



Building our Own House Churches: On the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple

The life of the All-Holy, All-Pure, and All-Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, who was the All-Pure Temple of the Savior, who was higher than all the Cherubim and Seraphim, could not have begun as does the life of an ordinary person: it needed to have been marked by a glorious beginning to her life. And the Lord God placed into the hearts of her holy parents, Joachim and Anna, the presentiment that their All-Pure Child, their only daughter, was being prepared by God for an extraordinary path, a path enormously loftier than people's ordinary paths. And guided by this presentiment, they dedicated the All-Holy Virgin Mary to God even before her nativity: they made a vow to God that she would serve Him.

But how? In what form could she serve God?

You know that the ministers of God were chosen by command of God Himself only from the tribe of Levi and, of course, they were all men; women could not be ministers of God.

Nonetheless, the All-Holy Theotokos was designated by God Himself for the very loftiest form of ministry to Him.

When the little Mary grew to the age of three, then her parents, the holy and blessed Joachim and Anna, decided to bring her to the Temple in Jerusalem, in order to raise her under the shadow of this Temple.

They gave a vow, and it was necessary to fulfill it. And they led her, accompanied by a choir of young girls carrying burning candles, to Jerusalem, to the Lord's Temple. And in an astonishing manner, when they approached the Temple, the three-year old babe Mary escaped from the hands of those holding her fast and quickly, quickly ran up the all the high steps to the Temple.



The great high priest Zacharias took her into his arms and performed something extraordinary, something that had never before been done: he not only led her into God's Temple, but led her into the Holy of Holies, where there once had stood the Ark of the Covenant and into which only the high priest, and no one else, had the right to enter once a year. The blessed Zacharias led the babe Mary into the Holy of Holies and gave her permission, when she wanted to, even if every day, to enter here to pray.

Thus was the childhood of her, who would become the All-Pure Temple of the Savior, observed. Let us leave her, the Holiest of the Holy, to pray in the Lord's Temple... Let us turn our thoughts to our own children.

All of you, fathers and mothers, have heard the astounding question of the Apostle Paul: "Know ye not that ye are the temples of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). Do you not know that you and your children are intended to serve God in spirit and truth, in works of love and righteousness?

If so, if all are intended to become living temples of God, then does not that require all of us to dedicate ourselves to God from our very earliest years of childhood and youth? Oh yes, oh yes – it goes without saying that this is required. But how can we fulfill this requirement?

This is an extremely difficult question, and I would like, if not to explain it to you, then at least to turn your attention to the importance and difficulty of this essential deed.

All of us receive sanctification in God's Temple; we are sanctified in it by great and glorious Mysteries



that bring us close to God, to the Lord Jesus Christ, making us even into temples of the Holy Spirit.

In God's Temple, at the divine services, we hear the great words of the Mystery of the Bloodless Sacrifice; we hear the chanting and reading of the Church, and receive great, very important, and very profound sanctification.

But without the sanctification of the Mysteries of the divine services of the Church, can we become temples of the Spirit of God?

But you know that, by God's allowance, this has become impossible for many Christians, for the divine services have ceased in many churches; for many people, especially peasants, live far, far away from churches in which the divine services and Mysteries continue to be celebrated.

This is very, very hard for us, especially for those who do not have the opportunity to hear the divine services, to be sanctified by the great mysteries of the Church.

This is very hard, but do we really need to give in to hopelessness? Do we really have no opportunity to raise our children in such a way that they would become temples of God and abodes of the Holy Spirit? No, God has not abandoned us, for we know from Holy Scripture that we can raise our children in our own house churches, about which the Apostle Paul speaks at length in his great epistles.

I should like to draw your attention to these words "house churches." Completing his First Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul conveys greetings from his friends Aquila and Priscilla and their house churches. They had their own house church.

In the Epistle to Philemon, the Apostle greets him with "the church in thy house" and their friends (Philemon 1:2). He also had a house church. Similar greetings to "house churches" are found in the epistles of the great Apostle to the Romans and the Colossians. They also had house churches.

What is a "house church" and what did the Apostle himself understand by these words? A "house church" is a strong Christian family.

I will first say what a "house church" was in ancient times, and will allow you to ponder deeply over what, at least to a small extent, a house church could be in our times.

He understood the very profound significance of the Christian family; he understood that the family, not only in a Christian state, but also in all other states far from Christianity, was of very great significance. He understood that the family is the primary unit that lies at the foundation of everything that takes place in the state and in society. Society itself and the state itself depend in great part on how individual families live, and on the goals that they have in their life.

If this primary unit is perfect, if it is pure, if it places before itself important and profound moral and spiritual goals, then society and the state will reflect these qualities of its primary unit: the family.

What was the house church in the times of the Apostle Paul, in these ancient times?



It was built along the lines of our dioceses, which are predominated, led, and guided by the bishop, who is called to the great mystery of the priesthood.

He directs the entire spiritual life of his diocese, taking care that the great commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ be realized and implemented in his diocese.

In ancient times, the meaning and significance of the father of the family was similar to the role the bishop was to play in his diocese.

He was to direct the entire spiritual life of his family; he was, to whatever small degree, to fulfill the duties that the bishop fulfilled in his diocese; he was, to a greater or lesser extent, to be the bishop of his family.

The mother of the family was to be like the ancient deaconesses. These were deeply devout women who were assigned by bishops to prepare women for the Mystery of Baptism. By frequent and long conversations, they prepared women for the Mystery of Baptism; they explained the profound and great significance of this Mystery; and served at its performance over women. Moreover, they took care of feeding the hungry and strangers and of clothing the needy. They served everyone who was in need of deeds of mercy; they were the directors and first performers of these deeds.

Thus, all mothers and wives were to have been like the deaconesses in the house churches. Upon them lay the extremely important responsibility of teaching the Law of God and the commandments of Christ to their children and to all members of their family.

Today the state schools, as you know, do not teach the Law of God.

May all mothers today remember their most important and primary responsibility of enlightening their children with the light of Christ's truth.

If the All-Holy and All-Pure Mother of God, already from the age of three, was dedicated to God; if she always breathed the incense of the people's prayers in the Temple of Jerusalem; if she breathed the incense of the censer, then would not our children always be in need of this?

Do not our children need to breathe the incense of the censer, the incense of the people's prayers?



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In the ancient years of the Russian Church, the whole people understood this well, and children were brought up in a Christian and ecclesial spirit. Russian children, like the little All-Holy Theotokos, also breathed the incense of the people's prayers and the smoke of the censer.

Thus it was, but thus it is no longer. Where is all this now? Do you now know how today the majority of Russian people have left all this behind, how they do not want to know anything about this, how they have no need of the Church, and have no need of the aroma of the censer's incense?

Nonetheless, the Lord God has preserved a remnant, a considerable remnant: the churches are full of worshippers; and you, the small flock of Christ entrusted to me by God, eagerly listen to the word of God, and you fill our holy church. That means that not all is lost; that means that what the Apostle Paul says about house churches remains in force for us.

And you, too, and not only the ancient Christians, can perform the tasks that lay on the house churches.

I know, I know, how busy you are; how burdened you all are with social work, with working in factories, with jobs – not only husbands are busy, but so too are wives, the mothers of families. I know how difficult it is for them to fulfill their job responsibilities, and their family responsibilities, and their responsibilities akin to the ancient deaconesses: the responsibilities of mothers raising their children. I know, I know – and you know.



But if this work is difficult, then do we really need to conclude that one need not strive to fulfill it?!

Before all other deeds, remember about this great deed: that your children, innocent and pure children, take into their pure hearts the Law of God, the commandments of Christ, at least from the small amount of instruction that they can receive from you.

You have not yet forgotten the Law of God, so teach, teach your children, and then your family will become your house church. And the light of Christ from this house church will spread invisibly for you beyond the boundaries of your family.

The Light of Christ, His Divine Truth, will invisibly flow into the hearts and minds of all those who have dealings with you. It could be that the influence of your house church will go beyond its boundaries.

Then the eternal blessing of our Lord and God Jesus Christ, His Beginningless Father, and the All-Holy Spirit will be upon you.

Amen.

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Translated from the [Russian](#).