

Christ is Born!



Glorify Him

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, an Orthodox Christian witness to Cedar Park and Central Texas. Saint John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Church is a local parish of the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America and is in the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America.

From the Pastor's Desk

I want to share with you the Nativity Greetings of our beloved Bishop BASIL and to also 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 +



Nativity 2008

To the Right Reverend Archimandrites, the Very Reverend and Reverend Priests and Deacons and their families, the Venerable Monastics, and all the Christ-loving Faithful of the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America:

I embrace and greet you with a holy kiss in the Name of the Incarnate Christ. I send to each of you and your communities my paternal love, festal greetings and prayerful best wishes for the merriest of Christmases and a healthy and happy 2009.

Christ is born!



المسيح ولد

In Christ Jesus the Incarnate Word,

+ *Bishop Basil*

+ B A S I L
*Bishop of Wichita and the Diocese of Mid-America
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America*

The Icon Tells the Story: 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.

We find 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](#).

The icon of the Nativity tells the story of Christ's birth from the Scriptures. It also shows that all creation is taking part in Christ's birth. The angels give thanks with their song; the heavens give the star; the Wise Men give their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The poor, humble shepherds give their praise and amazement; the earth gives the cave, and humanity gives the Virgin.

The Icon of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is an example of a scenic icon or one in which many scenes are included in one icon. It actually covers a length of time from the announcement of the angels to the shepherds to the arrival of the three magi that occurred many weeks later when the Christ child was found in a house rather than a stable cave.



◀ The long ray of light from **the star** points directly to the cave. This ray comes from the star and travels to all parts of the world. It teaches that this bright star is an astronomical happening, and is a messenger from heaven announcing the birth of Jesus. Some of the Church Fathers say that the star was actually an angel sent to lead the Magi or wise men to Jesus.



Second in importance , only after Christ, the most Holy **Theotokos, the Mother of Jesus** is placed near the center and is often the largest figure in the icon. In this icon, she is reclining on a travel bed of the period and meditating upon the Christ child. The three stars, denoting her virginity before, during, and after the Nativity, are on her garments.



The **Wise Men** who were led by the star, are riding horses to bring their gifts of frankincense, and myrrh to Jesus. The wisemen are dressed not as kings as we find in western art but as Persian magi. The Wise Men are of various ages. One is without a beard. In those days, young men did not wear beards. The other Wise Man has long hair and a long beard, which indicates that he is middle aged. The third with white hair and long



The **Christ Child** as the primary focus of the icon is found in the center of the icon. His image is small and diminitive to remind us that he came as a babe into the world. He is wrapped in traditional swaddling clothes of the period and is lying in the manger where the feed for animals in the stable would normally be placed. In the background is the dark cave where He was born.



In the cave are an **ox and a donkey** guarding the newborn Babe. Even though the Gospels say nothing of the cave, this information is from Holy Tradition. The Gospels do not speak of a cave, the ox or the donkey.

Including the animals in the icon fulfills the prophecy of [Isaiah 1:3](#). "The ox knows his master, and the donkey his master's crib; but Israel does not know me, and the people have not regarded me."

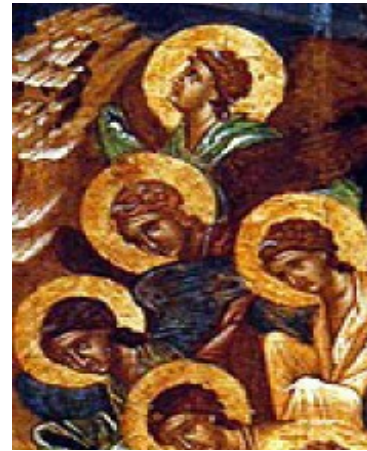


Opposite the Wise Men is the scene with the humble shepherds. An **angel proclaims the glad tidings**. A young shepherd plays a reed instrument . This scene reveals that the music of the humans was added to the hymn of the angels .

hair is much older. These details teach that regardless of age and appearance, the Good News was given to each and everyone.



< Across from the shepherd's > scene is **the heavenly choir of angels** . They are giving glory to God. The angels serve two purposes in the Nativity of Christ. They give glory to God and announce the good news to all mankind



In left lower corner are the two women Joseph brought to take care of the Christ child . They are **bathing Jesus** just as any baby is bathed. The humanity of Jesus is clearly shown in this setting.



Opposite the bathing of Jesus scene sits a sad and **worried Joseph** . He is not part of the central group the Christ Child and the Theotokos. Joseph is not the natural father. Joseph is troubled and despondent. There is an old man talking to Joseph. The old man is Satan.



The old man is **Satan**. Satan can appear in many forms. Here he is as an old man who is tempting Joseph and disturbing him. Satan is telling Joseph that virgin birth is impossible. He's telling Joseph that he's a fool if he believes this. This story comes to us from Holy Tradition. The sad Joseph shows us not only his personal predicament but the dilemma of all mankind the difficulty of accepting that which is "beyond words or reason."

Resources:

- 1) Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is courtesy of the Orthodox Church in America.
- 2) The Story of the Icons by Dr. Mary Paloumpis Hallick. Article on the web site of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

The Family of Joseph

Most modern representations of Mary and Joseph at the Nativity and after indicate that they were alone, just the two of them and later the three of them after the birth of Christ. Such is not the Orthodox teaching; the written record and iconography of the time indicate that they were surrounded by family. Holy tradition also indicates that Joseph and Mary did not travel alone to Bethlehem but were accompanied by his four sons, three of whom were married and had to register their own family at Bethlehem.



The icon of the Enrollment located at the famous Church of Kariye Djami in Constantinople clearly shows the elderly Joseph with his three of his sons and the Virgin Mary awaiting registration for the tax rolls. St James, the brother of our Lord, is not present as he would be registered as part of Joseph's household. In Bethlehem daughters who served as midwives also come into the picture to provide support to their father and their step-mother Mary.



This icon of the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt is found at the Monastery of St. Gerasimos, near Jericho

James the Brother of the Lord

Of all of the children James was apparently still in the home of his father when Joseph was betrothed. Icons of the departure to Egypt show a youthful James leading the ass. This is also seen in western paintings of the middle and renaissance period. James had a special relationship to the Virgin Mary. When she came into the home, he was still grieving the loss of his mother, Salome, in the previous year. Mary entered Joseph's home and brought up James. As such she was called the "mother of James" (Luke 24:10). She was on good terms with her step-daughters particularly Salome the future myrrh-bearer.

The Midwives

The apocryphal writings and hymnology of the church include much about the midwives who came to attend the Virgin Mary as she gave birth. The *Protoevangelium* speaks of Joseph knowing very little about giving birth to Children and wanting to seek a midwife for the birthing of Jesus. He returns with a midwife named Zelomi (Salome) who witnessed

but did not assist in the birthing of Jesus. Other family members came as midwives to assist with the birth --- Salome, Mary's mother's sister's daughter (i.e. Mary's first cousin), and in some sources, the Young Salome the daughter of Joseph

From the *Protoevangelium of St James*, we learn that the midwives were amazed to find "a virgin hath brought forth, a thing that nature does not admit." When Zelomi, did not believe and reached forth her hand to the Virgin Mary's body to examine it as a midwife might do and then she believed but her hand was withered for she was punished for her impudence and disbelief. Crying for mercy, an Angel of the lord healed her by telling her to carry the child and bathe him. Apart from assisting a mother with the childbirth (something unnecessary in Mary's case), the midwives' duties included washing the baby, rubbing the child with salt, water, and oil and then wrapping it in swaddling bands (Ez. 16:4) as was typical of postnatal care at the time of Jesus' birth. Beyond the miraculous delivery without the loss of Virginity, the midwives provided all the required postnatal care that would be expected for a healthy child. The angel's directions to Zelomi would add an additional witness not only to the miraculous birth, and the ever-virginity of Mary, but also to the fact that Christ Jesus was fully man, healthy and normal in all aspects.



Nativity in the Holy Land

By Maggie and Jerry Benson

A recent visit to the Holy Land with Metropolitan Kallistos Ware and the Friends of Orthodoxy on Iona was a lifetime dream for us, and with them, we visited some of the most holy and spiritual places on earth for Orthodox Christians...we actually walked where Christ walked nearly 2000 years ago...and although much has changed, the feelings and the awe are still there. As we are now in the midst of the Nativity Fast, we wanted to share our experiences concerning the "Nativity" sights.

One of the first places our group visited was the Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Shepherd's Field, which is located near the Eastern side of Bethlehem in the village of Beit-Sahour. This cave was one of many churches built by Saint Helena in the year 325 A.D. when she came to the Holy Land to find the True Cross of our Lord. Here you will also find open excavations of an old Byzantine church. Egeria, a fourth century nun also wrote about the Shepherd's Field, and tradition states that this is the location where the Shepherds were keeping watch on their fields the night Jesus Christ was born; and it was here that the Angels proclaimed "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and good will toward men".

When we arrived in Nazareth we were met and greeted by Archbishop Kyriakos of Nazareth who came personally to greet Metropolitan Kallistos and extended an invitation to the Metropolitan and the priests in our group to concelebrate with him the following day. St. Gabriel's Greek Orthodox Church is a beautiful church and the liturgy was served in Arabic, Greek and English. Coincidentally, we were present to hear that the Gospel reading for the day referred to the town of Nazareth, and told the story of Christ reading from the scroll of Isaiah and how it was fulfilled in their hearing. Of all the days we could have been visiting Nazareth, it just happened to be the same day as the Gospel reading (old calendar is used there). An 18th century iconostasis, which shows many signs of wear after having been lovingly venerated over the years, stands majestically inside the church and receiving communion there with Metropolitan Kallistos and our fellow pilgrim priests was such a joy and blessing.



Well were Gabriel greeted Mary

The Well where the Archangel Gabriel Greeted the Virgin Mary announcing that she would bare the Messiah

St. Gabriel's Church was built over the original village well where the Theotokos would have drawn water, and it was here at this sight that St. Gabriel appeared to her and announced that she was chosen from all others to conceive the Son of God. This holy well is located inside the church in the apse next to the ancient steps that led down to the well from the street.

Pilgrimage sites pertaining to the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



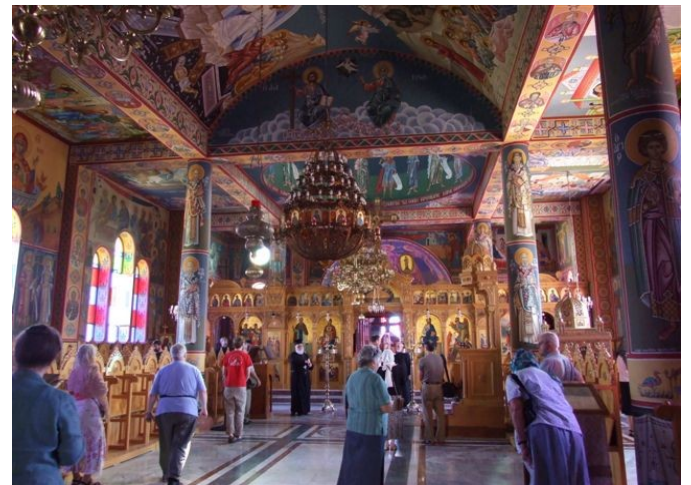
Pilgrim venerating the Spot where Jesus was born in the Grotto (Cave). The Church of the Nativity was built over the cave.



The Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem



Church of the Nativity



The Monastery at the Shepherd's Field, near Bethlehem.

While in Nazareth we also visited the Roman Catholic Basilica of the Annunciation and the Church of St. Joseph's Carpentry. The Basilica is very large and modern (and in the tradition of the Roman Catholics, it is an

alternative sight of the annunciation). The churches altar overlooks the cave of the ruins of St. Joseph's workshop, and the home of the Holy family.

How exciting was the day when we visited Bethlehem, where Christ was born! Over the years, The Church of the Nativity and The Grotto of the Nativity have been marred by natural disasters and wars ever since it's discovery in 326 AD by St. Helena, who commissioned a church to be built directly over the cave. Portions of the mosaic floor still survive from Constantine's time. The church made it through the Crusades and Ottoman periods, revolts, fires and an earthquake. Legend states that when the Persians invaded the area in 614 AD, the commander was so moved by the depiction of the Three Magi wearing Persian clothing that he allowed the building to survive! The Church of the Nativity is one of the oldest continuously operating churches in the world, and although it is very large, it is hardly inspirational on the outside as it resembles a fortress more so than a church, but on the inside and underground many unexpected sights and blessings were awaiting our discovery!

To begin our pilgrimage into the Church of the Nativity, we were greeted by the four foot Door of Humility, which awaits every person who chooses to enter. The original door was once much larger, but during Ottoman times it was made considerably smaller by the priests in an effort to keep looters, carts, and men on mounted horses and camels from desecrating the holy sanctuary and thus assuring that everyone who entered would have to bow their heads... which also appropriately meant bowing before the holy altar!

Ever since the second century, The Nativity of the Grotto has been acknowledged as the site of the original cave of Christ's birth and is located beneath the Church of the Nativity and is commemorated by a simple 14 point silver star. Entrance to the cave is accessible by descending steps located near the church altar. The church is extremely old and in need of much repair work, yet it still commands a presence that would have almost been overwhelming had it not been for the massive numbers of people crowding the area, thus preventing the time allowed to venerate this holy sight and to reflect on its meaning. Although we waited patiently for entrance, once inside we were herded through the enormous line, barely given enough time to venerate the sight of Christ's holy birthplace properly. There are several underground chapels in the grotto which also included the Chapel of the Manger and the Altar of the Adoration of the Magi, and then nearby in another tunnel The Chapel of St. Joseph, The Chapel of the Holy Innocents, and The Chapel of St. Jerome, the famous theologian and resident who died there in the 5th century, are located. So much to reflect on, so little time....

One final place we visited that pertained to the Nativity, and that which was very exciting for us, was our visit to St Gerasimos Monastery, located in the desert near Jericho and the Jordan River. It was said that the church and monastery are built on the site where the Holy Family found refuge when they where fleeing to Egypt at the time when King Herod planned to kill all the children under age of two years. It was also here that we discovered on the iconostasis an icon of The Holy Family's "Flight to Egypt" which included a young St. James (the brother of Christ and son of Joseph the Betrothed). This sort of icon is very rare, so it was a special moment for us to witness St. James's relationship and his acknowledgment in this manner.

Visiting these holy sights was a dream and a blessing that we will never forget...and being led through it all by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware was an amazing time for us. This essay only skirts the many wonderful and blessed holy sights we visited but one thing we know... now when we read the Gospels, we feel the words come to life and we can relive the many places we've seen when before we could only read them. Looking back on our extraordinary trip and all we experienced, every day now feels just like Christmas!

The Bensons are members of [St John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Parish](#). They serve as the Librarians for the parish Library and are active in all aspects of the parish life.





Christ the Lightgiver Christmas Party

On Monday, December 29th, our bookstore community will be gathering for our first ever Christmas party! Yes, we know that the 29th is four days after Christmas, but, since we're old-fashioned, we follow the liturgical calendar, and that means twelve days of merry-making. And since this will be the 4th Day of the Feast, we want everyone to come dressed as one of the Four Calling Birds (you can emphasize the telecommunications aspect of the theme or the avian dimensions of the theme). But, hey, you can also show up as one of the Five Golden Rings or Seven Leaping Lords. The point is we want everyone who is part of Christ the Light-Giver to come and have a good time. We'll provide the drinks and the live music, so bring your favorite refreshments and join us at 7pm.



The Miracle of Bethlehem

By Metropolitan Philip

It is easy to lose sight of the miracle of Bethlehem in our modern world of pressure politics and commercial Christmas. This annual reminder of the continuous presence of the Divine in our wayward world is a necessary thing for us all; nothing is more usual, nothing is more miraculous than the birth of a child: every child's birthday is a reminder of the presence of God in the world.



The atheist forces of the world try to tell us that God does not exist, that there is no connection between man and the eternal cosmos, the eternal mystery; they tell us that we are slaves of the world and of the material forces of existence. And yet, our experience tells us that GOD IS: too many aspects of our life clearly reflect the presence of the divine, the presence of God, among us. The birth of a child tells us this truth; the birth of the Divine Child sums up the common experience of all mankind.

The present troubles of our world seem overwhelming; the sorrow, the injustice, the poverty, the wickedness of war, the inhumanity of man to man, the distortion of the divine image which we cause, is everywhere; we have lost sight of God, and we suffer; the renewal that comes with the birth of our Lord can restore us, if we perceive it with the eyes of faith, and the simplicity of a child.

The blessing of our incarnate Lord be with you all, this Feast of his Nativity, and throughout the coming year!

— METROPOLITAN PHILIP



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.

Father Aidan Wilcoxson

Patty Lewis (Chair)

Will Hampton (Vice Chair)

Vickie Knight (Treasurer)

Sh. Josie Long (Choir)

Fr. Deacon Basil Long (Building Comm)

Melinda Treckman (Youth)

Rob Thurner (Finance Comm Chair)

Gayla Easley (Church School Supt)

Tim Treckman (Facilities Comm Chair)

Anna Pitts



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 God-head 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!

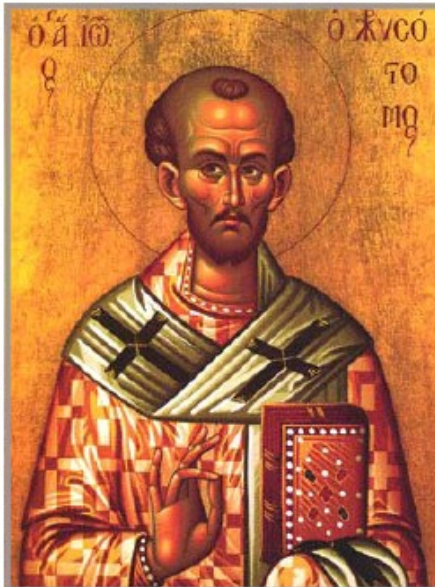
This is my life!

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! "





READINGS FOR CHRISTMAS

By Archpriest Paul Ziatyk

Each year there is an excitement in the air in the weeks preceding Christmas. There is the hectic preparation for the feast — the gift buying, planning, food preparation, card writing, decorating, etc. to name a few of our activities, as well as making time for our children's Christmas pageant, watching our favorite Christmas programs on TV, and of course the office Christmas Party.

This heavy involvement in preparing for the feast often leaves us tired, irritable and short-tempered, and searching for the meaning behind what we frantically do. There is little joy and peace experienced and we feel that something is wrong with us. It is even common to hear people saying the day after Christmas, "I'm glad it's over."

What can we do to change all this which gives so little long term meaning to our lives? It is in understanding Christmas — what are we celebrating — that meaning can be found in what Advent is all about.

WHAT IS CHRISTMAS ALL ABOUT?

Christmas is the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ. It is the celebration of God's Son taking on flesh and becoming a man, i.e., the Incarnation. It is one of the central events in the history of our salvation.

1) **The Incarnation is foretold in the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah 9:2-7:** "The people who walked in the darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy; they rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as on the day of Mid'ian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore.

2) We also read about the **Word becoming flesh in the Gospel of John 1:14, 16-18:** "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth: we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God: the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known."

3) In the Creed which we recite or sing at every Divine Liturgy we confess our faith in, Jesus Christ, the Son of God — "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man."

4) In the **Gospel of Luke 1:26-38** we learn about the announcement to Mary by the Angel Gabriel of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. This feast is related to the Nativity of Christ.

EMMANUEL – GOD WITH US

5) God so loved the world that He gave us His Only Begotten Son (John 3:16). And so it was that "in the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4) God sent forth His Son to take on flesh from a virgin woman named Mary. This we read about in the Gospels of Matthew 1 and 2, and Luke 2. Following are the events as recorded in these chapters. Take time to read them in the weeks or days preceding the feast and use them as brief meditations.

- a) *Mary and Joseph Betrothed*: In the Galilean town of Nazareth, Joseph and Mary were betrothed to one another. She was a young virgin woman; he an elderly carpenter who took Mary to be his wife, and before they came together she was found with child. **(Matthew 1:18)**
- b) *The Annunciation*: The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary in the Temple and told her that she would conceive a child and His name shall be called Jesus. (Luke 1:26-35) This event is celebrated each year on March 25.
- c) *The Angel and Joseph*: The angel also appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him that the son to be born was the long awaited Messiah. **(Matthew 1:20-25)**
- d) *The Census*: The Roman Governor of Palestine ordered a census to be taken of all the people. Therefore, Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem, since they were of the tribe of David, in order to be registered. **(Luke 2:1-5)**
- e) *Birth in Bethlehem*: Because of the crowds who came to Bethlehem, there was no room in the inn and the Virgin Mother gave birth to Jesus Christ in a cavern. **(Luke 2:6-7)** This Nativity of Christ is celebrated on December 25.
- f) *The Shepherds*: An angel appeared to the shepherds who were caring for their flock in the field and announced the birth of the Savior. They hastened to the cave to find Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger. **(Luke 2:8-20)**
- g) *The Circumcision*: According to the Jewish law every male child was circumcised on the 8th day and so it was with the young Christ child who was given the name Jesus. **(Luke 2:21)** Our Orthodox Church commemorates this event on January 1.
- h) *The Ritual of Purification*: Again according to Jewish law every male child was presented to the Lord on the 40th day. Jesus' parents brought him to the temple of Jerusalem on the 40th day where He was received by the righteous Simeon. Simeon blessed God and prayed what is known as "Simeon's Prayer." This prayer is sung or recited at every Vesper Service. **(Luke 2:22-38)** This feast is celebrated on February 2.
- i) *The Magi*: Magi or Wisemen came from the East, being guided by a star to Bethlehem. And when they found the child they presented gifts and worshiped him as "King of the Jews." **(Matthew 2:1-2, 9-12)**
- j) *Slaughter of the Innocents*: Herod, the ruler of Palestine, hated the young child and feared him for He was a threat to his throne. Herod ordered all male infants two years and younger in Bethlehem to be killed in the hope that Jesus would be among them. **(Matthew 2:3-8, 16-18)**
- k) *Flight*: In a dream Joseph learned of Herod's scheme, therefore he took Mary and the child Jesus and fled into Egypt. **(Matthew 2:13-15)**
- l) *Return to Nazareth*: After the wicked Herod died, Joseph took the child and His Mother to Nazareth where Jesus was raised. **(Matthew 2:19-23)**

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1) Who is this Jesus whom we speak about?

2) Is He God, is He just a man, is He two persons?

3) What is the Church's teaching about "who Jesus Christ is?"

ANSWER: He is the Son of God who has a divine nature as the eternal Son of God and who took on a human nature from the Virgin Mary. He is One Person with two natures. How are we saved by Jesus Christ? Give this considerable thought. Discuss it with your family, friends. If you are not sure, speak to your priest.

4) At the Christmas Vigil, we sing: "God is with us." In what manner is this understood?

ANSWER: Just as Christ was born in Bethlehem of old, so Christ is born in our hearts, minds and souls, if we make room for Him. Advent is that season of 40 days before Christmas which is set aside by the Church in order to help and guide us in preparing ourselves for the birth of Christ within us. This time before Christmas is a time for repentance, fasting, prayer, the confession of our sins and the reception of Christ in the partaking of His flesh and blood. It is a time to come out of the everyday rush of life and to realize that man cannot live by bread alone. Only as we do this will God's promise become flesh in our lives. When we direct the attention of our hearts to God, the dimness of our eyes will fade away. We discover purpose in our existence and in everything we do. How different is such preparation for Christmas than what the world offers. One leads to God, life, peace and joy — the other to that darkness of soul and restlessness of heart which continues to gnaw at the heart until they find their rest in God.

Courtesy of the website of the Self-Ruling Antiochian Archdiocese of North America. www.antiochian.org.



Food For The Kingdom



In Keeping with the Festal period of the Nativity Feast December 25 thru January 4, here is a sampling of feasting breads , cookies, and cakes served in Orthodox countries around the world.



Kourabiethes

Greek shortbread recipe.

These Greek little balls of heaven are a Christmas specialty. In the bakeries of Greece, the Kourabiethes are piled up high and deep and look like a mound of little snowballs. In some of my, older Greek cookbooks in English it is noted that, "Kourabiethes are the national cookies of the Greeks for Christmas and New Year's Day."

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup, unsalted Butter
- 1 cup, powdered Sugar
- 1 egg yolk Eggs
- 1 tablespoon Brandy (Ouzo)
- 3 cups Flour
- 1/2 teaspoon Baking Powder
- 1 lb. Powdered Sugar

DIRECTIONS

1. Mix butter and sugar until very light and fluffy.
2. Stir in egg yolk and brandy.
3. Then add sifted flour and baking powder, a little at a time.
4. Knead well until dough is smooth. If it is too soft, add a little flour.
5. Take small pieces of dough and shape into balls, the size of a small egg or shape into crescents, or into small pears and insert a clove in the top of each.
6. Place on lightly greased baking sheets. Bake in moderate 350 degree oven, about 20 minutes.
7. Roll Kourabiethes while warm in powdered sugar. Then sift sugar over as they must be very well coated.

This recipe makes about 3 1/2 dozen. You may add 1/2 cup blanched and finely chopped almonds to the dough if you like. Each shortbread is stuck with one clove to represent the three wise men who brought spices to the Christ child.

Slavic Medianyky (Christmas Cake)

There are many versions of this cake some cooked in round pans and iced like a layer cake with a icing made from condensed canned milk, however this simple one is my favorite. It is great with coffee or tea in the afternoon on Christmas Day.



Ingredients:

- 4 oz butter
- 4 large eggs
- 14 oz honey
- 14 oz unbleached flour (3 cups)
- 1/2 tsp ginger
- 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp cloves
- 1 tbs cinnamon
- 2 tsp baking powder

Procedure:

1. Cream the butter and separate the eggs.
2. Add the room temperature yolks, one at a time, to the butter and beat well.
3. Mix in the honey.

4. Sift the flour, baking powder, and spices twice and add to the butter mixture.
5. Whip the egg whites until stiff. Fold a little of the egg whites into the batter, then add the rest of them, folding them gently into the batter.
6. Pour the batter into a guttered and floured loaf pan.
7. Bake in a preheated 350 Degrees F. oven until firm on top and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 1 hour.
8. Cool, in the pan, for 10 minutes, then remove and finish cooling on a wire rack.

VASILOPITA

Vasilopita is associated with Saint Basil's day on January 1 in Greece. On Saint Basil's Day Orthodox Christian families cut the Vasilopita to bless the house and bring good luck for the new year. It is traditional to bake a coin into the Vasilopita (St. Basil's cake). The one who receives the coin is considered to be especially blessed for the year. A piece of cake is sliced for each member of the family and any visitors present at the time. Slices are also cut for various other people or groups, depending on local and family tradition. They may include St. Basil and other saints, the Virgin Mary, the Church and the poor. Vasilopita is made in honor of a beautiful act of charity by St. Basil to the poor and needy of his flock. In order to insure that the needy would have money for life's necessities, and knowing that the needy were also proud people, St. Basil had the ladies of his church bake sweet bread with coins baked into them. In this way he could give them money without demeaning them at all.



Today in many American Greek Orthodox parishes, "Vasilopita Auctions " are held to raise money for the Philoptochos Society , the Greek Orthodox Women's philanthropic organization so they may help the poor and hungry within the parish and community. Each woman provides a loaf of bread which is "auctioned" and the money given to the poor and needy thru the Philoptochos Society.

Here is one of the many differing recipes for Vasilopita for you to try this St. Basil's Day"

INGREDIENTS :

- 1 cup fresh milk
- 2 teaspoons yeast
- 4 eggs, separated
- 1 cup milk-butter, melted
- 1 ½ cup sugar
- 1 envelope mahlepi, crushed (optional)
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1 level teaspoon salt
- 9 cups of flour
- Handful of blanched almonds or a sprinkling of sesame seeds

Directions:

- 1) Preheat oven to 350 F.
- 2) In a large tub pour half a cup of lukewarm milk and dissolve the yeast in it. Add ½ cup flour and stir to mix. Cover with a towel and let rise in a warm place for about an hour.

- 3) While the dough is rising, beat the egg yolks with the sugar in an electric mixer or food processor and set aside. Beat the egg whites into a meringue. To the risen dough, add yoke/sugar mixture, the remainder of the milk, the meringue, butter, mahlepi (optional) and zest. Knead until all is well mixed, adding the remainder of the flour a little at a time so the dough won't be too tight. Shape the dough into several balls, place in a bowl, cover it with a towel and leave in a warm place for about 3 hours until it doubles in size.
- 4) Knead the dough for 5 minutes more and place in a large round oiled pan (or two smaller ones) and leave covered in a warm place until it doubles in size again.
- 5) Before placing in oven, beat the yoke of 1 egg with a teaspoon of water and brush it on the dough with a pastry brush. Then, using the blanched almonds, form the "new" date on the top of the dough or just sprinkle the top with sesame seeds. Bake for about 30/40 minutes, or until Vasilopita looks well browned.

Note: Some people when they do not use Mahleb will use 2 tsp of lemon, orange, or almond extract to produce a flavorful bread.



St. John's Community News

Special Services:

**December 24 - Orthros 6am Royal Hours 9am
Vespers Liturgy of St Basil Noon**

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 8am Liturgy 10am

January 5 - Royal Hours 9am Vespers Liturgy of St Basil Noon

January 6 – Feast of Theophany Orthros 7am 9am Divine Liturgy

January 6 - The Synaxis of the Forerunner Great Vespers at 6:30

January 7 - The Synaxis of the Forerunner Orthros (8:30) .

PRAYER LIST:

Pray for the Catechumenate: Gregory Goecker, Cheryl Wallace, Alexei Kennedy, David Williams, the Juhnke Family (Charra, Claudia, John, and Lee), Brandon and Crystal Wilson, John and Lindsey Bell

Pray for the Health of Body and Soul of those who have requested your prayers: Arch Priest Michael, Arch Priest Stephen, Deacon Daniel, Reader Mark, Reader Matthew, Reader Symeon, Reader Ishmael, Kh Angie, Kh Anne, Shamassy Mary Josephine, Priscilla Gail, Elena, Irina, Sally, Despina, Eleni, Charra, Albert, Nicholas, Linda, Alexandra, Walter, Vicki, Cheryl, Melinda, Rebekah, Dave, Mary Beth, Elizabeth, Amy, Elizabeth, Mary, Catherine, Greg, Bethany, John, Ron, Becca, Todd, Robyn, Beverly, Sheron, Hannah, Michal, Jacob, Aaron, George, Elizabeth, James, Lisa, Jared, Gabriel, Aurora Tatiana, the infant Jacob, and those who serve in the Armed Forces (especially the Servant of God David).

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.

MANY YEARS! Brandon and Crystal Wilson, John and Lindsey Bell were made catechumens at the end of the liturgy on December 7. Let us pray for them throughout their catechumenate.



Patriarch ALEXY II of Moscow + Memory Eternal

On 9 December 2008, Patriarchal Locum Tenens Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad celebrated the Divine Liturgy together with the assembly of hierarchs and clerics at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. It was followed by the funeral service for the deceased Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia. The funeral service for the late Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church was celebrated by His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and the Patriarchal Locum Tenens of the Moscow Patriarchal Throne Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad together with the Primates and representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches, members of the Holy Synod, and other archpastors of the Moscow Patriarchate.

Paying last respects to His Holiness Patriarch Alexy were delegations of all Local Orthodox Churches. The delegation of the Church of Constantinople was led by His Holiness Patriarch

Bartholomew; the Church of Alexandria by metropolitan Peter of Aksum; the Church of Antioch by bishop Nifon of Philippopolis, representative of the Patriarch of Great Antioch and All the East in Moscow; the Church of Jerusalem by metropolitan Hesychios of Kapitolias; the Georgian Church by His Holiness and Beatitude Patriarch-Catholicos of All Georgia Iliya II; the Serbian Church by metropolitan Amfilohiy of Crna Gora and Primorje, chairman of the Holy Synod; the Romanian Church by His Beatitude Patriarch of Romania Daniel; the Bulgarian Church by metropolitan Dometian of Vidin; the Church of Cyprus by metropolitan Georgios of Paphos; the Church of Greece by His Beatitude Hieronymos of Athens and All Greece; the Church of Albania by His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania; the Church of Poland by archbishop Szymon of Lodz and Poznan; the Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia by His Beatitude Metropolitan Christopher of the Czech Lands and Slovakia; the Orthodox Church in America by archbishop Seraphim of Ottawa and Canada.

Attending the service were members of the Russian government, Russian President D. Medvedev and Russian Prime-Minister V. Putin the State Duma deputies, members of the Russian Federation Council, other statesmen and leaders of the regions. Other international observers at the funeral were the President of Belarus A. Lukashenko, President of Moldova V. Voronin, President of Serbia Boris Tadic, President of Armenia Serge Sarkisian, Ambassadors of the USA, the Great Britain, France, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Greece and other countries, as well as representatives of the governmental, public and religious organizations from Russia and other countries.

Metropolitan Philip wrote this, "Patriarch ALEXY lived in two worlds, one under the Soviet oppression of the Church and the other whereby he led the Church from glory to glory after the fall of Soviet rule. I have no doubt that this will be his legacy. The courage he showed by leading the nation through a difficult time that could have led to civil war when he addressed the country in the midst of the night, in the midst of darkness at 1:42 a.m. on August 21st, 1991 will stand out as one of the greatest addresses of the 20th Century. Out of this darkness, his address to the nation became a new light of hope for a new nation..."

he capably oversaw the rebuilding and restoration of thousands of churches and monasteries, the reeducation of the faithful and the clergy and the reestablishment of the Church as a great force in the Russian Federation. His untiring work which led to the reunification of ROCOR and the Russian Orthodox Church is yet another example of his bold leadership."

ORTHODOX KIDS PAGE

Meet Saint Joachim and Saint Anna

exemplars of
Thankfulness

Let me tell you a story about the most famous grandparents who ever lived. They lived a life of thankfulness.

Joachim and his wife Anna loved God very much. They were thankful to God for what they had. They always divided their money into three parts: one part they gave to the temple and one part to people who were poor; they used the third part for their own needs.

Joachim and Anna didn't have any children. They grew old and still didn't have any children. They promised God that if He would give them a child, in thanksgiving they would give the child back to God.

One day, Joachim went to the temple to give an offering to God. The priest told him to go away. He said that God didn't want Joachim's offering because he and Anna didn't have any children. Joachim and Anna were sad. Joachim went into the desert to pray and fast. Anna went into her garden to pray. She reminded God that even the birds in her garden had families, but that she did not.

The angel Gabriel came to Joachim and Anna and told them that they would have a baby. Joachim and Anna said, "Thank you, thank you, God for hearing our prayers." Nine months later, they had a baby girl! They named her Mary.

When Mary was three years old, Joachim and Anna kept their promise. They took Mary to the temple so that she could serve God there. They visited her often, giving thanks to God for hearing their prayers and for all that He had done for them. When Mary grew up, she became the mother of Jesus!

Let's be thankful for what God has given us, just like Joachim and Anna. One way we can thank God is by giving something back to Him. What can we give back to God?



To tithe is to show God we know how to say "Thank you" for what He gives to us.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Saint Joachim and Saint Anna are commemorated on September 9.
- The falling asleep of Saint Anna is commemorated on July 25.
- Saint Joachim lived on the earth for 80 years and Saint Anna for 79.

Discover more at
[www.antiochian.org/
tithe](http://www.antiochian.org/tithe)

Joachim and Anna were _____.

PRAYER

“Let us sing praises to Joachim and Anna; they have borne the Theotokos for us!”



THANKFULNESS IN THE BIBLE

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18
NKJV

PRACTICE THANKFULNESS

- Remember to say “Thank you” to your parents, priest, and teachers for helping you learn about God.
- Make and send a “Thank you” card for someone who has done something for you.
- List 12 things you are thankful for, with each word beginning with a letter of the word **thanksgiving**.

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR OFFERING?

When we tithe, where does the money go?

Part of your offering goes to pay for the Church building and things like heat, water, and electricity, so that we have a place to worship God.

Find the Best Answer

Answer the questions about Joachim and Anna. Place the letter of the correct answers in the spaces below.

1. For 50 years, Joachim and Anna had _____ children.
R. three
S. two
T. zero
2. They promised God that they would give him _____.
H. their child
I. a lamb
J. one-third of their money
3. The priest at the temple told Joachim to _____.
A. go away
B. to pray more
C. to bring an offering
4. Anna reminded God that _____ have families.
L. their friends
M. priests
N. birds
5. The archangel Gabriel brought _____ to Joachim and Anna.
J. food
K. good news
L. a baby
6. Joachim and Anna took Mary to _____.
S. the Temple
T. Egypt
U. the desert

GIVE _____ TO GOD.
1 2 3 4 5 6

We wish you a blessed Nativity. The Staff of the Voice in the Wilderness.