

The Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God in the Eastern tradition. Historical-liturgical and theological-spiritual study

Phd. Candidate **BĂCĂUANU Dănuț**

Abstract:

In the Orthodox Church, the Mother of God is highly venerated because she occupies a prominent place in its theology, due to her quality as the Mother of God. Her life begins with her birth from Saints Joachim and Anna. The celebration of her birth is a liturgical event through which the Church shows its gratitude for the role of the Mother of God in the plan of salvation for humanity. The phenomenon of honoring the Virgin Mary intensifies to the peak of recognizing her quality as the Mother of the Lord Christ. The ramifications of this veneration are clearly visible in the liturgical festive manifestations. One of these is the Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God in the liturgical calendar period of September 7-12. The Nativity feast itself undergoes evolutionary stages that begin with the building of a church on the place where St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin, gave birth to her and continue in the liturgical rite of the Feast. Around this manifest act of honor and commemoration are woven the elements contained in the liturgical ensemble dedicated to the event of the Virgin Mary's coming into the world, as well as those of the speeches that praise it. Depending on the geographical space and chronological aspects, the Celebration has diverse formal visibility but is unified in essence. The birth of the Mother of God is the soteriological act preceding the coming into the world of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Keywords: Nativity, Virgin Mary, Feast, hymnography, liturgical ensemble

The topic and purpose of the paper

The thesis analyzes the internal and external aspects of the liturgical celebration of the Nativity of the Mother of God in the Eastern tradition from four perspectives: historical, liturgical, theological, and spiritual. The main goal is to present the liturgical ensemble in a unified way through the lens of the evolution of the Celebration and to highlight the importance of honoring the birth of the Mother of God in Orthodox faith, with the aim of contributing to doctoral research as part of the Romanian Orthodox theological scriptural heritage. It is intended to serve as a working tool for future studies in mariology.

The Importance of the Topic

The Mother of God is highly revered as the Theotokos (Mother of God) and holds a central place in Orthodox theology. The beginning of the path to this status is her birth by Saints Joachim and Anne. The celebration of her Nativity expresses the Church's gratitude

for her role in the salvation of humanity, being part of the development of Marian devotion throughout Church history. The work emphasizes that this veneration appeared and gradually evolved, manifesting in worship through hymnography, iconography, and divine services, forming its own liturgical ensemble. It is important because it ensures continuity in the understanding of the Mother of God and is part of a timeline that it complements within the overall framework of major feasts dedicated to the Mother of God.

Methodology

The study is based on four pillars consisting of sources drawn from biblical references, patristic writings, liturgical texts (like the Menaion, Synaxarion, Homilies, etc.), and apocryphal manuscripts (e.g., the Protoevangelium of James). The latter is only a supplemental reference touched upon incidentally in aspects confirmed by Orthodox Church tradition and is by no means regarded as a text with absolute scientific value. The methods used are: analytical, comparative, historical, and liturgical commentary for developing ideas, and chronological expository for the content of the thesis. The liturgical commentary of the Feast constitutes the first endeavor of this kind in the Romanian Orthodox theological scientific heritage. In turn, the four pillars support the structure of the doctoral work, built around four areas of consistency: historical, liturgical, theological, and spiritual, creating an aesthetic and easy-to-follow architecture. Established theological terms are used in Orthodox Christian debate, so as to avoid undesired expressions foreign to the discourse of the Church Fathers, while still being updated according to the understanding of the current generation. In other words, the oldest teachings of the Holy Tradition are dressed in a new language that is as bright and full of spiritual feeling as possible to give the opportunity for equal chances in understanding and experiencing the holy emotions that arise during the celebration of the Birth of the Mother of God for today's believers. All of this, along with the liturgical commentary, forms a first element of novelty in Romanian Orthodox theological discourse.

The personal thesis stated

The celebration of the birth of the Virgin Mary, concretely expressed in its most expressive form through a liturgical ensemble specific to the period of observance (September 7-12), is a Christian theological phenomenon with an evolution that can be traced back to the earliest times of the Church, and it is by no means a relatively late 'liturgical graft.' In this sense, it autonomously complements the other feasts dedicated to the Mother of God, completing them in meaning and logic.