

Synaxis of the Holy Theotokos

Every October in the Orthodox Church, we celebrate the feast of the Protection of the Holy Theotokos. This feast commemorates the protection of the city of Constantinople from invading forces by the Mother of God. In a vision to St. Andrew, the fool for Christ, and St. Epiphanius, the Holy Theotokos appeared praying before the altar for the protection of those gathered in the church and then turned around and covered them over with her veil as a sign that she would protect them from all harm. Indeed, at that moment the enemy forces were then repulsed and forced to retreat by the defenders of the city.

The feast of the Holy Protection has its roots in today's feast day that we are celebrating, the feast of the Synaxis of the Holy Theotokos. Today's feast day is the oldest feast day of the Mother of God on our liturgical calendar. A synaxis feast is a feast that is usually celebrated the day after a major feast day and commemorates a Saint who played an important secondary role in the previous day's feast day. In this case, we celebrate the Holy Theotokos, who gave birth to Christ, whose Nativity we celebrated yesterday. The feast is named "synaxis" because at one time it involved a gathering of the bishop with his priests to celebrate together the day after a major feast day.

In today's reading from St. Matthew's gospel for the feast, we hear the account of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. We can imagine the Holy Theotokos riding upon a donkey while holding the baby Jesus in her arms and covering Him over with her veil to protect Him from the harsh elements. Since, as St. Paul says, we are the body of Christ because we all partake of the one loaf of Holy Communion, thus, the Holy Theotokos also covers us over with her veil of intercessory prayer to protect us and keep us safe on our journey to God. Today, on this feast of the Synaxis of the Holy Theotokos, we celebrate the Mother of God as our mother, who through her prayers gives birth to Christ within us and who protects us on our journey to the fullness of life in Him. May her prayers be with us always.