the universe is filled with joy at the glorious feast of the Mother of God, and cries out: "She is the heavenly heavenly tabernacle."

Our own Scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ came to save everyone, not just those who call themselves His followers. We must love and respect those of other faiths, and need to work at finding common ground with them. But we also have to show them the Man who died on the cross for them—the Man who just won't fit in that bag.