

## Dormition of the Theotokos (Assumption)

The first feast of the liturgical year is the Nativity of Mary (September 8) and the last feast of the church year is the Dormition (August 15).

There are no relics of the Mother of God. This confirms what the Church has always kept in its Tradition: that Mary ascended to heaven with her body.

We do not know the time or place of Mary's death. There are two traditions: one, she died in Jerusalem; the second, she died in Ephesus.

Dormition means "passage through death," or "the falling asleep."

Assumption signifies "ascension into heaven."

The feast of the Dormition is a second Pascha, a passage from death to life, because we believe that Mary, like her Son, has passed through death and like Him she has risen body and soul.

This icon expresses the hope of every Christian who waits for the hour of death as the passage into new life, because of the victory of the resurrected Christ. Each death is a new and personal Pascha.

In preparation for the feast, a two-week fast is prescribed (little practiced nowadays). Historically, the Fast of Dormition can be traced to the 9<sup>th</sup> century but it was officially introduced into the Byzantine Church in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

According to an old custom, flowers and medicinal herbs are blessed after the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Dormition. According to traditional belief, after Mary's assumption, her tomb was filled with a "heavenly fragrance" and flowers. The herbs, used as natural medicine, are blessed in commemoration of the numerous healing and extraordinary graces bestowed on the pilgrims at Mary's tomb.