

On November 21st, the Orthodox Church celebrates a feast called **The Entrance of the Virgin Mary into the Temple**. That's quite a long title, and not very many people know what it's about, so let me tell you the story.

We all know that **Mary** is the mother of the **Lord Jesus**. Mary's dad was named **Joachim**, and her mom was named **Anna**. That means Joachim and Anna were Jesus' grandparents.

Joachim and Anna had been married for a very long time, but they were never able to have any children. Finally, when they were quite old, an angel told Joachim and Anna that they would have a baby girl. What a happy surprise that must have been!

Joachim and Anna knew that Mary was a special child, but they also knew that they were very old, and they might not be able to take care of her very well. So they decided that when their daughter Mary was 3 years old, they would bring her to the **Temple** and she would live there. The Temple was like a huge church in the Old Testament.

Mary lived in the Temple from when she was 3 years old until she was ready to get married. In those days, people did not live as long as they do now. Young women got married when they were about 15 years old.

Mary entered the Temple when she was 3 years old. When Joachim and Anna arrived, the priest welcomed her in. His name was **Zechariah**. Also, many other young ladies held candles. This was partly because they didn't have light bulbs back then. But it was also a way to celebrate Mary's arrival. These young ladies would be Mary's new sisters!



Some people ask why this day is so important. Well, I'm going to tell you.

First of all, let's go back in time to hundreds of years before Mary was even born. In those days there was the Temple in a city called **Jerusalem**. It was God's holy house. Inside the Temple, there was a special place called the **Holy of Holies**. It was separated from the rest of the Temple by a curtain. The Holy of Holies was a place where God visited His people.

Inside the Holy of Holies was a special container made out of gold. This container was quite large, and was called the **Ark of the Covenant**. The Ark of the Covenant had angels on top, and it held two very important things: the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (which were the **Word of God**) and a jar of Manna (Manna is the **Bread of God** that came down from heaven).



After a long time, a very bad king named **Nebuchadnezzar** destroyed the first Temple and the Ark of the Covenant, and he took all the Jews as prisoners to a country called **Babylon**.

After 40 years, a new king let the Jews return to Jerusalem, and they built a new Temple. They even built a Holy of Holies. The only thing they didn't make was a new Ark of the Covenant. They didn't build this container because they didn't have the presence of God to put into it – no Word of God and no Bread of God.

So when Mary entered the Temple when she was 3 years old, she became the new container. Of course, Mary is not made of gold. She is far more important – she is a living person like you and me! And she is not going to hold stone tablets or bread, but the living **Son of God**. And don't you think the living Son of God needs a *living* Ark and not one made of gold? Mary is the living Ark of the Covenant. But can you think of ways that Jesus is the God's Word? Can you think of a way Jesus is the Bread of God?



So we celebrate Mary going into the Temple because she is getting ready to be the container that holds the Son of God.

One more important part of this feast is that it is celebrated at the beginning of **Advent**. Advent is the time we prepare for the birth of Christ at Christmas. We celebrate Mary becoming the new Ark of the Covenant at the beginning of Christmas-time because she will carry the Son of God.

Because Christmas is coming soon, we think about ways we can prepare to carry God in our hearts too. I think we can all become containers that hold God. Don't you?