



The Great Feasts: *The Life of Our Lord*



A program from The Department of Christian Education,
Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America, funded in part by
The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch

Above: Icon of Christ Pantocrator from Hagia Sofia, Constantinople

Beloved Teacher,

Orthodox Christians, ideally, have one foot walking in the temporal year and the other in the Church's liturgical year—one foot on earth and the other in heaven. The foot that walks the liturgical year keeps us in touch with the eternal, important events of the life of Jesus and his mother, the Theotokos.

Although the term, “liturgical year” includes all the services and readings for the year, it is often used to speak of Pascha and The Twelve Great Feasts. We consider Pascha as “the feast of feasts,” hence it is called out when we speak of the Great Feasts of the liturgical year. The Church Year begins on September 1. The feasts are listed in temporal chronological order below.

The Great Feasts

Pascha!

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| 1. Nativity of the Theotokos September 8 | 7. Annunciation, March 25 |
| 2. Elevation of the Holy Cross, September 14 | 8. Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Pascha |
| 3. Presentation of the Theotokos,
November 21 | 9. Ascension, Forty Days after Pascha |
| 4. Nativity of Christ, December 25 | 10. Pentecost, Fifty Days after Pascha |
| 5. Theophany, January 6 | 11. Transfiguration, August 6 |
| 6. Presentation of the Lord, February 2 | 12. Dormition of the Theotokos, August 15 |

Through the Great Feasts we are kept in touch with the reality of Jesus Christ. When we remember any of the events of His life story, we also remember His promise at the end: one day He will come again and we will live eternally in His Kingdom. Only by placing our story in His, can we find peace, joy and meaning in this life.

Please post the Feast Day pages around your classroom, or if you don't have a room, keep them in a notebook so you can show the students the icon as the feast approaches. If you post them, find a way to note that the Feast Day is approaching by placing a colored closepin, or a removable sticker, or arrow on the page. Review them throughout the year. Our goal is for the students to know the icons, and memorize the feasts—our Lord's story—by the end of their years in Church School.

The facing page gives you a few words you can say to the students, or give to a student to read at the outset of each year. For those who have the time, we have also provided a “fill-in” sheet for the students to help them remember the story of the icon. Thank you for your attention to this program that aims to keep the story of Christ intact, and the reality of Christ active in the lives of our students.

Carole A. Buleza

Director, Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese
Department of Christian Education, July 2018

Dear Students,

When we make a new friend, we ask one another questions about families, our likes and dislikes, and eventually end up sharing some stories. If you are going to be in a relationship with anyone, you get to know their story.

Each one of us has been entered into a relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. We have “put on Christ,” at our baptism. Yet, do we know Him? How well do we know His story?

Through the centuries, Orthodoxy has commemorated certain events, thirteen by number, of the life of God’s Son. These comprise the key events of His life story.

These events are found in the pages of the four gospels. You are ready to learn about Jesus on your own, so find the Bible in your house and open it up. Look for the Table of Contents and the books called “Matthew,” “Mark,” “Luke,” and “John.” Jesus wanted people to really think about His message. Make sure you pray first and take your time. If you do this, you will be like the people who heard Jesus speak, and understood his teachings. You can spend time just being with Jesus through prayer or maybe by looking at the icons. If you seek Jesus, He will find you and His Holy Spirit will give you peace and joy.

Without His life, our lives would end at the grave. With His story His life—we look forward to the Life of the Kingdom at the end of the world. Then we will be with the Lord who knows us and loves us, forever.

*“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good
pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*

Luke 12:32

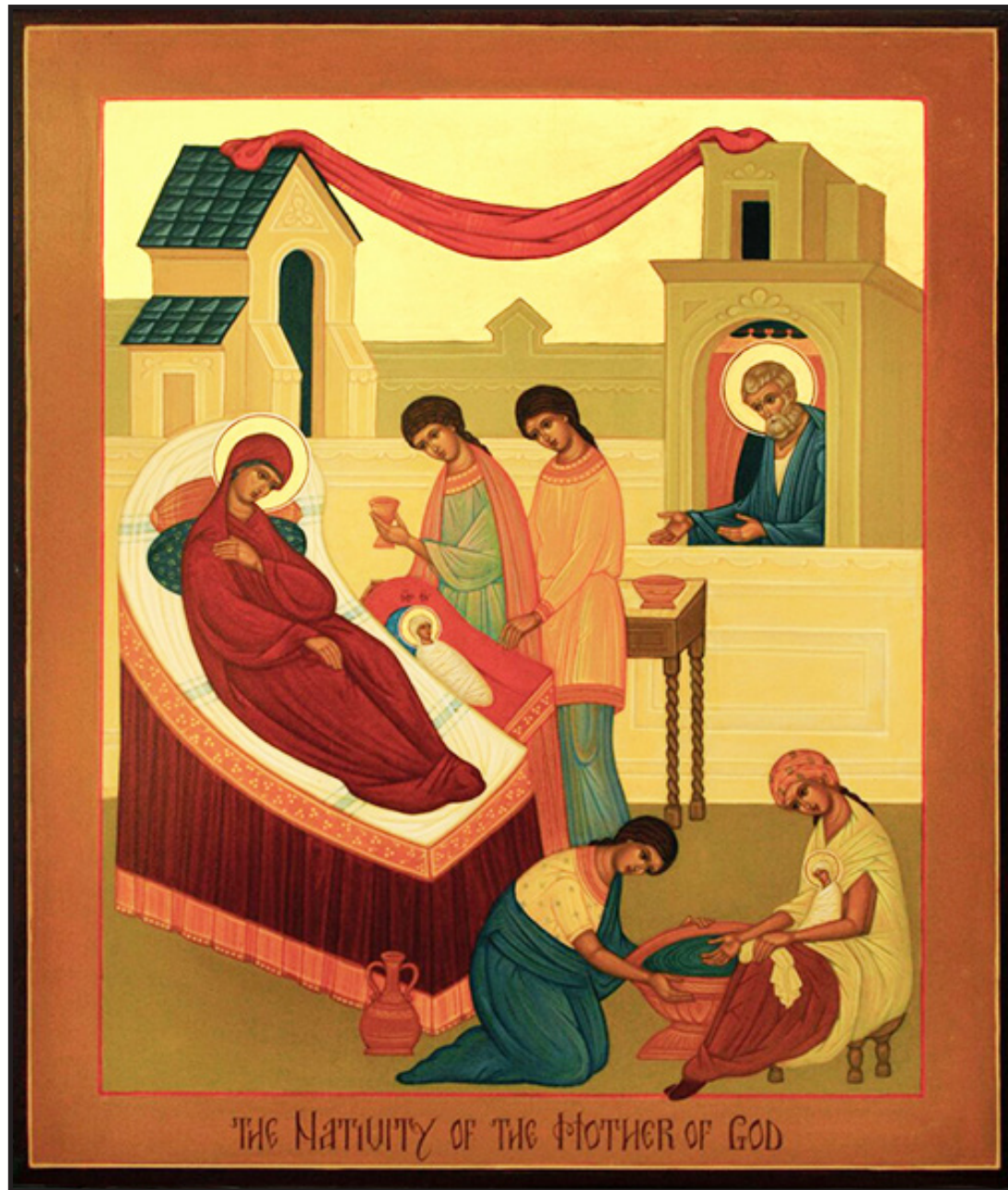
Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the iconographer, Robin Armstrong, and the parish of St. John the Evangelist, Eagle River, Alaska, for the use of these icons.

The apolytikia are taken from the website of the Antiochian Archdiocese Department of Sacred Music. <http://ww1.antiochian.org/music/library>

Carole Buleza, Leslie, Elaine and Blair Atherholt prepared this program.

Nativity of the Theotokos



September 8

St. Joachim and St. Anna were quite old, and had no children. They prayed and prayed asking God for a child. Finally, their prayers were answered and they had a daughter who they named Mary. This feast celebrates the birth of the Mother of God and reminds us to trust God's plan.

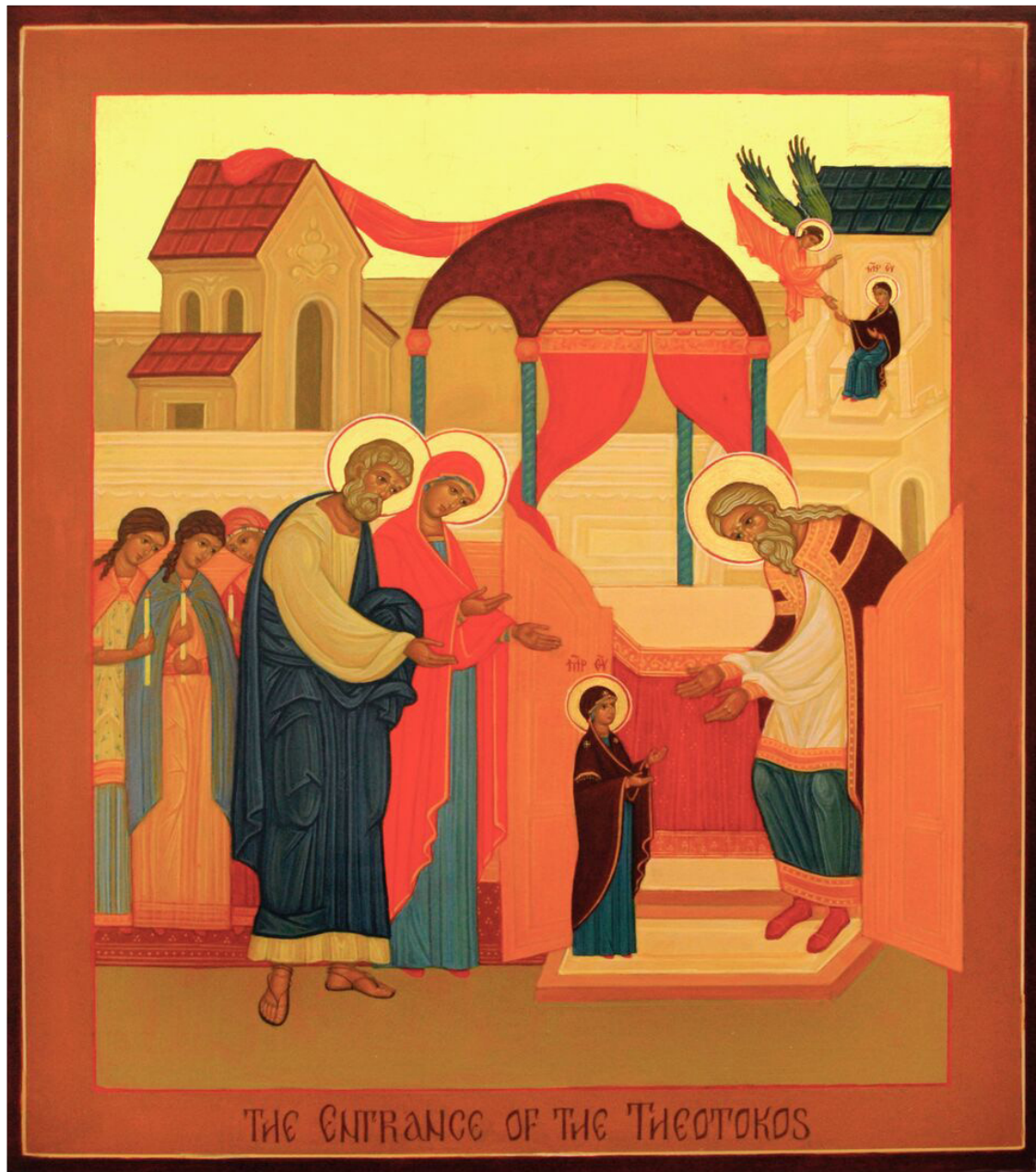
Elevation of the Holy Cross



September 14

St. Helena, the mother of St. Constantine, wanted to find the true cross of Christ. When she found the cross she took it to the Bishop of Jerusalem, St. Macarius, where he showed it to all of the people. In the icon you can see St. Macarius displaying the cross and St. Helena on his right side.

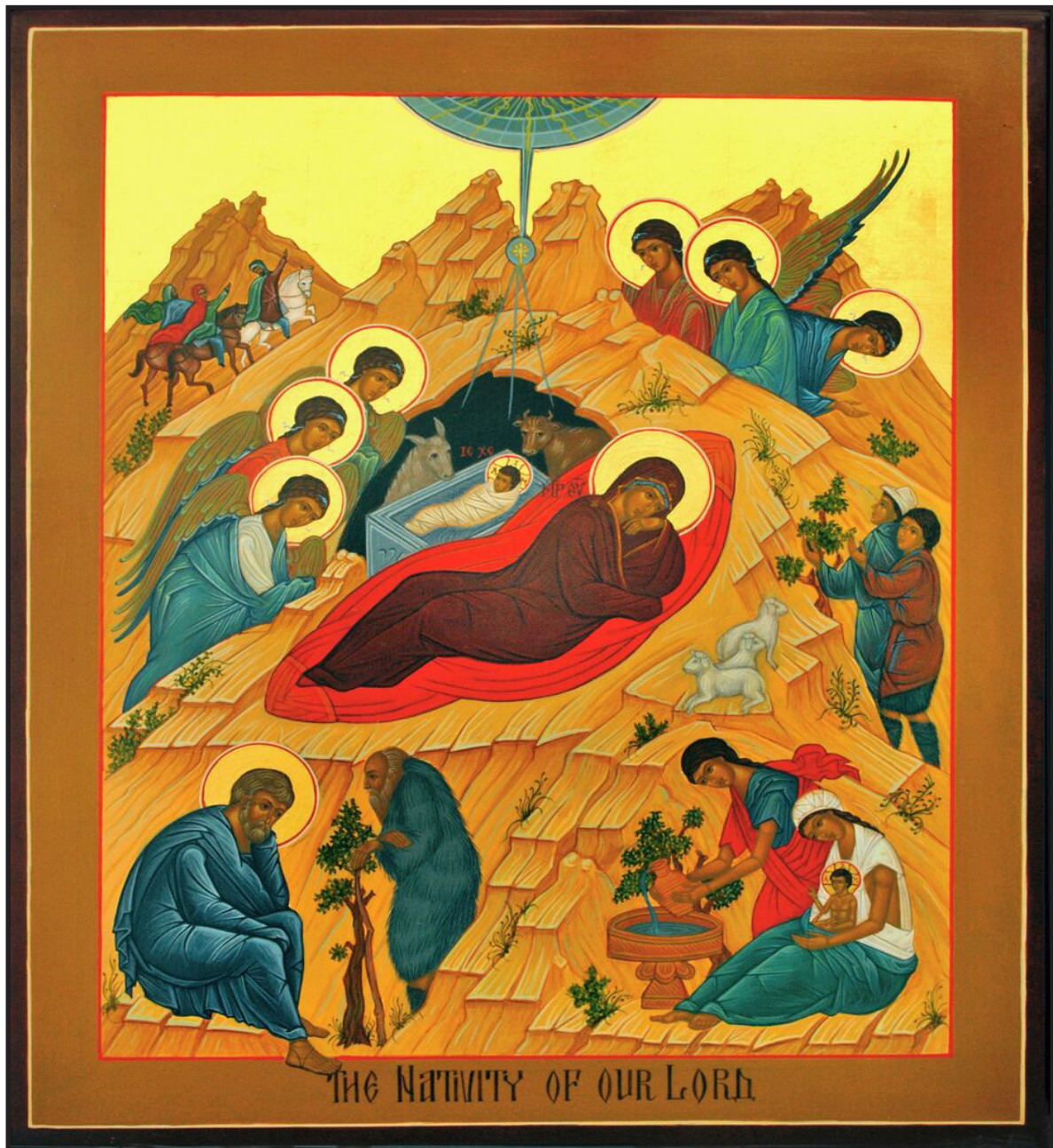
Presentation of the Theotokos



November 21

God had chosen Mary to be the Mother of God. However, she needed to prepare. Her parents took her to the Temple to live and learn about God. In the icon you see Mary being greeted at the Temple as a young girl. This feast celebrates this important day in the life of the Theotokos.

Nativity of Christ



December 25

Jesus Christ was born to Mary in a cave in the town of Bethlehem. A star shone above the place where He was born. Shepherds heard angels proclaim the birth. Wise men came to honor Him. The animals show us that all of creation rejoices in the birth of Jesus Christ.

Theophany



January 6

Theophany celebrates the baptism of our Lord. Before Jesus started teaching He first went to John the Baptist to be baptized in the Jordan River. As Jesus was being baptized the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove and the voice of the Father could be heard saying, "You are My beloved Son;

Presentation of Christ



February 2

This feast celebrates Jesus being presented to the Temple in Jerusalem. In the icon Jesus is held by St. Simeon who said, "Now, Master, You can dismiss Your servant in peace; You have fulfilled Your word. For my eyes have witnessed Your saving deed, displayed for all peoples to see; A revealing Light to the Gentiles, the Glory of Your people, Israel."

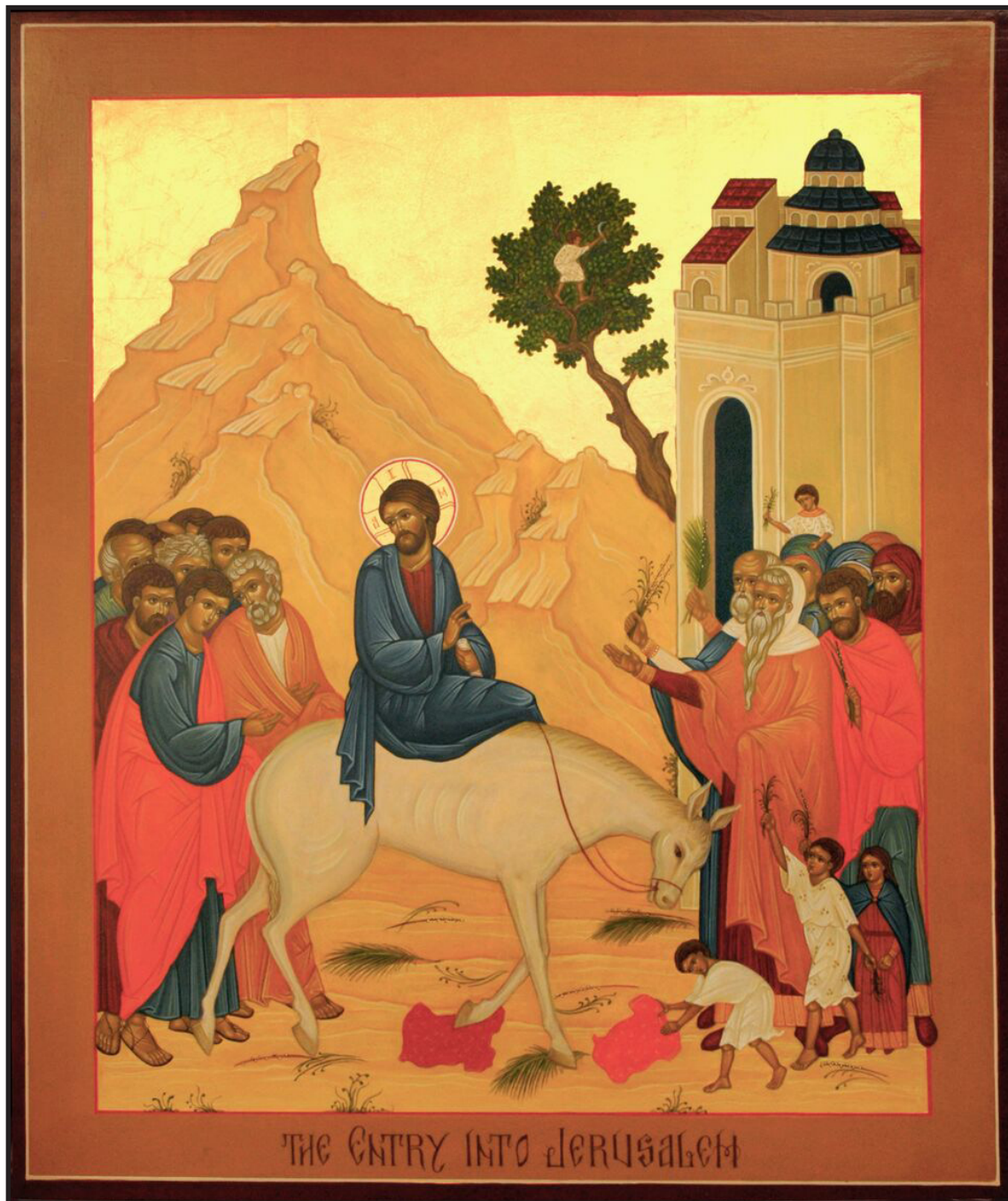
Annunciation



March 25

Mary was chosen by God to be the Mother of our Lord. God sent the Archangel Gabriel to Mary saying, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” (Luke 1: 26-28) This feast celebrates the Virgin Mary’s acceptance of God’s will.

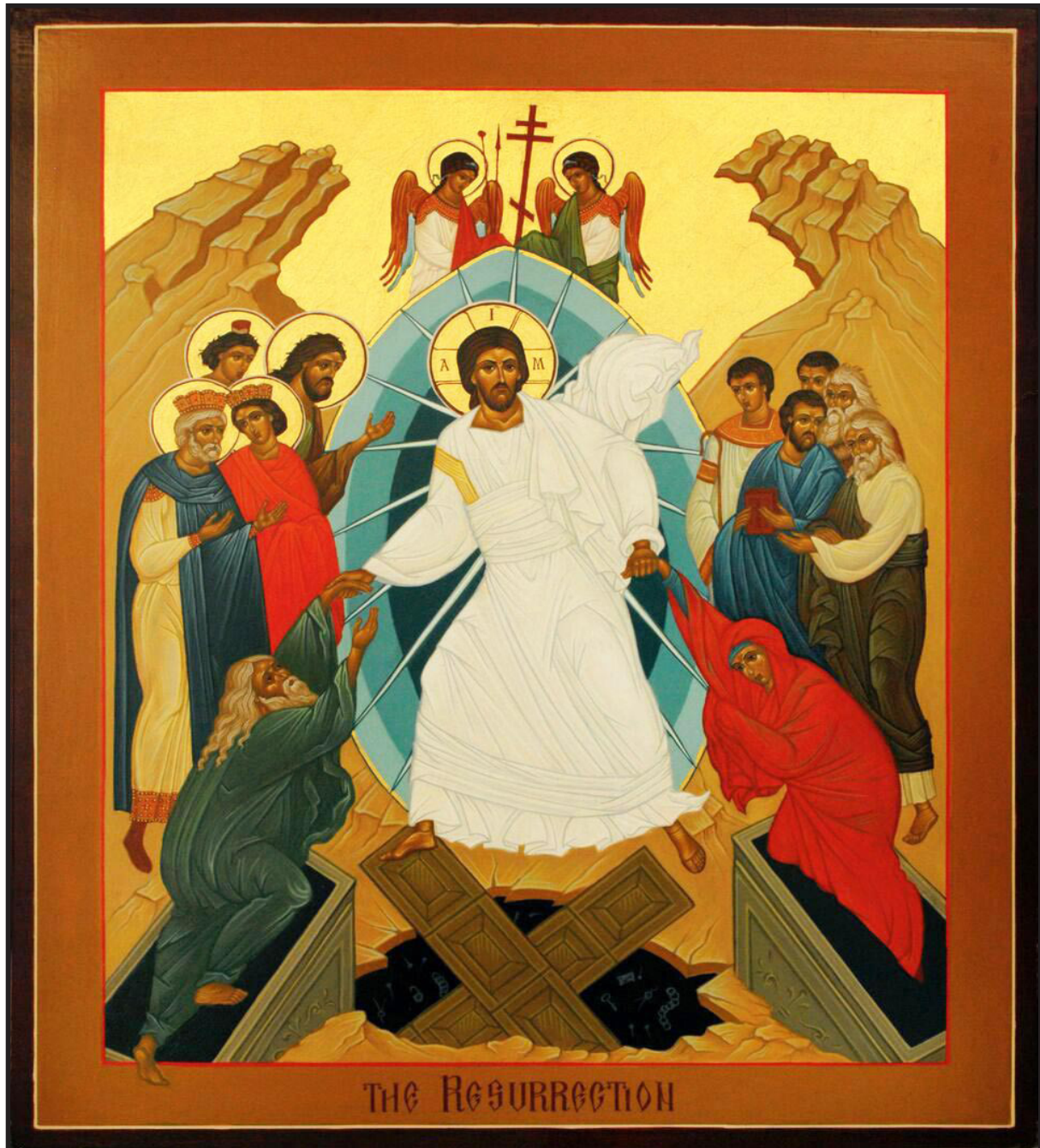
Palm Sunday



The Sunday before Pascha (Palm Sunday)

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead Jesus entered Jerusalem fulfilling the prophecy that reads, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt." The people there greeted him with palm branches crying out, "Hosanna!"

Pascha!



Pascha is the day we celebrate Christ's resurrection from the dead. Christ stands on the broken doors of Hades, the place of the dead. Christ broke the bonds of evil, sin and death (shown in some versions as the devil now in bondage). Christ is the victor! He has opened the gates of heaven to us. Jesus is raising Adam and Eve, teaching us that all people have the chance to enter the Kingdom of God.

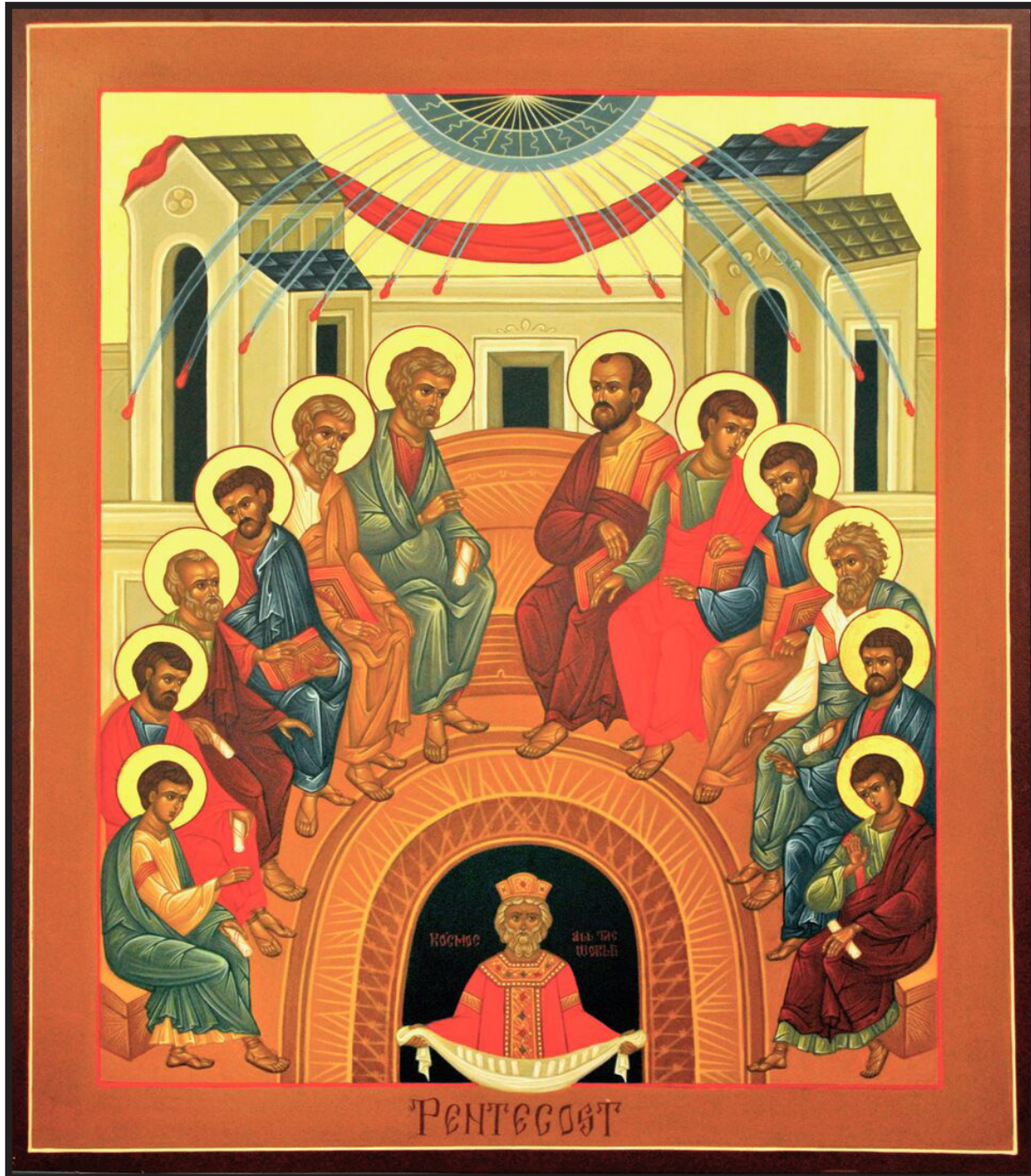
Ascension



Forty days after the Resurrection of Christ

The feast day celebrates Christ's ascension, or rising, into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. He was lifted up before their eyes in a cloud. In the icon you can see angels carrying the seated Christ, and the Apostles with the Theotokos. Christ promised the Apostles that He would not leave them; He would send the Holy Spirit to them.

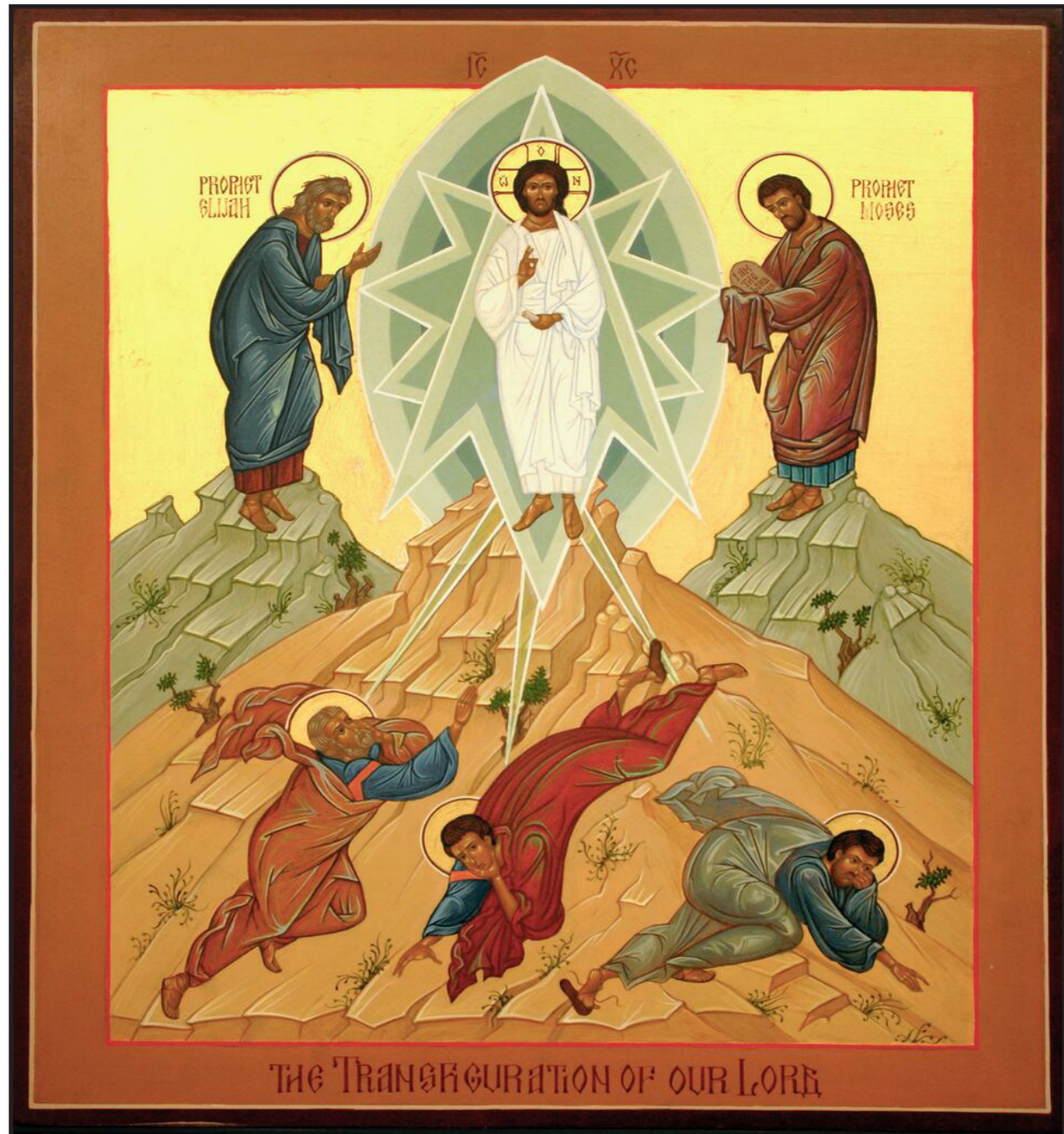
Pentecost



Fifty Days After Pascha

While the Apostles were gathered together, the Holy Spirit descended upon them, as Jesus had promised. Tongues of fire came upon them and they were able to speak different languages and bring the good news of Jesus Christ to the world, understood as the personification, “Kosmos.”

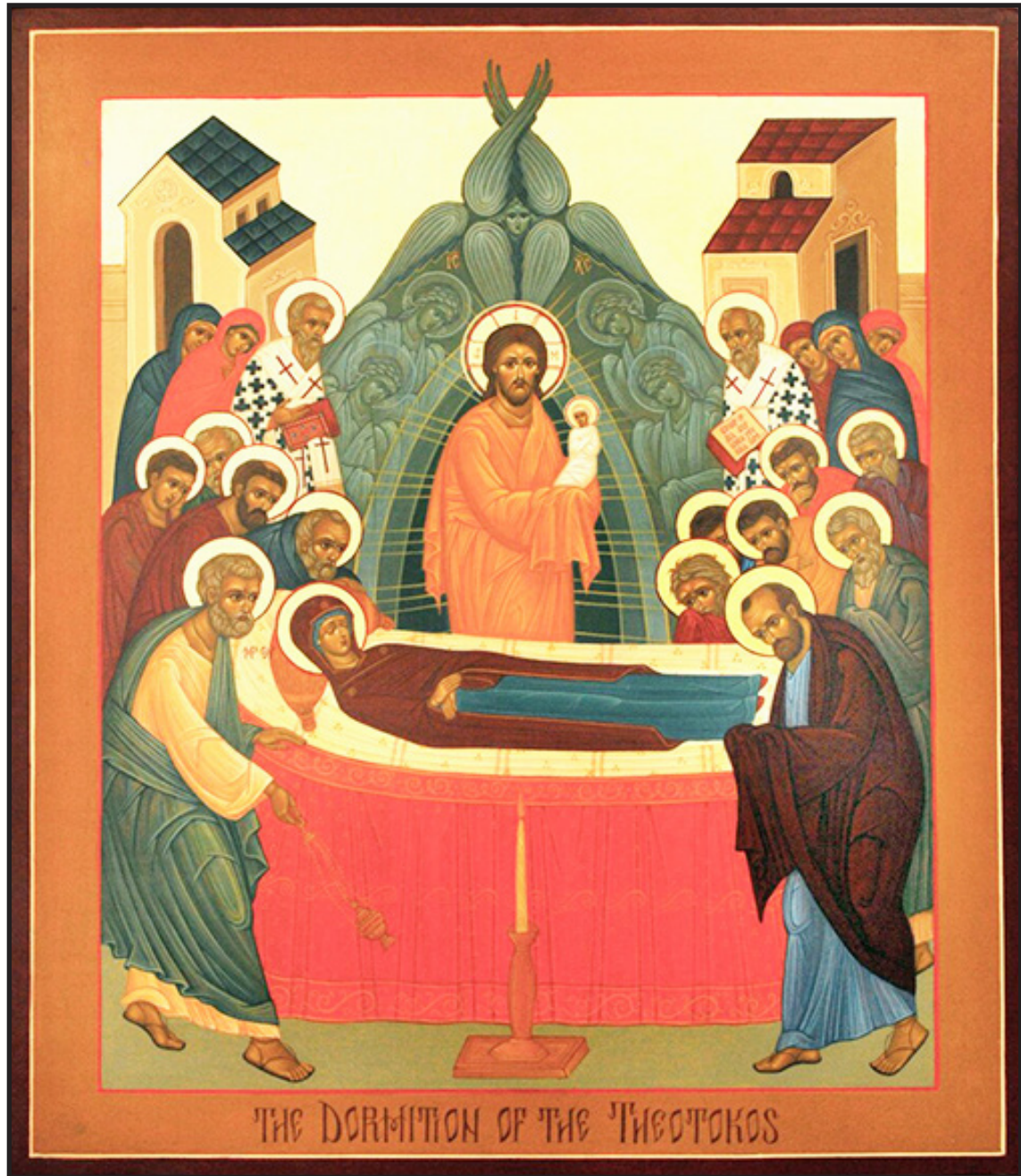
Transfiguration



August 6

Christ took Peter, James, and John to Mt. Tabor where he was transfigured before their eyes. His face dazzled like the sun. His clothing became radiant with light. In the icon Jesus stands with Moses on His left and the Prophet Elias on His right, while the three apostles are at His feet.

Dormition of the Theotokos

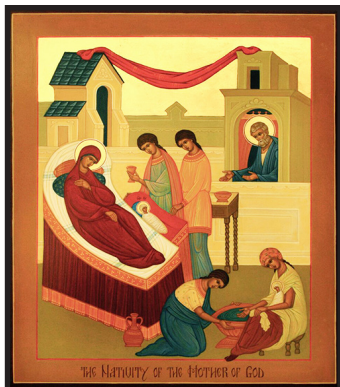


August 15

At the feast of the Dormition we remember the death of the Theotokos, the Mother of God. In the icon you see the Theotokos surrounded by the Apostles, and Jesus holding her soul (symbolized by the child) to be with Him in His Kingdom.

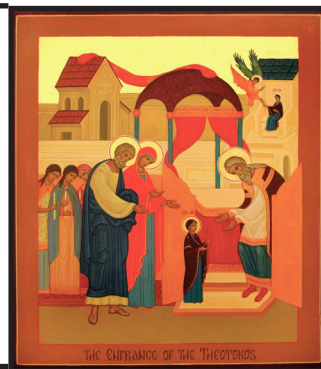
Know Christ, Know His Story

Note: These icons are NOT in feast-day order, rather in order of occurrence two centuries ago. What are the feast day commemorated by the icons on this page? How well do you know the story of Jesus? Complete the paragraphs by filling in the blanks.

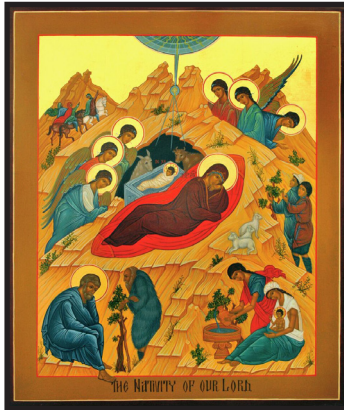


1. _____ of the _____
St. _____ and St. _____ were quite old, and had no children. They prayed asking God for a child. Finally, their prayers were answered and they had a daughter who they named Mary. This feast celebrates the birth of the _____ of God.

2. _____ of the _____
God had chosen _____ to be the Mother of God. However, she needed to prepare. Her parents took her to the temple to live and learn about God. In the icon you see Mary being _____ to the _____ as a young girl.



3. _____
Mary was chosen by God to be the Mother of our Lord. God sent the Archangel _____ to Mary saying, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the _____ is with you..."



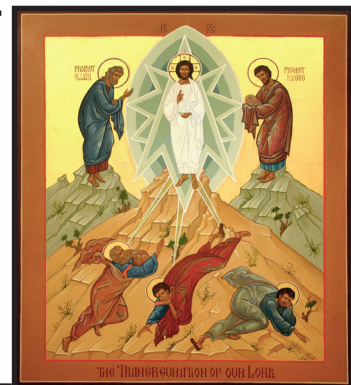
4. Jesus Christ was born to Mary in a _____ in the town of Bethlehem. A _____ shone above the place where He was born. Shepherds heard _____ proclaim the birth. Wise men came to honor Him. The _____ teach us that all of creation rejoices in the birth of Jesus Christ.

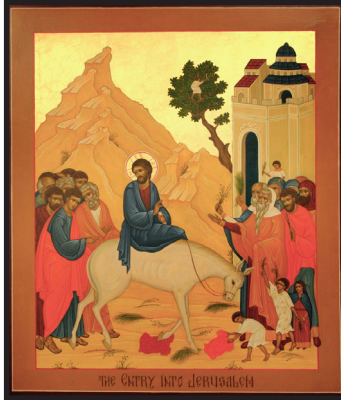
5. This feast day celebrates Jesus being _____ to the _____ in Jerusalem. In the icon Jesus is held by St. _____ who said, "Lord, now you are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel."



6. Theophany celebrates the _____ of our Lord. Before He started teaching He went to _____ to be baptized in the Jordan River. As Jesus was being baptized the Holy _____ appeared in the form of a dove and the voice of the _____ could be heard saying, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

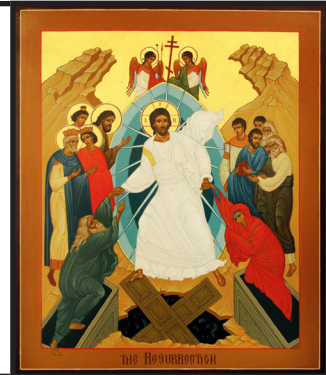
7. Christ took Peter, James, and _____ to _____ where he was _____ before their eyes. His face dazzled like the sun. His clothing became radiant with light. In the icon Jesus stands with _____ on His left and the Prophet Elias on His right, while the three apostles are at His feet.





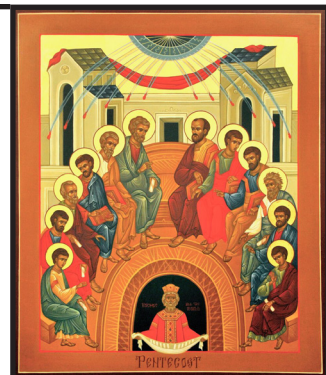
8. After Jesus raised _____ from the dead,
He entered _____ fulfilling the prophecy that reads, “Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your
_____ is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.” The
people there greeted him with palm branches crying out,
“ _____ !”

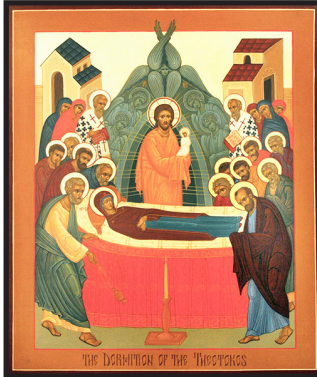
9. Pascha is the day we celebrate Christ’s _____
from the dead. Christ stands on the broken doors of Hades, the
place of the dead. Christ broke the bonds of evil, sin and death
(in some versions shown as the devil now in bondage). Christ is
the victor! He has opened the gates of heaven to us. Jesus is
raising _____ and Eve, teaching us that all people have
the chance to _____ the Kingdom of God.



10. The feast celebrates Christ’s _____ ,
or rising, into heaven to be _____ at the right hand
of the Father. He was lifted up before their eyes in a cloud. In
the icon you can see angels carrying the seated Christ, and
the Apostles with the Theotokos. Christ promised the Apostles
that He would not _____ them; He would send the
_____ to them.

11. While the Apostles were gathered together, the Holy Spirit
_____ upon them, just as Jesus had
promised. _____ came upon them
and they were able to speak different languages and teach the
_____ about Jesus Christ.





12. At the feast of the _____ we remember the _____ of the _____, the Mother of God. In the icon you see the Theotokos surrounded by the Apostles, and Jesus holding her _____ (symbolized by the child) to be carried by Him into His Kingdom.

13. St. _____, the mother of St. Constantine, wanted to find the true _____ of Christ. When she found the cross she took it to the Bishop of Jerusalem, St. Macarius and he showed it to all of the people. In the icon you can see _____ elevating the cross and _____ on his right side.

