NINETY YEARS OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

THE DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS

Its Meaning and Purpose

Very Rev. Timothy G. Bakakos

2015 has been an exciting year in the life of our beloved Parish of Panagia. Why, some of you might ask? Well, this year marks the 90th Anniversary of ministry and service of our Lord to the communicants of the Assumption Church of Chicago. Literally thousands upon thousands of faithful families have entered through the doors of this Church for spiritual and religious nourishment, and thousands of children having taken their first steps as Orthodox Christians.

On October 18th, 2015, we will culminate this year-long celebration with a banquet at the Carlisle in Lombard, Illinois, where we will be able to share in fellowship and gratitude, and give thanks to our Lord Jesus, Who has blessed each of us so abundantly. And, we also pay homage and respect to the Mother of God, the Panagia, the Protectress, who has stood as a ‘beacon’ for each of us, imploring us to follow in the steps of her blessed Son.

Each year, our Parish proudly commemorates and celebrates the Feast of the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. This event in the life of the Christian Church commemorates the repose (Dormition, Koimisis) or "falling-asleep" of the Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord. This Feast also commemorates the translation (or assumption) into heaven of the physical body of the Theotokos. Of course, we all have heard the words dormition, Koimisis, and falling asleep, but do we fully understand what the meaning of this most blessed day encompasses?

The Holy Scriptures tell us that when our Lord was dying on the Cross, He saw His mother and His disciple John kneeling at the foot of the Cross, and He said to the Virgin Mary, “Woman, behold your son!” and to John, “Behold your mother!” (John 19:25-27). And from that hour on, the Apostle John took care of the Theotokos in his own home.

Along with the biblical reference in the New Testament Book of Acts 2:14, which confirms that the Virgin Mary was with the Holy Apostles on the day of Pentecost, the tradition of our Church maintains that she remained in the home of the Apostle John in Jerusalem, continuing a ministry in word and deed.

And, we are told that three days before the death of the Panagia, the Archangel Gabriel appeared and announced to her that he was sent from her Son, Jesus Christ, to inform her that the time of her departure into eternity was imminent. The disciples of our Lord, who were preaching throughout the world, miraculously returned to Jerusalem to see the Theotokos. All of them, that is, except for the Apostle Thomas. The eleven disciples, including the Saint Paul, Apostle, were gathered together at her bedside. The Mother of God expressed her wish to be buried in Gethsemane near her parents and her spouse, Joseph. At the moment of her death, Jesus Christ Himself descended, and accompanied by Angels and Saints, and while singing holy hymns, the Panagia’s soul was carried up to heaven.

Following her repose, the body of the Theotokos was taken in procession by the Apostles and laid in a tomb near the Garden of Gethsemane, where they remained and kept vigil for three days. When the Apostle Thomas finally did arrive three days
THE DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS, Continued

continued from page 1

after her repose, he desired to see her body. But when the tomb was opened, her body was not there, and only the funeral clothes which the body had been wrapped in were left. The tomb was opened, but was found to be empty. The Apostles then realized that Mary had been taken up body and soul into heaven, and it is from this that the theology of the bodily assumption of the Theotokos was confirmed by the message of an angel and by her appearance to the Apostles.

This great Feast of the Church celebrates a fundamental and important teaching of our Christian Faith, the Resurrection of the body. In the case of the Theotokos, this has been accomplished by the divine will of God. That is why we refer to this Feast of the Panagia on August 15th as a Feast of Hope: hope in Resurrection and life eternal. And just like those who gathered around the body of the Virgin Mary at her bedside, we too, gather around our departed loved ones, and commend their souls into the hands of Christ when they pass from this world to the next. That is why we carry on the tradition of our funeral ritual, and even our memorials that we commemorate on 40 days, 3 months, 1 year, 3 years, etc. As we remember those who have reposed in the faith before us and have passed on into the communion of the Saints, we also prepare ourselves to one day be received into the new life of the age to come.

My dear brothers and sisters, this Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos that our Church celebrates this year on Saturday, August 15th, affirms that the Mother of God intercedes for us. The blessed Panagia, the Mother of God, has become the Mother of us all as children of God, embracing us with divine love which comes to us directly from our Father in Heaven.

Finally, most, if not all of us, know that our Orthodox Church calendar year begins on September 1st. But did it ever occur to you why the last major Feast we celebrate on our Church Calendar is fittingly the Dormition of the Mother of God? It is because the Church year begins and ends with the life of the Panagia. How so, you may ask? Well, on our Church calendar, the first of the Great Feasts celebrated is the Birth of the Virgin Mary on September 8th. We progress and we experience each Feast Day through the year, just as the Panagia lived through them: the Feast of the Annunciation, the Birth of Christ-God at Christmas, the Holy Baptism in the River Jordan, the public ministry of Christ, the Passion of our Lord, the Crucifixion, the Tomb, the Glorious Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Now finally, as if to complete the story and the Book of Christ, we come to the end of the Virgin’s life on earth.

As Orthodox Christians and believers, our emphasis on the ‘Dormition’ of the Virgin, is about her passing from life to death, and finally to eternal life in Christ, and how it parallels our approach to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Panagia is Christ’s first and greatest disciple, and as any good disciple, She imitates the Lord and teacher. God could not allow the body of the Mother of God, the flesh which had given Christ flesh, to know corruption, so the angels came to bring Mary’s soul to heaven with her body. There were witnesses to Christ’s Ascension, and it is told in Scripture, but there is no proof of Mary’s ascent, and that is why it is called her Assumption. However, the Church Fathers have always held that this honor was given to Mary, and that now, She is glorified in heaven, together in body and soul.

The blessed Panagia is unique and wonderful. There are many saints in heaven, but these must await until the final day of judgment for their bodies to be raised, and for them to be reunited and made ‘whole’ again, in body and spirit. The bodies of the other saints remain in their tombs. We venerate them as relics, and they will remain until the glorious return of our Lord Jesus. But our Church tells us that that has already happened to our Panagia, to the Mother of God! Her relics are not among us. For those of us who have been privileged to visit Her tomb in Jerusalem which lies empty, we have experienced the wonderful fragrance that exudes from the tomb, because for three days She lay there as the apostles and the Early Church mourned. But our Church rejoices, and yet again, in His Mother, God has provided to us a sign of the Resurrection, and a promise of the future glory which we all hope to enjoy one day.

The Panagia, the Mother of God, is the faithful disciple, who carried out the will of God with a generous spirit. She accepted Christ, and bore our Savior within herself in love. And as an act of gratitude and honor, Christ accepts Her, and bears Her to the throne She occupies in heaven. For us as faithful followers of Christ, the Panagia is the sign of hope, the proof of Christ’s merciful love, the first among the redeemed, and the highest among our race. The Panagia is more honorable than the cherubim, and beyond compare and more glorious than the Seraphim…. for they are only spirits. The Panagia, however, glorifies God in the flesh. So, as we again, in just a few days, will witness and celebrate this Great Feast of Dormition of the Theotokos, let us implore our Mother of God, to support us, to console us, and to bring Her Son closer to us, so that we too may be resurrected to His place in Heaven called Paradise.
Dear Assumption Stewards,

The Assumption Church is half way through its 90th anniversary commemoration: Honoring the Past—Embracing the Future. Let’s review the upcoming social and ecclesiastical events comprising our celebration:

July 25-July 26:
Our Greek Fest will be held on the church grounds over the last weekend in July. Last year we shifted the event from its former time slot over Labor Day Weekend; the opening of schools in mid-August made the September date problematic for many families. Though the date has changed, we continue to have the same excellent food and fellowship. We invite you to sample our acclaimed souvlaki and loukoumades. A Greek dance troupe will demonstrate the most complex of routines. The ever popular Euro-Bungee will entertain our kids. We welcome you to join us either on Saturday or on Sunday. Better yet, make it Saturday and Sunday!

August 14-August 15:
Nothing defines us better as Orthodox Christians than our liturgical tradition. No greater symbol of that tradition is the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, our “summertime Easter.” While others may frequent beaches and golf courses in mid-August, you find the Greek Orthodox faithful crowding churches dedicated to the Blessed Panagia. If you are a “regular” on August 14-15, Panagia embraces you with open arms. If you haven’t come in recent years, we invite you to reclaim your heritage. Nothing is more inspiring than a packed church. Honor your ancestors and worship as they worshiped—at the Assumption Church on August 14-15.

October 11:
The Ninety Acts of Kindness Program wraps up with a celebration in Plato Hall immediately following the Divine Liturgy. Let’s cheer on our Sunday Church School children for their extraordinary accomplishment—90 philanthropic acts since September, 2014.

October 18:
Our 90th Anniversary reaches its grand conclusion with a Gala at the Carlyle in Lombard. We triple celebrate—our Church and Her 90 years of ministry to the faithful; our proistamenos, Father Timothy, and his 35 years of service as an Orthodox priest; and our cantor, Nick Georgiafentis, who completes 50 years of service at Panagia. You will soon be receiving: (a) an invitation to support our 90th Anniversary Restoration Campaign and (b) the formal invitation to the banquet. Your Parish Council thanks you, in advance, for your generosity. There are no greater examples of loyalty and generosity than the faithful of Panagia.

We look forward to seeing you at these events.

-Peter J. Panton, M.D.
Philoptochos...

Philoptochos News
By Ann Dervis

Saint Iakovos Retreat Center
On a rainy Saturday, May 30, Sophia Vlahos and Ann Dervis attended the Philoptochos President’s Meeting at the camp in Wisconsin. They received a tour of the facility which includes a main lodge that can house 100 persons, as well as two cottages that can each house 50 persons. During the meeting, information was given on ongoing national special appeals: aid to Greece and Cyprus; Nepal Disaster Relief Fund; and St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine.

Visit to Greek American Rehabilitation and Care Center
On June 15 Francine Kott coordinated a visit to the GARCC in Wheeling, IL. Joined by Sophia Papafotopoulos, Betty Tsiolis, Demetra Spyropoulos, Irene Giardina, Phyllis Nicholas, and Garifalia Bolos, Francine provided ice cream, cookies, and lemonade for more than 50 residents. She also brought along a phonograph turntable and records of “golden oldies” which the residents enjoyed. Although the weather was inclement a good time was had by all.

Festival, July 26-27
Once again we will be baking and packaging delicious pastries for sale in our sweets tent. We will have loukoumades, diples, me-lomakarona, kourabiedes, and more. All proceeds will go to the church.

August 14-15
We will be hosting the reception after the Vesper Services on August 14, and then hosting a light luncheon on August 15.

September Meeting
Out September general meeting will be held the evening of the 17th at Plato Hall. We are fortunate to have our own Maria Delis as a guest speaker on the topic of nutrition with a focus on the healthy Mediterranean diet.

September 19
The Metropolis Philoptochos luncheon will be held on Saturday, September 19, at Café La Cave.

90th Anniversary on October 18th
Philoptochos ladies will be helping the 90th Anniversary Committee by working on mailing invitations and taking reservations for this beautiful event to be held on October 18th at the Carlisle in Lombard, IL.
Our Sunday Church School closed the book on another successful year! Congratulations to all our students and best of luck to our graduates: Estelle Bastounes, Declan Loftus, Marika Maggos, Christen Massouras and Nichaolas Rodinos!

This year without a doubt will go down in the record books as one of the busiest and certainly one of the most spiritually enriching years. Quite fitting as it is also a year that we celebrate a milestone, our 90th Anniversary!!! Without a doubt our students have given us a year to remember! Every chance they had they represented our beloved parish of Assumption with great love, enthusiasm and true dedication.

Whether at the Hellenic Parade, the Jr. Olympics and with each and every Act of Kindness, there is no question of their love for this parish. As our Acts of Kindness logo clearly displays, for 90 years this parish has been rooted in faith, family, and love! This year our children came along and sprinkled a little extra kindness here and there. It’s something that has revitalized us as a community and reminded us of what is truly important. Our faith teaches us to be kind to one another, to love our neighbor, and that it is better to give than to receive. Our children have done an outstanding job of doing all of this and showcasing Assumption.

In less than 10 months our children have completed 75 Acts of Kindness; feeding the hungry, caring for the sick and providing for the poor, all of which come right out of scripture.

Please visit our website and share in the pride of all the good that these children have done. We are blessed our SCS children call Assumption home and look forward to all the good they will continue to do by truly putting our faith in action.
Every year, with each celebration of the 4th of July, Americans are called to celebrate the idea that we live in a free country. We get together as families, we watch and participate in parades and we watch firework shows. All this is done to celebrate the idea that America is a free country.

But what really is freedom? And are human beings really free? These are questions all American’s should contemplate from time to time. Because we tend to be worldly and predominately think of this present life, freedom in this generation has predominately been associated with the idea of human rights. Americans can become more and more free in society through the recognition of their cause. Indeed, it seems that over the past few decades Americans, because they think idealistically, have come to believe in this belief of total freedom.

In direct contrast to this secular view of freedom is the Orthodox Christian view of freedom. From the Christian view point this idea of total freedom is not a possibility. Our freedom as human beings is limited because no one willed themselves into being. No one is totally free. No one choose their day of birth. That sort of thing is above our pay grade.

The holy fathers of our Church state that freedom comes through a life in Christ. They state the only freedom that matters – the only freedom we should be preoccupied with – is the freedom from sin. And this is where the Church comes into play, for through a life in Christ, as one partakes in the sacraments and lives a life in the Church, one becomes increasingly more free, and not only that, we gain the gift of discernment to know what is a legitimate, Godly pursuit of freedom and what is not.

Any pursuit of freedom outside of a relationship with God can lead to total destruction of the human being. And this is why, as America increasingly becomes more secular or more Godless, it’s pursuit of freedom has to be met with skepticism and even protest. I say that because without an intimate connection to God, either on a personal or societal level, the pursuit of freedom may in fact lead to a form of slavery in disguise. Today if one follows the tenants of the Bible and of the Orthodox Church and witnesses to them, in what is now a time of transition in society, he is many times called a hater and a bigot. “Who are you to judge me?” he is told today when he stands up to teachings that contradict the Christian tenants.

And yet, the one who really hates today is not the one who cites from the witness of the Church or the Bible and out of real love tells a person this type of freedom is wrong. No, the one who hates today is the one who pats the other on the back and in a secular way says, “I just want you to be happy.” We are destroying the souls of people by loving people without Biblical truth. And this is why American society today is so tragic. Having turned its back on the Bible it has decided to hate people in the name of what it perceives is really love.

Most of the freedoms we see in society today have been mae possible by the neglect of the Bible, the rise of secularism, and the great divorce of love from truth. Simply put, love cannot be separated from truth, for when it is all sorts of hatred for neighbor is unleashed into society in the most friendly way. We can express the truth without love, but we cannot love without truth. Love without biblical truth is really hatred.

And this is where America stands today. On the one hand it celebrates its freedom, but on the other it tragically fails to understand that when one loves without Biblical truth, it does something thought to be impossible. It enslaves “free”people by such an oppres-sive and Godless ideology.

In Christ,

+Fr. Athanasios Papagiannis
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ASSUMPTION CHURCH

GREEK FESTIVAL '15

SATURDAY, JULY 25
3 PM - 10 PM
SUNDAY, JULY 26
NOON - 9 PM

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40 DAY BABY BLESSING:
The daughter of Harloula Giannikopoulos and Joshua May was Churched
The son of Apostolos and Stephanie Xanthopoulos was Churched
The daughter of Michael and Jessie Pullos was Churched

BAPTISM:
Daughter of Thomas and Natalie Kott was Baptized, and given the name, Andreana.
   **Godparent:** Joseph Kott
Son of Paraskevi and Diamantis Dimitrakakos was Baptized, and given the name Constantine.
   **Godparent:** Steve Stavropoulos
Son of Telly and Doris Psaradellis was Baptized, and given the name Luke (Lucas).
   **Godparents:** Eduard & Emma Theodosescu
Daughter of Chrisoula and George Dana was Baptized, and given the name Demetra.
   **Godparent:** Vicki Poulos
Daughter of Roula and Michael Borkowski was Baptized and given the name Eleni.
   **Godparent:** Despina Kaspiris

CHRISMATION:
Lynn Voulgarakis was Chrismated.
   **Sponsor:** Dina Koulouris

WEDDING:
Georgia Loutos and Peter Mourtokokis were joined in Holy Matrimony
   **Sponsor:** Anthony Loutos
Alana Dakajos and Garick Schiddell were joined in Holy Matrimony
   **Sponsor:** Nicholas Dakajos

ARTOCLASIA:
The Artoclasia was offered for the Health and Welfare of the family of Peter Logothetis.

FALLEN ASLEEP IN THE LORD
+ John Gouvas + Claudia (Eftihia) Panos + Stefan (Stefanos) Wiseman
+ Dolly (Anthoula) Makaris + Catherine Gerakaris + Mary C. Arvis
+ Dr. Lucas C. Politis + Mary K. Panton

MEMORIALS

40 Days:
Eleftheria Filis
John Gouvas
Lucas Politis
Dolly (Anthoula) Makaris

3 Months:
Pauline Velikanakis
Evangelos Toubbas

6 Months:
Sophia Karagiannias
Mary (Garifayla) Livaditis

1 Year:
Helen Krillies
Maria Kanel

1 Year:
Angelo (Evangelios) Terovolas
Georgia F. Argyris

2 Years:
Andriana Vasilatos

3 Years:
Steve C. Yannias

4 Years:
Patricia (Petroula) Rombakis

5 Years:
Penelope Galanopoulos

7 Years:
Mando Gouvas
Alexandros Kalasountas

10 Years:
Dela (Stamata) Skrapates
Elaine Isaac

25 Years:
Nicholas Skrapates

33 Years:
Harry (Aristarchos) Phillips

40 Years:
John Wahby
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Dates to Remember:

July 25th-26th
Annual Assumption Church Festival

August 14th-15th
Feast of the Dormition of Theotokos

August 22nd
Day Trip to St. Iakovos Camp/Retreat Center in Wisconsin

September 13th
Sunday Church School (SCS) Begins

September 21st
Adult Bible Study Begins
St. Catherine Meeting Room, 7:00 p.m.

October 11th
Official Welcome Back to Sunday Church School
Plato Hall

October 18th
Assumption 90th Anniversary Dinner Dance
Carlisle Banquets, Lombard, Illinois

November 24th
Great Vespers for Feast of St. Catherine

November 25th
Orthos and Divine Liturgy for Feast of St. Catherine