

The Feast of Female Taper Bearers

By Fr. Ted Bobosh, November 20, 2019



Something that stands out to me about many icons of this Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple is the portrayal of women taper bearers. In the iconography, they are portrayed not as small children like the Virgin Mary but perhaps teenagers as they are portrayed slightly smaller than Joachim and Anna but larger than Mary. It is amazing to me that so many modern Orthodox have such a strong reaction against girls serving in the altar, when we have a Major Feast which portrays exactly that – young women serving in the temple, carrying candles. Altar boys are basically taper bearers, carrying candles, which at least in Orthodox iconography girls are permitted to do.

I have heard numerous times that in fact girls are permitted to serve at the altar in some Orthodox churches in the Patriarch of Antioch. I have never seen this myself, but have heard it from several witnesses. Women do serve at the altar in convents as was permitted even by some Orthodox saints. In some traditions girls do serve as “myrrhbearing women/girls” during liturgical processions such as at Holy Friday. I remember reading that St John of Kronstadt in 19th Century Russia had girls serve as taper bearers for the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the temple and he used them in a procession to celebrate the Feast. Seems like a right practice based on the icon of the Feast.