



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO  
ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΓΙΟΥ ΦΡΑΓΚΙΣΚΟΥ

## ENCYCLICAL FOR THE FEAST OF THE DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS 2017

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

On this great Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, our minds first turn to the mystery of her bodily translation to heaven. The story of her Dormition ends in an empty tomb, with her reception into the arms of her Son. As the Kontakion of the Feast relates, ***“Neither the tomb, nor death could hold the Theotokos . . . for being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life by the One who dwelt in her virginal womb.”***

This Feast obliges us to reflect on the entirety of her life as we would at the end of the life of any loved one. In a homily for the Dormition, Saint Andrew of Crete enumerates her entire life, reminding us of Mary's central role in our salvation. At the end of his review of her life he states, ***“It was a life without spot or stain, utterly filled with every pure and holy quality, a life such as the world cannot grasp, since it cannot interpret it with words or bring it to the light – a life that the world had to respect, until the end.”***

In our reflections on the life of the Theotokos, we must begin with her parents, Joachim and Anna. The Fathers of the Church describe Joachim as righteous, distinguished, single-minded, and in every way pleasing to God. They say Anna lived faithfully before God, regularly attended the temple of God, and observed fully her Jewish faith with her husband. We can see how these qualities combined to create a home and family that nurtured Mary. Because of these qualities at home, Mary was secure in her identity and was willing to accept the role she would play in the life of God's people. At Mary's dedication in the Temple at three years old, the high priest blessed her saying, ***“The Lord has magnified your name in all generations. In you, on the last of the days, the Lord will manifest His redemption to the sons of Israel.”***

Mary's life was no stranger to heavenly ways, as Saint Germanos of Constantinople says. We must assume that those heavenly ways filled the home she created for her son Jesus. Although the New

Testament is silent about the early years of Christ's life, we must remember that Mary nurtured Him, saw to His physical needs, and guided His upbringing, as does any mother. And, although He was fully God, His mother taught Him the ways of His people and into maturity. In short, as the Gospel of Luke states, she saw her son increase *"in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man."* (Luke 2:52)

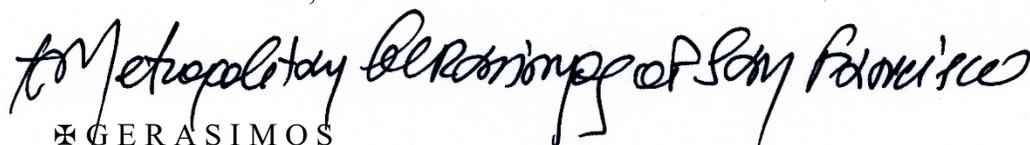
When Jesus began His ministry to the people of Israel, Mary was present from the wedding at Cana, all the way to the foot of the Cross at Golgotha. After the resurrection of Christ, Mary shared her stories, all those things that she had *"kept in her heart"* (Luke 2:51), with the Apostles and the first Christians.

When it was time for her to depart her earthly life, she prepared herself with prayer, faith, and resolve. She comforted those around her, but urged them not to be sad or weep. The Apostles gathered around her and at the moment of her death, Jesus Himself appeared. After embracing Mary, took her soul, wrapped it and handed it to the Archangel Michael, who carried it to heaven.

Beloved, the Theotokos, the Mother of God, is our example, We can learn so much from her when we open our hearts and minds to her life on this Feast of her Dormition, but in all the Feasts that commemorate her role in our salvation. In this brief recollection, we see Mary the child of devout and loving parents, with a secure and strong personal identity. We see the adult Mary, the faithful and nurturing Mother of God, and we see Mary, resolute and strong, facing the end of her earthly life. In so doing, there are examples for each of us to imitate in each stage of our lives, in our families, and in our communities.

Wishing to all who celebrate their Name Day on this Feast, the blessings of our Lord through the intercessions of His Mother the Theotokos, I remain,

With Love in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan GERASIMOS of San Francisco". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠ GERASIMOS  
Metropolitan of San Francisco