

## The Fast Of The Nativity

### Preparing for Birth: The Fast of the Nativity

The fast of the Nativity (November, 15th through December 24th) is first mentioned historically in the 7th Century. The only universal fasting rules (canons) of the Church that exist refer to Great Lent (40 days before Pascha or Easter); which is the most severe fast of the year. The fast of the Nativity on the other hand, varied in duration and degree of severity throughout the Church. The Nativity fast is less severe than Great Lent. The following is presented as a guide to fasting during the 40 days leading to the birth of Christ.

- Meat is not to be eaten for the duration (exceptions as explained below).
- Wine, Fish and oil are allowed except on Wednesdays and Fridays.
- The last 7 days (December 17th - 24th) are to be kept as strict as possible.
- A strict fast consists of no meat, fish, dairy products, wine and oil.

The Christmas season has become the victim of marketing and exploitation. Banners in Malls display the words "Peace, Hope, and Joy" as mere holiday sentiments without any connection to the *person* who is the Peace, Hope and Joy of all mankind. The miraculous birth and God's visitation to earth are marketed in the name of greed and consumerism. Living in such a consumeristic environment demands a watchfulness among Christians in order not to lose the whole reason for this blessed season.

This is a time for gatherings and holiday celebrations, sweet treats and the bestowing of gifts on friends and family members. Without the presence of a spiritual effort and vigilance; the message of sharing the love of Christ with our neighbor is easily lost. Fasting and praying have, as their goal, to make one more aware of the needs of others. The sign of authentic Christian life is found when a community attempts to "out do" one another in serving one another. According to the Church, if we are found to be lacking in this "one thing" there is no salvation for us (Matthew 25).

How do Orthodox Christians "keep" the Nativity fast living in such an environment? We should remember the stories from the lives of the saints who at times set aside their spiritual labors in order to show hospitality to strangers. Many Orthodox Christians may find themselves as part of a mixed faith family and be the only one preparing for the birth of Christ in an Orthodox fashion. Our fasting should have as its goal to open the heart towards others and gathering with friends and family is appropriate. Receiving one another as our Lord received others is the greatest gift Christians can give. If an Orthodox Christian is hosting a holiday party it would be more appropriate for it to take place prior to December 12.

Once the birth of Christ comes, the Church is in a state of feasting until the day before Epiphany on January 6. This is a *fast free* period even on Wednesday and Friday. All of the fasting, prayer and almsgiving of the Nativity fast receive a double blessing with the

waters of rebirth. The Feast of Epiphany on January 6 declares that baptism is our source of being regenerated or *born again* in Christ. It serves as an opportunity for the Orthodox to mystically enter again into the waters of baptism. The prayer that sanctifies the holy water of Epiphany is identical to the prayer that sanctifies the waters of baptism. If we have remained vigilant prior to Christmas then on the Epiphany the whole of creation can be seen with the new eyes of faith. We are given the opportunity to begin again!

I pray that we may find the renewal that awaits us during this Winter Lent. It is a time for a journey of rebirth May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Sprit be with you all!

In Christ's Love,  
+Fr. Andrew