



■ **On the Occasion of the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25)**

The Vigil Lamp of the *Panagia* and the Widow with Five Children*

“You take care to feed my children...”

It was the eve of the Feast of the Annunciation, March 24, 1942, and we were in Drama, my hometown in northern Greece. It was then under Bulgarian occupation. Deprivation, disease, and famine had reached dreadful proportions and death was decimating both young and old, and especially children, on a daily basis.

Among my relatives was a distant aunt who was a widow with five children. Her husband had been killed by the occupiers six months previously, during the massacre that took place on September 29, 1941.

As far as food was concerned there remained a very small amount of olive oil and a handful of corn flour. So then, that evening she thought to herself that the next day, the Feast of the Annunciation, she had at least a little food for the children: one hundred grams of flour and a very small amount of oil.

Suddenly, her gaze fell on the extinguished vigil lamp that hung in the Icon corner. She was thus faced with a dilemma: Should the oil go to the hungry children or to the vigil lamp in front of the Icon of the Annunciation?

Resolutely making the sign of the



Cross, she said to the Mother of God: “My *Panagia*! I will light the vigil lamp since tomorrow is a Great Feast day, but I ask that you take care to feed my children.”

She took the remaining oil and lit the vigil lamp of the *Panagia*. Its joyous light illuminated the humble abode and her heart was filled with serenity. This sense of peace accompanied the family in their evening prayer, their sleep, and throughout that unforgettable night.

The next morning after the Divine Liturgy, my aunt opened the kitchen cupboard to take out the meager flour... and remained speechless. What did she see? The oilcan filled with oil all the way to the top, as well as two bagfuls of flour and pasta! She made the sign of the Cross many times, glorifying and giving thanks to God and the Theotokos for the great miracle, but did not say a word to anyone.

For two years the oilcan never emptied, nor did the flour run out, even though it was used on a daily basis to feed six mouths, and they would exchange it for other kinds of food and secretly give some away to those in need.

Likewise, the vigil lamp thenceforth remained lit day and night, witnessing, with its perpetual flame, to the fervent faith of this blessed woman.

* *Experiences During the Divine Liturgy*, Protopresbyter Stephanos K. Anagnostopoulos (Piraeus: 2008).