

The Voice In The Wilderness

*"A voice crying in the wilderness:
Prepare ye the way of the LORD..."*

Matthew 3:3

The Newsletter of St. John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church, the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America, an Orthodox Christian witness to Cedar Park and Central Texas.

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Nativity 2006



Christ is Born!

Glorify Him!

The parish Council of St. John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Church wishes all of you a Blessed and Holy Nativity Feast.

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- *Stephen Bodnarchuk*
- *Will Hampton*
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THE NATIVITY SERMON OF ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

"I behold a new and wondrous mystery! My ears resound to the shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but loudly chanting a heavenly hymn! The angels sing! The archangels blend their voices in harmony! The cherubim resound their joyful praise! The Seraphim exalt His glory! All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead herein... on earth and man in heaven. He who is above now, for our salvation, dwells here below; and we, who were lowly, are exalted by divine mercy!

Today Bethlehem resembles heaven, hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices and, in place of the sun, witnessing the rising of the Sun of Justice! Ask not how this is accomplished, for where God wills, the order of nature is overturned. For He willed He had the powers He descended. He saved. All things move in obedience to God.

Today He Who Is, is born ! And He Who Is becomes what He was not! For when He was God, He became man-while not relinquishing the Godhead that is His... And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him angels, nor archangels, nor thrones, nor dominions, nor powers, nor principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Yet He has not forsaken His angels, nor left them deprived of His care, nor because of His incarnation has He ceased being God. And behold kings have come, that they might serve the Leader of the Hosts of Heaven; Women, that they might adore Him Who was born of a woman so that He might change the pains of childbirth into joy; Virgins, to the Son of the Virgin...

Infants, that they may adore Him who became a little child, so that out of the mouths of infants He might perfect praise; Children, to the Child who raised up martyrs through the rage of Herod; Men, to Him who became man that He might heal the miseries of His servants;

Shepherds, to the Good Shepherd who was laid down His life for His sheep;

Priests, to Him who has become a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek;

Servants, to Him who took upon Himself the form of a servant, that He might bless our stewardship with the reward of freedom (Philippians 2:7);

Fishermen, to the Fisher of humanity; Publicans, to Him who from among them named a chosen evangelist; Sinful women, to Him who exposed His feet to the tears of the repentant woman; And that I may embrace them all together, all sinners have come, that they may look upon the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! Since, therefore, all rejoice, I too desire to rejoice! I too wish to share the choral dance, to celebrate the festival! But I take my part, not plucking the harp nor with the music of the pipes nor holding a torch, but holding in my arms the cradle of Christ!
For this is all my hope!

This is my life! This is my salvation! This is my pipe, my harp! And bearing it I come, and having from its power received the gift of speech, I too, with the angels and shepherds, sing:

"Glory to God in the Highest! and on earth peace to men of good will! "

THE ICON OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

What is the meaning of the icon of the Lord's Nativity?

On this icon, the whole Gospel message of the incarnation of our Savior from the Virgin Mary is depicted, along with other details added from the holy Tradition. On many icons of the Nativity, there are a multitude of details, on other less. On the diagram shown here, taken from a drawing for an icon, we can identify at least 8 major elements.



(1) The focus of the icon, of course, is on the birth of our Lord from His most pure virgin mother Mary; She is shown larger than any of the other figures, reclining on a mat, and looking not at her new-born Son, but rather with love and compassion towards her spouse, St Joseph the Betrothed (7), seeing his affliction and bewilderment over this most strange and divine birth;.

St. Joseph the Betroth (7) is shown seated in the left bottom corner, conversing with Satan, disguised as an old shepherd. The posture of St Joseph is one of doubt and inner trouble, for he wondered if it might be possible that the conception and birth were not by some secret human union; how blessed he was to serve the Mother of God and her divine Son, in spite of these thoughts and temptations, and to protect her from the evil gossip of the people who could not yet possibly understand so great a mystery. Our Lord is shown in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, "for there was no room for them in the inn." (cf. Luke 2) The back-drop for the manger is a dark cave (3), which immediately reminds us of the cave in which our Lord was buried 33 years later, wrapped in a shroud. In the cave are an ox and ass, details not mentioned by the Gospels, but which are an invariable feature of every icon of the Nativity; the scene is included to show the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "the ox knows his Owner, and the ass his Master's crib, but Israel does not know Me, and the people has not regarded Me" (Isaiah 1:3). (2) Above this central composition, in the very center of the icon is the wondrous star coming from heaven, which led the magi (6) to the place where our Savior lay; It reminds us of the heavenly orb we see on icons of the Theophany, or Pentecost, wherever divine intervention is indicated.

The holy angels (4) are seen both glorifying God and bringing the good tidings of the Lord's birth to the shepherds (5). The fact that Jewish shepherds and heathen magi were among the first to worship our Lord shows us the universality of this great event, meant for the salvation of all mankind.

The final detail of this icon, the scene of the washing of the Lord (8) is an element that has caused some controversy over the ages. In some churches of the holy monasteries of Mount Athos, the scene in the frescoes has been deliberately obliterated and replaced with bushes or shepherds; there was a prevailing opinion that this scene was degrading to Christ, who had no need of washing, being born in a miraculous manner from a pure virgin. But we retain this image on our icons, being part of the holy tradition passed on to us; truly it does not degrade the Lord, but magnifies Him, as is evident in the

prayer that is appointed to be read at the time of Baptism for the midwife of a child: (From the Old-rite Potrebnik, 2nd Prayer for the midwife) "O Master, Lord our God...Who didst lie in a manger and didst bless the midwife Salome* who came to believe in an honorable virginity..." [*according to Tradition, Salome was a daughter of St Joseph by his previous marriage.] Who, more effectively than a midwife, could testify to the divine and virginal birth? Therefore we do well to understand the importance of this blessed scene.

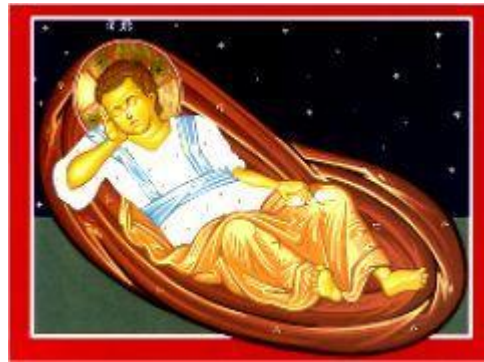
The icon when looked at as one united composition, fills us with the joy of the Holy Nativity of the Lord, not only because of the bright colors and the festive activity depicted thereon, but for the joyous news of our salvation so clearly proclaimed by it. In it, all creation is rejoicing at the birth of our Lord: the heavens (a star and angels); the earth (the mountains, plants and animals); and especially mankind, represented most perfectly in the figure of the new Eve, the most pure Mother of God.

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

This article was adapted from an [Article from ROCOR Old Russian Rite Church of the Nativity, 251 East Front Street, Erie, Pa.](#)

Orthodox Christians need to remain faithful to their traditions: The Twelve Days of Christmas

By Father Johannes L. Jacobse



In the Christian tradition of both east and west, the twelve days of Christmas refer to the period from Christmas Day to Theophany. The days leading up to Christmas were for preparation; a practice affirmed in the Orthodox tradition by the Christmas fast that runs from November 15 to Christmas. The celebration of Christmas was reserved for these twelve days.

As our culture became more commercialized however, the period of celebration has shifted from Thanksgiving to Christmas Day. Christmas celebration increasingly conforms to the shopping cycle while the older tradition falls by the wayside. It's a worrisome shift because as the tradition dims, the knowledge that the preparation imparted diminishes with it.

Our Orthodox traditions - from fasting cycles to worship - exist to teach us how to live in Christ. The traditions impart discipline. These disciplines are never an end in themselves but neither can life in Christ be sustained apart from them.

The traditions only make sense only when they have the Gospel as their reference. If we forget that these traditions are given to us to help us lay hold of Christ, then the traditions appear to be superfluous and the disciplines they impart seem to serve no real purpose. We start to evaluate them by the values of the dominant culture - by a cost-benefit calculus, rather than seeing them as ways by which we morally reorient ourselves towards Christ.

This is happening with Christmas. Rather than preparing for the birth of Christ through inward reorientation and discipline, we follow the direction of the dominant culture and skip any preparation altogether. We party instead of fast. We get caught up in the commercial energy of the season rather than waiting on the Spirit of God.

It's a dangerous path. Our culture is becoming increasingly secularized; the sacred dimension of creation is slipping from view. This loss of this sense of the sacred has grave ramifications for society that are expressed in different ways such as the desecration of religious art to reducing an unborn child to a commodity, to name two. If this view prevails our culture will inevitably view man as nothing more than an animal or machine.

But man is more than an animal or machine. The scriptures reveal man as created in the image and likeness of God, a phrase that means that man is not complete unless he partakes of God - God must be part of his life. This longing - this innate knowledge that man is created for God - never leaves man although a person can fight against it if he chooses.

A secularized mind is blind to the inherent holiness of life. Maintaining our traditions is one way to avoid this debilitating blindness. Christmas is not just "Jesus' birthday" (an impoverished notion heard more and more even among Orthodox faithful), but much more.

The birth of Christ and His baptism ought never to be divorced. Both events define the Christmas season. It imparts to the Christian the knowledge that Christ's coming into the world and Christ's sanctification of the waters makes our new life possible -- a sonship by adoption accomplished through baptism.

When the link between Christmas and Theophany is broken (and by neglecting the proper preparation we break it), the cultural memory of the promise of new birth expresses itself in weakened and ultimately insufficient cultural forms. These forms function as a new tradition.

Take the way our society celebrates New Year's Day for example. More partying fills the space that is created when celebration culminates on Christmas Day. At the same time, the start of a new year is also the time for resolutions, which recalls the promise of a new start that was the mainstay of the original tradition for many years.

There is of course nothing wrong with making resolutions, but their tie to New Year celebrations is blind to the original promise that all new beginnings depend on the power of God. Moral self-reflection is good and necessary. The secularized tradition however, does not reveal from where the power comes that makes real and necessary change possible.

Religion is not the product of culture; religion is the source, writes philosopher Russell Kirk. "It's from an association in a cult, a body of worshipers, that human community grows...when belief in the cult has been wretchedly enfeebled, the culture will decay swiftly. The material order rests on the spiritual order." [Russell Kirk "Civilization with Religion" The Heritage Foundation Report (July 24, 1992)].

Orthodox Christianity can contribute to the recovery of the moral foundation of American culture by imparting knowledge that can strengthen and deepen that foundation. It won't happen however, if the Orthodox faithful adopt the practices of the dominant culture in place of their own tradition.

Father Johannes L. Jacobse is a priest in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Article is courtesy of <http://www.3saints.com>

Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: December 25



The Feast of the Nativity of Jesus is one of the most joyful days of the Orthodox Church. It ranks next to the greatest holiday, the Resurrection of Jesus. The Feast of the Birth of Jesus is also known as the "Incarnation of Christ." This means that Jesus became a man and came into the world to save us. We also refer to this joyous feast as Christmas.

Biblical Story

The story of the Nativity of Christ is beautifully told in the Holy Scriptures. The story is found in [Matthew 1:18-25](#) and in [Luke 2:1-20](#). No matter how often the Birth of Jesus is told, we realize that it is an important event.

As the story is told by the Apostles, the Roman Empire was powerful. The Romans had conquered much of the then known world. Judea and Samaria, what we know today as Israel, were included in their conquests. Emperor Augustus ordered that a census be taken in all his lands. He needed to know how many people lived in the empire so he could tax them. Everyone had to go to the town of their family's origin to register for the census. This meant that Mary and

Joseph had to go to Bethlehem. They were descendants of King David and Bethlehem was the City of David.

Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth and it was a great distance from Bethlehem. It was about 100 miles over very rugged roads. Moreover, Mary was expecting the baby and it was almost time for her to give birth. Bethlehem was a small town and there were many descendants of David who had come to register for the census. By the time Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem there was no place for them to stay. Joseph tried very hard to find a place to sleep that evening. There was no room at the inn. Finally, Joseph found a cave-like place where they could rest. This place was used by shepherds to protect their sheep in stormy weather. It was here that Mary gave birth to Jesus. The baby was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the straw in the manger.

Now, that night the shepherds were out in the fields guarding their sheep. Suddenly, there was a bright light which startled the shepherds. The light was so bright that it turned the night into daylight. Of course, the shepherds were frightened. Nothing such as this had ever happened. Soon an angel appeared and calmed them. The angel said:

"Fear not for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior; which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:11-12).

Then a larger group of angels appeared. They praised and glorified God and sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will toward men" (Luke 2 : 14) . When the angels finished singing, they disappeared and the light began to fade. It became dimmer and dimmer until it was dark again. The shepherds were awed. They didn't know what to do. Finally, they decided to leave their flocks of sheep and go to Bethlehem . They decided that they wanted to see for themselves what the angels had told them. When they got to Bethlehem, they found Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus. They fell to their knees and adored Jesus.

Some Wise Men came from the East for they knew of the coming of Jesus. They had seen a star that told them that a new king had been born to the Jews. They followed the star and were looking for the child. At this time the governor of Judea was King Herod. He was a wicked man and was feared and hated by the people. When Herod heard about the Wise Men looking for the child, he invited them to his palace. Herod asked the Wise Men to find the child so that he, too, could worship Him. But Herod was lying. He did not want anyone to take his place. The Wise Men went on to look for Jesus. The Star led them to Jesus and Mary. When the Wise Men found Jesus, they fell to their knees and worshipped Him. They gave Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The Wise Men left but did not return to Herod. They had a dream that warned them that Herod wanted to harm Jesus. Instead, they returned to their native country by a different route.

Resources:

Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ written by the hand of Athanasios Clark and used with permission. © Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America . Article was reproduced from a larger one on the Greek Orthodox Website www.goarch.org.

The Orthodox Traditions Celebrating the Nativity of Christ



Orthodox Nuns in Bethlehem at Christmas

Christmas Parade in Bethlehem



Lighted decorated Boat, a Greek Christmas tradition



The celebration of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ throughout the Orthodox Churches of the world hold many things in common and are supplemented by many beautiful local traditions. Some things that are held in common with the Orthodox throughout the world is the focus of the Feast being upon the Nativity or Birth of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

There are many traditions that are observed by Orthodox Christians around the World here are a few with some recipes to help you celebrate the Nativity Feast:

The Nativity Eve Bonfire (Middle East)

In Syria and Palestine, the Orthodox Christians lock the Gates of their courtyard in memory of the massacres by Moslem mobs in the past of the Arab Christians. They then light a bonfire representing Christ the Light of the world and read the messianic prophecies and psalms from the Holy Bible. Christmas Hymns are sung and the family departs for the Christmas Vigil. After the Vigil Service they return home to eat a special cake called Sfoof, special cookies stuffed with dates, Turkish delight (a candy), and drink small cups of hot coffee.

On Christmas day, either Turkey stuffed with Rice Pilaf or a roasted Chicken with Pilaf, oranges, nuts and pastries will be served with delicious sweet meats and Syrian cookies called maalmoud., In the afternoon and early evening every home holds an open house where there are platters of maalmoud waiting with hot coffee and fresh Turkish delight. One would find delicious flat-topped date maamoul, oval pistachio maamoul, and a domed walnut maamoul waiting to be served to those who visit the home and offer their blessings on Christmas Day . For the adults there may even be a small glass of brandy, as well.

Greece

In Greece you are as likely to find a decorated ship hanging from the ceiling as you are to find a Christmas Tree in a Greek home. The Ship representing the Church is decorated with small lights and is often found not only in homes but hanging from street corners. In some homes an Icon of St Nicholas or the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child may be found in the ship. From Eve of the Nativity of Christ through St Basil's day, Greek Children go door to door playing little clay drums and triangles singing Kallanda or Carols and receiving cookies, sweetmeats and candy. Small gifts are exchanged on St Basil's Day in honor of the circumcision of Christ. In some areas St. Basil delivers small gifts to the children in their stockings. Like people everywhere, sweets and baked goods are common to the Greek celebration of Christmas.

Many Greek traditions center around baking, and few are more deeply ingrained in Greek culture than the Christmas Bread. On Christmas Eve, families eat dried figs, nuts, honey, and Christopsomo bread, literally Christ's bread. This loaf is traditionally baked using the most expensive ingredients and served on Christmas Eve when the head of the household blesses the loaf and each person at the table gets a slice, drizzled with honey. Each region of Greece has its own variation, although it is customarily decorated with a cross. The head of the house makes the sign of the cross on the bread with a knife while saying, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, " and then cuts a piece for each person with a wish of "*Kalá Christoúyena*" ("Good Christmas") or "*Chrónia pollá*" ("Many years").

Russia

The church in Russia still uses the old Julian calendar, therefore their Christmas celebration is 13 days behind the Revised Julian calendar that we use. For many Russians, a return to religion represents a return to their old roots and their old culture. Throughout Russia, after Christmas Eve services, people carrying candles, torches, and homemade lanterns parade around the church, just as their grandparents and great-grandparents did long ago. The Krestny Khod procession is led by the highest-ranking member of the Russian Orthodox Church. After the procession completes its circle around the church, the congregation reenters and they sing several carols and hymns before going home for a late Christmas Eve dinner.

Christmas Eve dinner is meatless but festive. The most important ingredient is a special porridge called kutya. It is made of wheat berries or other grains which symbolize hope and immortality, and honey and poppy seeds which ensure happiness, success, and untroubled rest. A ceremony involving the blessing of the home is frequently observed. The kutya is eaten from a common dish to symbolize unity. Some families used to throw a spoonful of kutya up to the ceiling. According to tradition, if the kutya stuck, there would be a plentiful honey harvest.

Ukraine

In Orthodox Eastern Europe, a strict-fast *Holy Supper* or *Svjatyj Vecer* is observed on Christmas Eve. It consists of 12 courses that are served in honor of the twelve apostles. The custom consists of readings, prayers, and family blessings. It is found in various forms in Ukraine, Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Roumania and has been imported even to the United States where it is gaining popularity in many Jurisdictions beyond the Slavic traditions. While the customs differ from area to area, the basic order remains the same. According to custom, the meal begins after the first star appears in the sky. There are several variations on the meal served, in some areas there are three dishes served in memory of the Three Wisemen and in other places the meal is more elaborate with 12 dishes served, symbolic of the 12 Apostles. Everyone must taste each dish; no one is permitted to skip a dish. After the dinner is complete, the father reads one of the accounts of Christ's birth from Holy Scripture. Then, traditional carols - are sung.

The Orthopraxis of Vasilopita

On New Year's Day, Greek Families cut the Vasilopita to bless the house and bring good luck for the Civil New Year. The word Vasilopita is a compound word that combines Pita the Greek word for bread with Vasilos the Greek version of St Basil the Great's name. Βασιλόπιτα means the *sweet bread of Basil*. St. Basil was the first person in human history to establish an orphanage for little children. He also founded the first Christian Hospital. His fame as a holy man spread like wildfire thru the villages of modern day Turkey and Greece.



In the fourth Century, Bishop Basil found himself with excess funding that he wanted to disperse to the poor of the church. He came upon the belief that by baking coins into his bread that he could give the bread to the poor with dignity and some anonymity. He hoped that the gift of bread with coins could offer the poor with hope. This original event which happened in Cappadocia of Caesarea in the last half of the 4th century, is very much alive in Greek Orthodox homes each year on January 1st. According to tradition, the Vasilopita, special sweet bread (in some areas of Greece, it takes the form of a cake) is prepared both in the Orthodox homes and in the Church community. Sweets are added to the bread which symbolize the sweetness and joy of life everlasting. It also symbolizes the hope that the New Year will be filled with the sweetness of life, liberty, health, and happiness for all who participate in the Vasilopita Observance. When the Vasilopita is prepared, a coin is usually added to the ingredients.

This tradition adds joy to the celebration at the beginning of the New Year, which everyone hopes will bring joy to all. Many Orthodox Christians enjoy the Vasilopita at home with their loved ones during the New Year celebration. Today this tradition has come down through the generation and is generally practiced in most Orthodox jurisdictions here in the United States, It has developed into a true annual family observance. The order of cutting the bread is likewise traditional:

- 1) A small piece from the center of the bread is cut for the Christ.
- 2) The second small piece is cut for the Theotokos.
- 3) The third small piece is cut in honor of St. Basil
- 4) The fourth piece is larger and is a piece to be shared with the poor (or an elderly neighbor)
- 5) Then the family members are given large pieces beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. He or she who receives the "Vasilopita Coin" is traditionally considered to be blessed.

From the Pastor's Desk

In just a few days, we will be entering into one of the most joyous times of the year! The weeks which include the Feasts of Nativity and Theophany are an especially glorious season, and I want to take this opportunity to highlight some of the events that will make the up-coming celebration particularly wonderful:

- 1) **The Divine Services.** We will have special services for Nativity, for the Feast of the Circumcision and St Basil's Day, and for Theophany. You can find the schedule for all these services in this newsletter or on the web-site. Of course, it is the services which give the season its spiritual significance, so let's plan on attending as many as possible.
- 2) **Bishop BASIL's Visitation.** Our beloved hierarch will be in Central Texas for Theophany weekend, but he will be with us on Sunday, January 7, for the Synaxis of our Patron and Protector, St John the Forerunner. We will celebrate a hierarchial liturgy, and His Grace will be preaching, so be sure and arrive early since we will undoubtedly be short on space.
- 3) **Tonsuring Readers.** Joe Wright and Baker Galloway will be tonsured as readers just before the Liturgy when Bishop BASIL is with us on Sunday, January 7. Please pray for them both as they prepare for this important step in their lives and in the life of our community.
- 4) **Baker and Rebekah's Wedding.** Baker Galloway and Rebekah Johns will be married at Transfiguration Greek parish on Saturday, December 30. We are all invited to the service, so let's show up and show them how much we love them.
- 5) **House Blessings.** The 2007 schedule is available in this newsletter and in hard copy at the church. Please look for your scheduled time, and, if it is not convenient for you, let me know as soon as possible, so that we can do our best to re-schedule. We want everyone to have the opportunity to receive this important measure of grace.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity, along with Khouria Cynthia and Brendan and Katie, to wish each and everyone one of you a Merry Christmas. It is a great privilege to be your priest, and I am praying that, during this beautiful season, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will enrich your lives—and the lives of those you love—with great mercy and deep peace and an abiding hope.

your unworthy priest
Aidan +

2007 House Blessing Schedule

Monday, Jan 8 morning Georgetown

Al Khoury 9am
Bruce and Pat Khoury
Onjanow
Shynkar
Parsons

Monday, Jan 8 evening Austin

Treckman 6:30pm
Locket
Dickinson

Monday, Jan 8 evening Austin (continued)

MacLaughlin
Thurston
Dunn
Galloway

Tuesday, Jan 9 evening Austin

Long 5pm
Harding
Brown
Barber
Mahoney
Hrissikoupolis
Medford
Shaw
Zozuyla

Saturday, Jan 13 Temple/Killeen/Burnet

Wilson/Montgomery 8am
Sisco/Bailey
Juliano
Macdonald



*Food
For
The
Kingdom*



In Keeping with the Festal period of the Nativity Feast December 25 thru January 4, there are feasting breads, cookies, and cakes served in Orthodox countries around the world. Here are two prominent sweet breads used during the Nativity thru Civil New Years day (celebrated at the Feast of St Basil.), a family favorite date cookie, and the popular Candy from *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Turkish Delight.



Christopsoma Greek Christmas Bread

In earlier times, Greek cooks baked large quantities of bread to last for 10-15 days, so baking just one or two loaves of Christopsomo the night before Christmas had special significance. The cook would start by crossing him/herself before starting the preparations, making this Christmas bread, which still is - considered by many to be a sacred task and great care is taken in its preparation. Raisins, nuts, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg are just a few of the taste treats that some recipes use for this traditional loaf.

Ingredients:

1 package (or 1 tablespoon) active dry yeast
1/4 cup warm water (110 to 115 degrees)
1/3 cup sugar
1 tsp ground cardamom
1/4 tsp salt
1 egg
1/4 cup milk
1/4 cup vegetable oil
1 1/2 cup whole wheat flour
1 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 cup golden raisins
1/4 cup walnuts, chopped

Directions:

1. Dissolve the yeast in the warm water.
2. Combine the sugar, cardamom, salt, egg, milk and oil in a large bowl. Mix well.
3. Add the yeast mixture, flours, raisins and nuts. Mix well.
4. Add enough extra flour to make soft dough.
5. Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and knead until smooth and elastic, about 5 minutes. Shape into a round loaf.
6. Put the dough into a lightly-oiled 8-inch-round cake pan.
7. Cover with a damp towel and let rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.
8. Bake in a 350-degree oven 35 to 40 minutes, or until brown.

Serves 15

VASILOPITA

On St. Basil's day, January 1st, the Vasilopita is baked. This is a bread-like cake which conceals a coin. The entire cake is carefully divided up - the Saint gets the first piece, Then the Virgin Mary, then to the members of the household, and so on down through the family, sometimes including those who live far away. A piece may even be set aside for the various kinds of livestock the household raises.



Ingredients:

- 2 packages dry yeast
- 3/4 cup warm milk
- 5 cups flour
- 4 eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup sugar
- grated lemon rind
- 1/2 cup melted butter
- 1 egg (to brush top)
- 1 1/2 tsp crushed/powdered mastika (optional)
- sesame seeds

To prepare:

1. Dissolve yeast in warm milk.
2. Add 2 cups of the flour, and beat batter until smooth.
3. Cover and set in a warm place for about an hour.
4. Beat eggs, salt, sugar and lemon rind (and mastika).
5. Stir mixture into batter; add remaining flour and knead, adding gradually the melted butter, until smooth and elastic.
6. Cover with a cloth and let it rise in a warm place until it has doubled its size - about 2 to 3 hours.
7. Knead dough and put in a buttered deep round baking dish, about 12 inches in diameter.
8. Cover and leave in a warm place until almost doubled.
9. Brush with lightly beaten egg and sprinkle with sesame seeds, or garnish with blanched halved almonds.
10. Bake in a moderate oven for about 45 minutes.
11. When cold, make a small cut underneath with a knife and insert the gold or silver coin

Turkish Delight

Turkish delight is quite popular in the Middle east and in England. Turkish Delight is probably best known among English speakers as the addictive confection to which Edmund Pevensie succumbs in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the Middle East, one will often find this candy flavored with Rose water as well. Try this recipe to make some of your own.



Ingredients:

2 cups granulated sugar
1 1/4 cups water
1 lemon, the peel cut into strips, the juice squeezed and strained
1 orange, the peel cut into strips, the juice squeezed and strained
4 tablespoons unflavored powdered gelatin
2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar
1 tablespoon cornstarch

Directions:

1. Dissolve the granulated sugar in half of the water over medium heat.
2. Add the strips of lemon and orange peel and the juices.
3. Bring the mixture to a boil and simmer for 15 minutes.
4. Soak the gelatin in the mixture for 5 to 10 minutes.
5. Strain the mixture into a shallow, dampened pan or onto platters, and let it set for 24 hours.
6. Cut the candy into 1-inch squares.
7. Sift the confectioners's sugar and cornstarch together into a shallow dish.
8. Roll the pieces of candy in the mixture.
9. Store the squares in boxes with more confectioners' sugar and cornstarch between each layer.

Syrian Date Cookies (courtesy of Pat Khoury)

Ingredients:

2 lbs pitted dates
3/4 c. Sugar
2 Tbsp sweet butter
1 Tbsp mahlab
1 lb sweet butter
1 1/2 oz whiskey
2 eggs
4-5 cups of flour

Directions:

1. Run dates thru a meat grinder with the 2 Tbsp of butter to make them soft.
2. Taking a small amount of the dates roll into little sausage shapes about 1 inch long and 1/4 to 3/8 inch thick. Set all the date sausages onto a plate.
3. Cream butter and sugar

4. Add the eggs, mahlab, and whiskey
5. Stir in the flour. (note the dough will be too heavy to beat with a mixer, so use your fingers). Your dough should be tender, but have body to be worked around the date sausages.
6. Roll one tablespoon of dough into a ball, flatten, then wrap around the date sausage.
7. Pinch off the excess dough.
8. Place the date filled cookies on an ungreased cookie sheet.
9. Bake in 350 degree oven until set, but not brown.

St. John's Community News

Special Services:

December 21 - Nativity Paraclesis 7pm

December 23 - Royal Hours for Nativity Noon

December 24 - Great Vespers of the Nativity 6pm

December 25 - Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ Orthros 8am Liturgy 10am

December 31 - Great Vespers for the Circumcision 6pm

January 1 - Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ Orthros 7am Liturgy 9am

January 5 - Royal Hours 9am Vesperal Liturgy of St Basil Noon with the Blessing of the Waters Great Compline at 7pm

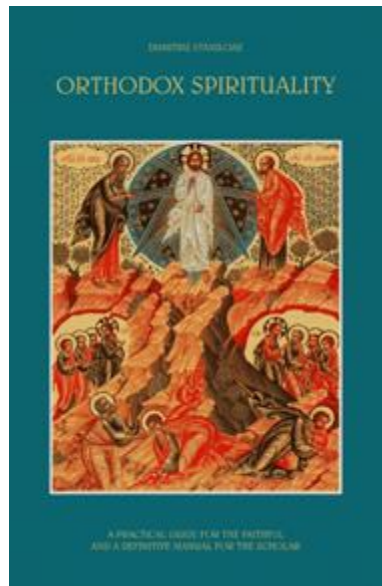
Up-Coming Events & Announcements:

Fasting Guidelines: No daily fasting from Dec. 25 through Jan. 4

Library books: Remember all Library books are due the first Sunday of the month. Please bring your book in for renewal if necessary. Orthodox Book donations are always welcome, come and look at some of our new arrivals.

Bishop BASIL will be visiting St. John the Forerunner on The Synaxis of the Forerunner. The following his itinerary for the visit to the Austin area:

- ❖ **Friday - January 5th - Paramon of Theophany:** Bishop Basil at ARCHANGEL MICHAEL IN SAN ANTONIO Evening Hierarchical Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St Basil the Great with the 1st Sanctification of the Water
- ❖ **Saturday - January 6th - Theophany:** Bishop Basil at PROPHET ELIAS IN AUSTIN Morning Festal Orthros and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom with the 2nd Sanctification of the Water
- ❖ 1:00PM Out-of-Doors Blessing of the Water at Barton Springs & Luncheon
- ❖ **Saturday - January 6th - Theophany:** Bishop Basil at ST SOPHIA IN DRIPPING SPRINGS Hierarchal Evening Great Vespers for the Synaxis of the Forerunner
- ❖ **Sunday - January 7th - Synaxis of the Forerunner** Bishop Basil at ST JOHN THE FORERUNNER IN CEDAR PARK Morning Festal Orthros 8 am and Hierarchical Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom 10 am. Festal Potluck after Liturgy.



Catherine's Book Review: Orthodox Spirituality

Spirituality is a term that has recently been bandied about a great deal. What exactly does it mean? Is there a truly Orthodox spirituality? (Some orthodox Orthodox theologians would say not.) For one of the most in-depth contemporary treatments of the subject, I would suggest a very careful study of ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY- A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR THE FAITHFUL AND A DEFINITIVE MANUAL FOR THE SCHOLAR by Dumitru Staniloae, the deceased Romanian theologian, who was imprisoned by the Communists for his faith and whom some would say was one of the most significant theologians of the twentieth century.

I started reading this book before I became Orthodox, and I am still reading and re-reading it today. Just as in reading the gospels, each time one reads it, there is something new.

The sixteen-page forward entitled "Spirituality in an Orthodox Perspective" by Alexander Golubov stands by itself as an excellent contemporary commentary on the subject. I would like to quote from one especially poignant footnote- commenting on the "anti-spirituality" produced by the atheistic materialism of the Russian revolution- as in some ways it parallels our own current situation (a fact reiterated many times over):

Our generations are confronted by a horrifying, mystical emanation (of a diabolical) elemental force, and we still are not able to put our life experience into precise words. We could describe this elemental force as 'black fire.' We could define it as eternal resentment, as unquenchable hatred, as belligerent banality, as shameless falsehood, as absolute immodesty and absolute lust for power, as debasement of spiritual freedom, as thirst for universal destruction, as joy in the annihilation of the best people, as antichristianity. A human being who acquiesces to this elemental force loses spirituality, love, and conscience; spiritual decomposition and corruption set in, he submits to conscious iniquity and thirst for destruction; he finishes with impudent sacrilege and ruthless torture of other human beings.

The first half of the book-PURIFICATION- deals with the ascetical aspect of the spiritual journey and so is concerned with acquiring the virtues and getting rid of the passions. (There is a very detailed chapter on each of the virtues); the second half of the book-ILLUMINATION & PERFECTION- deals with the mystical aspect and so is concerned with prayer and contemplation. It is riddled with references to everyone from the early church/desert fathers to current existentialists.

The treatment of asceticism is very helpful in that it explains why it is so important for us to try to resist pleasure and accept pain. Quite frankly I never before really grasped some of the implications.

Several reviewers have termed Staniloae's prose "dense;" however, I am not sure that is the description I would use. It is very concise and compact, and you need to read word for word- very carefully and slowly. A prison psychiatrist, Dr. Troy Caldwell, who reviewed this book, aptly describes it as-among other things- a training in how to overcome the the fear of the world, (which he says is nothing else but addiction to pleasure and repulsion from pain) with the fear of God (which he believes is the only force which can liberate us.)

This is a very hard book to review properly because it contains so very much of significance for our spiritual lives. Nothing I can say will really do it justice so I hope everyone will read it and let it speak for itself.

Softcover. 398 pp. ISBN: 1-878997-66-1 Pub. Year: 2003 Publisher: STS Press \$23.00
There are several copies available at Christ the Lightgiver Bookstore

Our reviewer Catherine MacLaughlin, M.A.T., M.S., J.D. is a member of St. John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Church in Cedar Park Texas. She is an Academic Advisor for the University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing.



*Eternal Memory
San William Montgomery
November 26, 2006*

We would like to thank the kind members of St John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Church of Cedar Park Texas for your prayers and support of our family on the repose of our infant Ian William Montgomery, November 26, 2006. We want to especially thank our beloved pastor, Father Aidan for the lovely and meaningful graveside services he provided for Ian.

*Hannah, Jodd, Gabriel, Michael and
Riley Thomas Montgomery*

*Subdeacon Thomas and Patricia
Wilson*

**Metropolitan PHILIP
sincerely thanks all those who
extended their greetings to him
on the occasion of
his name's day.**



Orthodox Kid's Page

The Nativity of Christ, Matthew 2:1-12
Jesus Comes to Live With Us

December 25, 2005
Grades: K-2



1. The wisemen came to worship Jesus, the newborn King of the Jews. How did they know where to come?
2. Where did they find Mary, Joseph, and Jesus?
3. What gifts did they bring the newborn king?
4. King Herod wanted them to come back to tell him where Jesus was. Did they do this?
5. Who warned them not to?

When Jesus was born wise men came from the east looking for Him. They asked people, "Where is the one who is born king of the Jews? We have seen his star rising!" When Herod, the king of the Jews, heard this he sent for these men. "When you find Him, tell me, he commanded them."

They found Jesus in a cave, wrapped in white cloth and lying in the manger, where food for the animals was kept. They worshipped Him and offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. An angel told them not to go back to King Herod, so they went back to their country another way.

Family Activities for the Nativity Feast

We all know that Christmas in the United States is a time for families to gather together to celebrate the Winter Pascha, the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Here are some fun suggestions for celebrating the Feasts of the Nativity, its after-feasts, and leave taking:

1. Place in icon of the Nativity in a special place in your home, and discuss it with your children. Help them to identify each figure. Make a Nativity scene with your children to keep in their room or the family room.
2. Sing the Troparion and Kontakion as part of your mealtime and bedtime family prayers on Christmas Day, and for the 8 days following the feast (the after feast). You will find several CDs and tapes in your local Orthodox Bookstore with the Troparion and Kontakion if you do not know the tone.
3. Read the Nativity Gospel: **Luke 2:1-20**.
4. Attend as many of the church services for the Nativity as possible as a family. The hymns of Orthros and Vespers change daily, each time offering a new insight into the birth of our Lord Christ Jesus. After church discuss with the children what they have learned new about Jesus from the service.
5. Visit a shut in parishioner or friend, and take along a homemade gift to share with your Christmas greeting: Christ is Born! Glorify Him!
6. During the 12-day Festival of the Holy Nativity have a Family Nativity Party and celebrate with your friends and family the Birth of Christ. Remember that December 25 is the beginning of the Feasting and Celebration of the Birth of our Lord, Now is the time for the real Christmas Party.
7. Most important try to attend at least one of the Nativity Divine Liturgy (Vespers on Nativity Eve or Nativity Day Liturgy) to truly celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus> This year Nativity is on Sunday, so you should be able to come for the Sunday Liturgy and be twice blessed once for attending the Sunday Liturgy and second for attending the Liturgy of the Nativity.

Hymns and Carols during the Feast of the Holy Nativity

Hymns, carols, and the chanting of the psalms have always played a great role in the Orthodox Celebration of the Nativity. Greek Children go door to door playing little clay drums and triangles singing Kallanda or Carols and receiving sweetmeats and candy. Ukrainian and Russian Carolers carry a six pointed star and go from house to house on December 25 and December 26 and sing carols, and often performing small skits about Jesus, Mary, and St. George. In the Middle East, Arabic Christians gather in the courtyards and light bonfires around which they sing hymns, carols, and chant from the psalms on the Eve of Nativity. In Russia, Serbia, the United States, and Great Britain, Orthodox Church Choirs often give concerts as a method of introducing non-orthodox people to Orthodoxy through the use of music.

The two hymns that every orthodox person should know are the Troparion of the Nativity and the Kontakion of the Nativity. If you do not know the melodies, they are available on CD and Tape through many Orthodox Publishers and Bookstores. To these you may add traditional Christmas Carols which are orthodox in substance as well as, some modern orthodox hymns that have been recently written by Travers and other new orthodox composers.

Menaion: 25 December

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Troparion - Tone 4

Abbreviated Greek Chant
arr. W. G. Obleschuk

Soprano
Alto

Tenor
Bass

Your Nativity, O Christ our God, has shone to the world

the Light of wis - dom! For by it, those who wor-shipped

the stars, were taught by a star to adore You, the Sun of

Right - eous - ness, and to know_ You, the O - ri - ent from on

High. O Lord, glo - ry to You!