

## THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN HOLIDAY IN THE BULZEȘTI COMMUNE, DOLJ COUNTY

Loredana Maria ILIN-GROZOIU

“C.S.Nicolăescu-Plopșor Institute for Studies  
in Social Sciences and Humanities”, Craiova  
lorelayy2007@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** The holidays are different from the other days of the year first of all because in the Orthodox Church is officiated the divine service and the believers participate to the holly services and listen the wise words of the priest. Therefore, each Christian enjoys the holidays in a clerical way. Then, the difference lays in the fact that all the responsibilities and other usual duties are ceased and replaced with religious preoccupations. The Assumption of the Virgin, commonly called The Great Saint Mary, is the event that marks the end of the earthly life. In the eve of the holiday takes place the Vespers service, along with The Requiem of the Blessed Virgin that is sung by all the believers. With the occasion of this holiday, on August the 15<sup>th</sup> is organized in the Bulzești commune an annual fairy where the villagers from this commune and from the neighborhood attend.

**Keywords:** Bulzești commune, Dolj county, religious holidays, popular culture.

August 15<sup>th</sup> is the day when the Orthodox Church celebrates The Falling Asleep of the Mother of God (The Dormition of the Theotokos), event that marks the end of her earthly life. According to an older tradition, three days after falling asleep, the Holy Virgin was taken up into Heaven bodily. As following, in the West, this holiday was called *The Assumption of Mary*<sup>1</sup>.

Virgin Mary, the Queen of all angels and saints<sup>2</sup>, the holiest of all the women and that who enjoyed the honor of giving birth in body to the Son of

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<sup>1</sup> Ene Braniște, *Liturgica generală cu noțiuni de artă bisericească, arhitectură și pictură creștină*, printed with the blessing of the All-Happy Father Teoctist, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 1993, pp. 188-189.

<sup>2</sup> *Preacinstirea Maicii Domnului*, anthology realized by Ierom. Porfirie Nichita, book printed with the blessing of the All-Holly Father Galaction, the Bishop of Alexandria and Teleorman, Bacău, Editura Bunavestire, 2008, p. 175.

God and the Redeemer of the world, is considered to be in the Christian orthodox tradition, the first and the greatest of all the saints<sup>3</sup>. The Mother of God is “among all the happy people, the stain-less mirror of the innocence and blamelessness: all good, all pure”<sup>4</sup>, as it is called in the Song of Songs by the Holy Spirit: “You are beautiful, my beloved, and there is no blemish in you!” (*The Song of Songs* I, 14). The Mother of God, “is born, full of grace, in the dawn of a new beginning for the mankind; she conceives the light of the world, our Lord, Jesus Christ and gives Him life; she follows Him into the world, full of the immaculate love and she is also accompanies Him on the way towards the cross”<sup>5</sup>.

In the first three centuries, the honoring of the Holy Virgin, especially in the particular cult of the Jerusalem Church and around the tomb of the Mother of God from Gethsemane, knew more discrete forms of manifestation. But, starting with the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, the Mother of God cult enjoyed a rapid development, being a natural reaction against the Nestorian heresy<sup>6</sup>, which’s followers claimed that Christ the Redeemer had two sides: a divine one and a human one, each existing in two different persons.

Furthermore, the Nestorians didn’t see a hypostatic union of the two sides, but, at the most, a moral union in the Person of the Christ the Redeemer, because they considered that the human nature couldn’t hold the divine one too<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, they admitted that Jesus Christ is only the bearer of God (Theophorus) and not the real God and Virgin Mary is not the mother of God but the mother of a man, at the most of Christ<sup>8</sup>.

The Saint Cyril of Alexandria united the forces against Nestorius and his followers, sustaining, on one side, the oneness of the person of Christ with the two subsistent sides, unmingled, inseparable, and separated but coexistent and theandric and, on the other side, promoting the truth about the quality of Virgin Mary, that of giving birth to God<sup>9</sup>.

Father Stăniloae remarks the involvement of the Holy Spirit in fulfilling this act through which the Son of God is a hypostasis of the human nature

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<sup>3</sup> Ene Braniște, *cited work*, p. 186.

<sup>4</sup> Ilie Miniăt, *Didahii și predici*, translated by Dumitru Fecioru, Bacău, Editura Bunavestire, 1995, p. 400.

<sup>5</sup> Petru Rezuș, “Mariologia ortodoxă”, in *Ortodoxia*, no. 4/1950, p. 515.

<sup>6</sup> Ene Braniște, *cited work*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>7</sup> Isidor Todoran, Ioan Zăgrean, *Teologia Dogmatică*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, printed with the blessing of His All-Holiness Bartholomew, the Archbishop of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, Arhidiecezana Cluj, 1997, p. 214.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, book printed with the blessing of the All-Happy Father Teoctist, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2003, p. 80.

through the Holy Spirit, the One who works upon the woman who is the mother of the Son<sup>10</sup>.

The honor shown to the Mother of God in the public cult of the Orthodox Church is mirrored in the great number of holidays dedicated to her memory: *The Nativity of Mary (September 8<sup>th</sup>)*, *The Entrance of the Mother of God (November 21<sup>st</sup>)*, *The Annunciation (March 25<sup>th</sup>)*, *The Assumption of Mary (August 15<sup>th</sup>)*, *The Protection of the Mother of God (October 1<sup>st</sup>)* and *The Solemnity of the Holy Family (December 26<sup>th</sup>)*. All these celebrations commemorate the most important moments from her life, events that laid the foundation of the divine plan, but also the controversies and the apologies of the Saint Parents that protected her against the heresies that denaturalized her quality of “Woman who gave birth to God”, of His and our Mother.

Father Cleopa confessed: “Through the Mother of God, He came on us and our nature rose to the right side of the greatness from above, to the right side of God-the Father. The nature that Jesus has today, such is the sinless human nature, He took it from the alimmaculate blood of His Mother”<sup>11</sup>.

As chosen daughter of the mankind, she lives her life in a total peace with God, in soul and body, with herself and with the other people. Her parents, Joachim and Ann, who received her as a gift from God in their later years, offered her back to Him, also as a gift<sup>12</sup>, sending her to the boarding school of the Jerusalem church since she was three years old, place where she gave herself totally to God in prayer and trying to fulfill His holy will. While she was praying, on March 25<sup>th</sup> 749 BC<sup>13</sup>, the Archangel Gabriel, sent by God, announced her that she would give birth to Messiah: “Rejoice, you highly favored one! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women!” (*Luke I*, 28). When receiving this news, Virgin Mary was frightened, because she didn’t understand what she had seen and heard. The Archangel encouraged her saying: “Fear not! You have found favor with God, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (*Luke I*, 31). Exited and concerned, the Archangel calmed her, saying that she will supernaturally conceive, through the divine power and, as an example, he added: “And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren”. Hearing this, Mary agreed, saying: “Behold, I am the servant

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> *Ne vorbește părintele Cleopa*, 7, book printed with the blessing of His All-Holiness Daniel, the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, edition supervised by Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Editura Mănăstirea Sihăstria, 2004, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> L. Băjău, *În slujirea dreptei credințe. Predici*, Craiova, Editura Policrom, 2007, p. 299.

<sup>13</sup> *Preacinstirea Maicii Domnului*, p. 171.

of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (*Luke I, 38*). After giving birth to the Son of God she still remained a Virgin. As pr. Ion. L. Băjău declared: “The human and the divine nature, maternity and virginity are connected each other in a secret and marvelous manner, like two golden strings, in her own being”<sup>14</sup>.

The last aspect from her life is her death that she accepts like any other earthly creature. “As Mother of Life”<sup>15</sup> that gave birth to the Son of God, she receives death as a passage into the real life. Thus, her death means actually the crossing from the earthly to the heavenly side, a slightly falling asleep, “a slumber” that she is given for a short period of time<sup>16</sup>. And as a proof we have got the empty tomb from the Village Gethsemane, found, according to the Apostolic Tradition, by Apostle Thomas.

The tradition says that, with three days before the falling asleep of Mary, the Archangel Gabriel announced her that that she will pass from the earthly life to the eternal rest, to the honor and to the glory from heaven<sup>17</sup>. The Mother of God prepared herself for the reunion with her Son. After the poor people had received alms and two widows received the two pieces of clothes – the belt and the omphorion – the people, holding torches in their hands and the holly bed, headed to the village Gethsemane, where the tomb was ready<sup>18</sup>. Here, her body was oiled with scents, was wrapped in a linen shroud and had a tombstone put at the entrance of the tomb.

Also according to the tradition, after three days, the Apostle Thomas, wishing to see the body of the Mother of God, asked for the tomb to be opened and, by some miracle, was found only the shroud because her body had been taken to heaven by our Lord, Jesus Christ<sup>19</sup>. We talk about an empty grave because “the grave can’t hold the Mother of life, the embodiment of the divinity, whose proper place is on the throne of the divine grace”<sup>20</sup>. As our Redeemer, throughout His death, defeated death, bringing the victory of life after His Resurrection, the Mother of God is, in the same time, the fruit of life and immortality through her Son. The Woman who gave birth to God made the transition from death to the eternal life<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Ion L. Băjău, *cited work*, p. 300.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 302.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 302.

<sup>17</sup> *Preacinstirea Maicii Domnului*, p. 176.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 191.

<sup>19</sup> Gheorghe Zamfir, “Învățătura despre Maica Domnului în teologia ortodoxă și catolică, in *Analele Universității din Craiova, series Teologie*, year VII, no. 9/2002, pp. 138-150.

<sup>20</sup> Ilie Miniati, *cited work*, p. 398.

<sup>21</sup> A. G. Cosma, “Viața Sfintei Fecioare Maria”, in *Glasul Bisericii*, year XXXVII, no. 10-12/1968, p. 1187.

The Mother of God, full of grace, sends her love to us, the believers. In suffering, need and trouble, only the Mother of God and “her prayer can overflow the mercy of her Son on us, her earthly children”<sup>22</sup>.

The feast day of The Assumption of Mary starts with the fasting that is a proper moment to think over the pastoral state of mind and over the renewing of the spiritual contact with God, through repenting and humbleness, and also over the love for the nearby people. The fasting before this holiday, that precede the festival, is decided by the Church in order to remember the special virtues of the Holy Virgin and her fasting before the passing over. As Ilie Moldovan noticed, “The fasting is the quintessence of the righteous life that is lived with great love for people, helping and caring, a life that feeds itself with the truth from the Gospel and the liturgical prayer”<sup>23</sup>.

As concerning the oldness, it is the newest from all the long fasting periods. Its origin goes probably back in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, when the Mother of God cult began to develop and when the feast of The Assumption gained an even greater significance. The fasting before the Assumption of the Virgin is, in the Orthodox Church, after The Lent and The Advent, the third as importance.

While expecting the feast of The Assumption of Virgin Mary, the orthodox Christians from the commune Bulzești prepare themselves spiritually and morally, trying to be better, understanding and caring people, to reconcile with themselves and with the other people around, to forgive and to be forgiven, to learn to love their neighbors. “Fasting is something I had learned from my parents. The fasting period makes us more thoughtful, better people, keeps us away from troubles and brings us closer to God. Before, our faith was different. We were all fasting... even the children. Now we are few people who keep the fast”<sup>24</sup>.

The fast period begins in the evening of July 31<sup>st</sup> and if this day happens to be a fasting day, the fast period begins a day before. The conditions of fasting before this holiday are harsher than those during The Advent or during the fast of The Saints Apostles Peter and Paul because the Great Church Formulary and the Teachings regarding the fasting periods from the Breviary recommends to eat on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays before 3 o'clock p.m., when the believer is supposed to eat dry food. On Tuesdays and Thursdays he mustn't put oil in his food, but only on Saturdays and Sundays when he can also drink wine. But, according to the Great Code of Laws, we can use oil and drink wine, not only on Saturdays and Sundays, but also on all the days of Tuesday and Thursday from this period. We can eat fish on the Feast Day of the Transfiguration of Jesus. The believers, during the Fast of the Assumption, can

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<sup>22</sup> Ion Băjău, *cited work*, p. 304.

<sup>23</sup> Ilie Moldovan, “Postul ca stare teopatică și filantropia”, in *Studii*, no. 3/2005, p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> Inf. Ovidiu Mitache, 80 years old, Prejoi, Dolj county, 2010.

consume this aliment because the fish is a Christian symbol<sup>25</sup> that embodies Jesus, our spiritual food. Information from the village Frățila, Bulzești commune, Dolj county goes: “In this day we eat fish cooked in different ways: as broth, fried, roe. For us, the old people, fish is a light aliment, also recommended by the doctors”.

On this day, the relatives give alms for the dead people consisting of fried fish on polenta or bread: “We give alms to the poor people, for our dear family members. For their souls... not because they could be able to eat the food, but because we want God to see we are caring people who desire to ease the suffering of our beloved, if they committed sins while they were alive”<sup>26</sup>.

According to the popular tradition, the person who gives alms for the departed one, fulfills a double role: on one side is the fact that he is the person who beseeches and mediates before God for the soul of the deceased and, on the other hand, he piously brings the offering, that the dead person could no longer bring before God, as alms<sup>27</sup>.

In the same time, this act of respect and devotion and, not last, of love for the departed one, is a duty of the still living persons – a belief that has its roots in the idea of immortality and a conviction that, at the end of the world, every human being will meet the dearest people, being judged in accordance with the divine justice. The care for the deceased person is a duty that deals with the observing of the ten commitments of God and His benevolence will reward the people who do this.

In the eve of the holiday takes place the Vespers service, along with the Requiem of the Blessed Virgin that is sung by all the believers: “We sing the Requiem along with the priest. It is something special. We calm our souls. We forget about our worries...”<sup>28</sup>. In the evening, the believers go to the church to celebrate The Assumption of the Virgin: “We all go to the church. We pray to the Mother of God to give us health, to be better, more caring and forgiving persons. The Virgin helps us when we need. Even today, when we have to deal with so many troubles and concerns... Where to go to, if not to the church? In the power of the mighty God and Virgin we place our hopes, expectations and trust”<sup>29</sup>.

On this day, in the Bulzești commune, a special event takes place with the occasion of this holiday: the Saint Mary fair, where the villagers from this commune and from the neighborhood attend. The children wait impatiently this event, dressed in new clothes and with the confidence that their parents will buy them sweets and toys: “Dressed in clean clothes, we all go to this fair year by

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<sup>25</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române*, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2006, p. 33.

<sup>26</sup> Inf. Constantina Gheorghe, 78 years old, Stoicești, Dolj county, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Inf. Gheorghita Gheorghe, 64 years old, Stoicești, Dolj county, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Inf. Valerica Preda, 78 years old, Prejoi, Dolj county, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> Inf. Maria Luță, 79 years old, Stoicești, Dolj county, 2010.

year. We can hardly wait for it. We buy sweets and everything our grandchildren want. The young people dance the *hora* (Romanian round dance). Everybody's having fun"<sup>30</sup>.

There are brought market stalls full with *mici* (forced meat balls), fizzy drinks and beer, together with clothing, toys, sweets and even workmanship items. The folk music entertainers heat the atmosphere along with the dancers – keepers of the folkloric traditions and connoisseurs of the former dances. Charmed by music, young and old people dance the *hora*, celebrating, on one side, The Assumption of Mary and her ascension to heaven and, on the other side, full with optimism, people know that some day will join their Mother, the one who mediates between them and God.

The joining in the *hora* signifies the infinite, the immortality is the game played by saints of martyrs, prophets and apostles mentioned in the Holy Scripture, the characters that were worthy to enter the kingdom of God. All the believers and the lovers of God will enjoy the consecrated charity and will spend their time together with the angels and saints. Valeriu Anania said that: “the *hora* – calm, pure, decent, as it is the classical Romanian dance – is a way to serve God”<sup>31</sup>. This is the reason the people are told about the *hora* of joy even at the weddings when it is recited the next hymn: “O Isaiah dance your joy, for the Virgin is with child; and shall bear a Son, Emmanuel both God and man! And Orient is His name, whom magnifying we call the Virgin blessed”<sup>32</sup>.

Therefore, the Mother of God is the connection between everything that is human and the heaven above and we worship her as being “more honorable than the Cherubs and greater than the Seraphs”<sup>33</sup> and we mention her in our prayers as an encourager, defender and hope for our redemption, the one who defends us from the devil's temptations and protects us against the evil forces.

The Virgin Mary is celebrated and honored with great feast, not only in the Bulzești commune, but in all the cities and villages from Romania. It is known the fact that, in his visit to our country, Pope John Paul II, called this place “the Mother of God's Garden”.

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<sup>30</sup> Inf. Maria Stănculescu, 78 years old, Prejoi, Dolj county, 2010

<sup>31</sup> Valeriu Anania, *Cerurile Oltului*, Râmnicu Vâlcea, edited by the Bishopric of Râmnic and Argeș, 1990, p. 250.

<sup>32</sup> *Molitfelnic*, printed with the approval of the Holy Synod and with the blessing of the All-Happy Father Teoctist, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, București, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2006, p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> *Liturghier*, printed with the approval of the Holy Synod and with the blessing of the All-Happy Father Teoctist, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2000, p. 166.

