

THINK ABOUT IT ...

1. The parents of the Virgin Mary were named:
 - A. Joachim and Martha
 - B. Joachim and Ruth
 - C. Joachim and Anna
2. Joachim was a descendent of (his ancestor was):
 - A. Lazarus
 - B. King David
 - C. Joseph of Aramathea
3. Mary was born in the city of:
 - A. Alexandria
 - B. Nazareth
 - C. Jerusalem
4. Mary's parents were:
 - A. Old and had no children previously
 - B. Young and just married
 - C. Middle-aged and already had many children
5. When the High Priest refused to accept Joachim's offering, he:
 - A. Went to another Temple to try again there
 - B. Went into the wilderness to pray to God
 - C. Became very angry and shouted at the Priest
6. Who came to tell Mary's parents that they would have a child?
 - A. The High Priest of the Temple
 - B. The Archangel Gabriel
 - C. Joachim's neighbors
7. To thank God for allowing them to become Mary's parents, they:
 - A. Fled to Egypt to be safe
 - B. Promised to dedicate their child to serve God
 - C. Built a Temple in their own garden
8. The Nativity of the Theotokos marks the change in history when:
 - A. The Israelites ended 40 years wandering in the desert
 - B. God's promises of salvation were about to be fulfilled
 - C. People first began to build Temples for worship
9. An Intercessor is someone, usually a Saint, who:
 - A. Prays to God for us
 - B. Lives in the wilderness
 - C. Establishes a monastery

Nativity of the Theotokos (the birth of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God)

“O Holy Theotokos, pray unto God for us.”



Kontakion for the Nativity of the Theotokos

(Tone 4)

By your Nativity, O Most Pure Virgin,
Joachim and Anna are freed from barrenness;
Adam and Eve, from the corruption of death.
And we, your people, freed from the guilt of sin,
celebrate and sing to you:
The barren woman gives birth to the Theotokos,
the nourisher of our life!

THE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF THE VIRGIN MARY

The Most Holy Virgin Mary was born at a time when there was a lot of conflict and evil in the world and many persons did not truly know God. The Son of God chose to take on human nature for the salvation of human beings, and God chose Mary as His Mother. For that reason, the Nativity (birth) of the Theotokos, the Virgin Mary, is celebrated by the Orthodox Church as a day of joy.

Mary was born in the city of Nazareth. Her parents were Jewish: Joachim, a descendent of King David, and Anna, a descendent of the Old Testament Priest Aaron. The couple were sad because they had no children and they had become old. Their neighbors were unkind to them because they thought that the reason they had no children was that God was punishing them for some sin. But they had faith that with God everything is possible. So they prayed for a child and promised to dedicate the child to the service of God in the Temple.

On a feast day at the Temple, Joachim brought an offering, but the High Priest would not accept it, because he thought him to be unworthy since he had no children. So Joachim went into the wilderness and prayed with tears to God for a child. Anna wept when she learned what had happened at the Temple, and she prayed also.

The Archangel Gabriel brought Joachim and Anna the message that their prayers would be fulfilled and that they would have a daughter, Mary, through whom would come the Salvation of the world.

Because the Virgin Mary was pure and virtuous, she was chosen to be the Mother of our God, Jesus Christ. The Orthodox Church teaches that the Nativity of the Theotokos marks the change in history when the promises of God for the salvation of the human race are about to be fulfilled. This event is the beginning of our celebration of the Incarnation of Christ, for through Mary, Christ was brought to earth to give everlasting life.

The Theotokos has been revealed to us as an Intercessor. An “Intercessor” is a saint who prays to God for us. By becoming the Mother of God, Mary became our greatest Intercessor, our heavenly Mother. When we are troubled or sick or worried, we can ask her:

“O Holy Theotokos, pray unto God for us.”

UNDERSTANDING THE WORDS

NATIVITY = “birth.” We celebrate the birth of the Virgin Mary. We also celebrate the birth of other important Saints in the Church, such as the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist. Later in the church year, we celebrate the Nativity of Christ (Christmas).

THEOTOKOS = “Mother of God.” The Virgin Mary was the Mother of Christ. Christ is called the “Second Person” of the Trinity, which is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, our God.

BARREN = “unable to or not having children.”

DEDICATE = “to promise something for a purpose.” In thankfulness for their answered prayers, Joachim and Anna promised God that they would dedicate their child to serve Him.

TEMPLE = “a place of worship.” In the Old Testament, the people who believed in the true God were the Israelites (Jewish). Their places of worship were called Temples.

UNWORTHY = “not good enough.” The people in ancient times were superstitious. They thought that not having children was a punishment from God. For that reason, even though Joachim and Anna were virtuous, their neighbors thought they were unworthy.

SALVATION = “being saved from something.” When Christ came to earth, he brought the message that people who believe in Him can receive forgiveness instead of punishment for sins. In Old Testament times, people knew only about God’s judgment.

VIRTUOUS = “doing only good things.” When a person loves God and follows the 10 Commandments, the person is said to be virtuous. Being virtuous is the opposite of being evil or sinful.

INCARNATION = “in the flesh.” Before the coming of Christ to earth, God was in heaven and not able to be seen. When Mary conceived and gave birth to Christ, God “took on flesh” as a perfect human being. The word “in-carna-tion” is from the root “carna” which means “flesh” (the human body).

INTERCESSOR = “someone who prays to God for us.” In the Liturgy, we pray for other people. And in our private prayers we also pray for others, such as when we ask God to bless our parents, our family and other persons whom we care about. The Saints, who are already with God in heaven, care about us who are on earth, and they pray to God for His mercy and His help for us.