

# The Twelve Major Feasts of the Orthodox Church

## (Resource Sheet 15)

- 1. The Nativity of the Theotokos (8<sup>th</sup> September)** - is celebrated by the Church as a day of universal joy. The Most Blessed Virgin Mary was born on this radiant day, having been chosen by Divine Providence to bring about the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God.
- 2. The Elevation of the Cross (14<sup>th</sup> September)** - commemorates both the finding of the Holy Cross by St Helen and its recovery from the Persians who had stolen it nearly 300 years later. When we elevate the Cross and bow down before it in veneration and worship to God, we proclaim that we belong to the Christ and His Kingdom by virtue of the saving power of His Cross.
- 3. The Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple (21<sup>st</sup> November)** – The Ever-Virgin Mary was received into the Temple as a child. She was led to the holy place to be "nourished" there by the angels in order to become herself the "holy of holies" of God, the living temple of the Divine Child, Jesus.
- 4. The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ (25<sup>th</sup> December)** - Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, was born of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. It is one of the greatest, most joyful and wondrous events in the history of the world.
- 5. The Theophany (6<sup>th</sup> January)** - is the Feast which reveals the Most Holy Trinity to the world through the Baptism of the Lord. God the Father spoke from Heaven about the Son, the Son was baptised by the Saint John the Forerunner, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son in the form of a dove.
- 6. The Presentation of Christ in the Temple [or Meeting of the Lord or Candlemass] (2<sup>nd</sup> February)** - commemorates an important event in the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ, forty days after His birth the God-Infant was taken to the Jerusalem Temple to give thanks. Technically this is a feast of the Theotokos since it also commemorates her Purification.
- 7. The Annunciation (25<sup>th</sup> March)** - This is the celebration of the announcing of the birth of Christ to the Virgin Mary by the Archangel Gabriel, is the feast of our own reception of the glad tidings of salvation.
- 8. The Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem (variable)** - is the celebration of the triumphant entrance of Christ into the royal city of Jerusalem. A large crowd met Him waving palm branches and placing their garments in His path. They greeted Him with these words: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."
- 9. The Ascension of our Lord** - Forty days after Christ's Resurrection, Our Lord was taken up into the Heavens in a cloud. It is the token of Pentecost, the sign of its coming, "The Lord has ascended to heaven and will send the Comforter to the world". For us the Ascension means that our humanity can be glorified in Christ.
- 10. The Pentecost** – Fifty days after Christ's Resurrection, the Holy Spirit that Christ had promised to his disciples came upon them on the day of Pentecost. The Apostles received "the power from on high," and began to preach and bear witness to Jesus as the risen Christ, the King and Lord.
- 11. The Transfiguration of the Lord (6<sup>th</sup> August)** - the Apostles see the glory of the Kingdom of God present in majesty in the Person of Christ, He was transfigured on the mount, revealing His glory to the disciples as they could bear it.
- 12. The Dormition of the Theotokos (15<sup>th</sup> August)** - commemorates the death, resurrection and glorification of Christ's mother. It proclaims that Mary has been "assumed" by God into the heavenly Kingdom of Christ in the fullness of her spiritual and bodily existence.

**Pascha** is not numbered among the Twelve because as the celebration of Christ's resurrection it is in a category all on its own as the Queen of Feasts. Ever Sunday is a "little Pascha."