



## Holy Ghost Orthodox Church

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### **NATIVITY EVE—STRICT FAST**

**ON THE MEND:** Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Metropolitan Constantine, Patriarch Pavle, Bishop Robert, Father Peter Natishan, Father Gerald Olszewski, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Dragan Filipović, Father Elias Katras, Father Stevo Rocknage, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father John Monronko, Father Michael Mihalick [MS], Ollie Pendylshok, Walt & Evelyn Burlack, Joshua Agosto and his family, Harley Katarina Rahuba, Mike and Hilda Holupka, Eva Malesnick, Helen Likar, Stella Peanoske, Joe Nezolyk, Nick Behun, Terry Reinhart, Bernie O'Masta, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Maria Balo, Linda Mechtly, Mary Mochnick, Mary Pekich, Mildred Manolovich, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Sandy Gamble, Glen Lucas Burlack, Bernie Vangrin, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Stella Cherepko, Sam Wadrose, Khoruia Joanne Abdalah, Cameron [a boy in Matt's class], Faith—a 6-year-old girl with rheumatoid arthritis, Isabella Olivia Lindgren—a 2-year-old with a brain tumor, Dillon, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Nick Malec [Maxine's brother], Bill, Erin, Jimmy Fennel [7<sup>th</sup> Grader], Jim Markovich, Jeff Walewski [thyroid cancer], Carol [Lotinski] Rose, Michael Miller, Dave May, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Claudia [Horvath] Gradicheck, Alverta, Margaret Mueller, Gary Zurasky, Michael Horvath, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Rita Very & family, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Mildred Walters, Michael Miller, Mike Pelchar [Liz's brother], Jim Logue—throat cancer, Liz Stumpf, Ester Tylavsky, Ed Jamison, Theodore Nixon, Charles Johnson, Donna Kerr [stroke], Amy Forbeck, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Gloria Prymak [Liz's niece], Robert Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, John Sheliga, Sabrina, George & Mika Rocknage, Elizabeth Mitchell, Ann McKivitz, and Daria Masur. **ARNOLD:** Stefania Lucci, Kay Tomson, Ann Ostaffy, Steve Sakal, Homer Paul Kline, and Steve Ostaffy. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

**REMINDER: 2008 wall calendars and donation envelopes are available downstairs!**

Please remember ALL American servicemen and women in the Middle East in your prayers. May God watch over them and all American servicemen and women—and bring them all home safely!

PLEASE REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR “BOXTOPS FOR EDUCATION” AND CAMPBELL’S SOUP LABELS TO CHURCH. There is a shoebox in the basement for Alex’s Fifth Grade and Matt’s Third Grade collections. THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HELP! *Alex and Matt*

**REMEMBER—PRAYERS ARE ALWAYS FREE!**

Communion Fasting: nothing to eat or drink after midnight, EXCEPT in cases where your doctor tells you to eat or drink something for medical reasons: medication, diabetes, etc. If you have a question, please call Father Bob.

**AT ANY TIME—if there is an emergency, if you have questions, or if you just need to talk, please CALL FATHER BOB at [412] 279-5640.**

**Schedule of Services**

<b>Sunday, January 6</b>	<b>OBEDNITZA</b>	<b>10:30 AM</b>
	<b>NATIVITY EVE—STRICT FAST</b>	
	<b>SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FATHERS—EVE OF THE NATIVITY</b>	
	<b>NUN-MARTYR EUGIA OF ROME &amp; HER FATHER PHILIP, PROTUS, HYACINTH, &amp; CLAUDIA WITH HER, VENERABLE NICHOLAS-MONK OF BULGARIA</b>	
	<b>HOLY SUPPER—IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE OBEDNITZA</b>	
	<i>Tone 7</i>	
	Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40	
	Matthew 1:1-25	
	<i>Litany in Blessed Memory of Nicholas Vetosky—Fr. Bob</i>	
	<i>Parastas in Blessed Memory of John Holupka—Mike Holupka</i>	
<b>Monday, January 7</b>	<b>DIVINE LITURGY</b>	<b>10:30 AM</b>
	<b>NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST</b>	
<b>Sunday, January 13</b>	<b>Divine Liturgy</b>	<b>10:30 AM</b>
	<b>SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY/BEFORE THE THEOPHANY OF CHRIST</b>	
	<b>COMMEMORATION OF THE HOLY RIGHTEOUS ONES: JOSEPH THE BETROTHED, DAVID THE KING, JAMES THE BROTHER OF THE LORD, VENERABLE MELANIA THE YOUNGER-NUN OF ROME, SAINT PETER MOHYLA-METROPOLITAN OF KIEV, VENERABLE GELASIUS-MONK OF PALESTINE, SAINT GAUIS</b>	
	<i>Tone 8</i>	
	Galatians 1:11-19	
	Matthew 2:13-23	
	<i>Parastas in Blessed Memory of Steve &amp; Tillie Kuzman—John &amp; Debbie Paouncic</i>	
<b>Friday, January 18</b>	<b>Grand Compline &amp; Great Blessing of Waters</b>	<b>7:00 PM</b>
	<b>STRICT FAST</b>	
<b>Saturday, January 19</b>	<b>Obednitza &amp; Blessing of Houses</b>	<b>10:30 AM</b>
	<b>THE HOLY THEOPHANY: BAPTISM OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST</b>	
<b>Sunday, January 20</b>	<b>Divine Liturgy</b>	<b>10:30 AM</b>

**SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY—SYNAXIS OF THE HOLY GLORIOUS PROPHET AND BAPTIST JOHN,  
AFTERFEAST OF THEOPHANY**

*Tone 1*  
Ephesians 4:7-13  
Matthew 4:12-17

**Feast of the Nativity (Birth) of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ  
Celebrated December 25/January 7**



**The Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ**

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, was born of the Most Holy Virgin Mary in the city of Bethlehem during the reign of the emperor Augustus (Octavian). Caesar Augustus decreed that a universal census be made throughout his Empire, which then also included Palestinian Israel. The Jews were accustomed to be counted in the city from where their family came. The Most Holy Virgin and the Righteous Joseph, since they were descended from the house and lineage of King David, had to go to Bethlehem to be counted and taxed.

In Bethlehem they found no room at any of the city's inns. Thus, the God-Man, the Savior of the world, was born in a cave that was used as a stable.

"I behold a strange and most glorious mystery," the Church sings with awe, "Heaven, a Cave; the Virgin the Throne of the Cherubim; the Manger a room, in which Christ, the God Whom nothing can contain is laid." (Irmos of the 9th Ode of the Nativity Canon).

Having given birth to the divine Infant without travail, the Most Holy Virgin "wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger" (Luke 2:7). In the stillness of midnight (Wisdom of Solomon 18:14-15), the proclamation of the birth of the Savior of the world was heard by three shepherds watching their flocks by night.

An angel of the Lord (St Cyprian says this was Gabriel) came before them and 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, Who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). The humble shepherds were the first to offer worship to Him Who condescended to assume the form of a humble servant for the salvation of mankind. Besides the glad tidings to the Bethlehem shepherds, the Nativity of Christ was revealed to the Magi by a wondrous star. St John Chrysostom and St Theophylactus, commenting on St Matthew's Gospel, say that this was no ordinary star. Rather, it was "a divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star." St Demetrius of Rostov says it was a "manifestation of divine energy" (Narrative of the Adoration of the Magi). Entering the house where the Infant lay, the Magi "fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Mt 2:11).

The present Feast, commemorating the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, was established by the Church. Its origin goes back to the time of the Apostles. In the Apostolic Constitutions (Section 3, 13) it says, "Brethren, observe the feasts; and first of all the Birth of Christ, which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month." In another place it also says, "Celebrate the day of the Nativity of Christ, on which unseen grace is given man by the birth of the Word of God from the Virgin Mary for the salvation of the world."

In the second century St Clement of Alexandria also indicates that the day of the Nativity of Christ is December 25. In the third century St Hippolytus of Rome mentions the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, and appoints the Gospel readings for this day from the opening chapters of St Matthew.

In 302, during the persecution of Christians by Maximian, 20,000 Christians of Nicomedia (December 28) were burned in church on the very Feast of the Nativity of Christ. In that same century, after the persecution when the Church had received freedom of religion and had become the official religion in the Roman Empire, we find the Feast of the Nativity of Christ observed throughout the entire Church. There is evidence of this in the works of St Ephraim the Syrian, St Basil the Great, St Gregory the Theologian, St Gregory of Nyssa, St Ambrose of Milan, St John Chrysostom and other Fathers of the Church of the fourth century.

St John Chrysostom, in a sermon which he gave in the year 385, points out that the Feast of the Nativity of Christ is ancient, and indeed very ancient. In this same century, at the Cave of Bethlehem, made famous by the Birth of Jesus Christ, the empress St Helen built a church, which her mighty son Constantine adorned after her death. In the Codex of the emperor Theodosius from 438, and of the emperor Justinian in 535, the universal celebration of the day of the Nativity of Christ was decreed by law. Thus, Nicephorus Callistus, a writer of the fourteenth century, says in

his History that in the sixth century, the emperor Justinian established the celebration of the Nativity of Christ throughout all the world.

Patriarch Anatolius of Constantinople in the fifth century, Sophronius and Andrew of Jerusalem in the seventh, Sts John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maium and Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople in the eighth, the Nun Cassiane in the ninth, and others whose names are unknown, wrote many sacred hymns for the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, which are still sung by the Church on this radiant festival.

During the first three centuries, in the Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Cyprus, the Nativity of Christ was combined together with the Feast of His Baptism on January 6, and called "Theophany" ("Manifestation of God"). This was because of a belief that Christ was baptized on anniversary of His birth, which may be inferred from St John Chrysostom's sermon on the Nativity of Christ: "it is not the day on which Christ was born which is called Theophany, but rather that day on which He was baptized."

In support of such a view, it is possible to cite the words of the Evangelist Luke who says that "Jesus began to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23) when He was baptized. The joint celebration of the Nativity of Christ and His Theophany continued to the end of the fourth century in certain Eastern Churches, and until the fifth or sixth century in others.

The present order of services preserves the memory of the ancient joint celebration of the Feasts of the Nativity of Christ and Theophany. On the eve of both Feasts, there is a similar tradition that one should fast until the stars appear. The order of divine services on the eve of both feastedays and the feastedays themselves is the same.

The Nativity of Christ has long been counted as one of the Twelve Great Feasts. It is one of the greatest, most joyful and wondrous events in the history of the world. The angel said to the shepherds, "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, Who 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. Then suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, glorifying God and saying: Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Those who heard these things were astonished at what the shepherds told them concerning the Child. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen" (Luke 2:10-20).

Thus the Nativity of Christ, a most profound and extraordinary event, was accompanied by the wondrous tidings proclaimed to the shepherds and to the Magi.

This is a cause of universal rejoicing for all mankind, "for the Savior is Born!"

Concurring with the witness of the Gospel, the Fathers of the Church, in their God-inspired writings, describe the Feast of the Nativity of Christ as most profound, and joyous, serving as the basis and foundation for all the other Feasts.

### ***Christ is Born! Glorify Him!***

See also: Discourse on the Nativity of Christ by Saint Gregory Thaumaturgos, Bishop of Neocaesarea.



### **The Adoration of the Magi**

The Nativity of Christ was revealed to the Magi by a wondrous star. St John Chrysostom and St Theophylactus, commenting on St Matthew's Gospel, say that this was no ordinary star. Rather, it was "a divine and angelic power that appeared in the form of a star." St Demetrius of Rostov says it was a "manifestation of divine energy" (Narrative of the Adoration of the Magi). Entering the house where the Infant lay, the Magi "fell down, and worshipped Him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Mt 2:11).



### **St. Melchior, St. Gaspar, St. Balthasar of the Magi**

The names of the three Wise Men (Magi) do not appear in the Gospels. The tradition that there were three visitors from the east is very ancient, but their names are only mentioned in the Middle Ages. The tradition that one of them was a Negro dates from the fifteenth century.

Bones reputed to be the relics of the three kings have been in the cathedral at Cologne, Germany since 1164.

**Prot. No. 1330**

Patriarchal Declaration For Christmas, 2007

+ **BARTHOLOMEW**

**By the Mercy of God**

**Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome And Ecumenical Patriarch**

**To the Plenitude of the Church**

**Grace, mercy and peace**

**From the savior Christ born in Bethlehem**

*Christ is born, glorify Him; Christ comes from heaven, meet Him.*

Beloved brothers and children in the Lord,

It is with great joy that our Church calls us to glorify God for His loving and personal presence on earth in the divine-human hypostasis of Christ Jesus, one of the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

We must, therefore, examine very carefully the true and life-giving significance of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God. First, it reveals to humanity that God is personal and is made manifest to us as a person, just as He has also created us as persons. Second, it reveals to us that God embraces us with His love. These two realities, the personhood and love of God, express fundamental truths of our faith, which we have doubtless heard many times. However, their impact on our lives is not as great as it might be, because many of us neither experience our brotherhood with Christ in a personal way, nor His boundless love for us. Neither do we return our love to Christ so that by sharing in His love, we may also share, by grace, in other characteristics of His Person.

If others, who do not know Christ and, as a result of their ignorance, drown in their search for an impersonal being that they perceive as divine, are to some extent justified, then we Orthodox Christians are not justified at all if we follow such fruitless pursuits. Instead of seeking God as a person and approaching Him in the One Who approaches us, namely Jesus Christ, people who are misled desperately strive to become divine through their own powers, like Adam thought, when he listened to spirit of evil. But the true and personal God, Who is known only through Jesus Christ, the One born in a manger out of love for us, promised us adoption and a return to the bosom of the Father, as well as deification by grace through Christ. It is only through Christ that one may fulfill the universal human desire to transcend the corruption and isolation of an existence without love, and to achieve communion with Divine and human persons in love. This is what leads to eternity and to immortality!

Let us, therefore, turn the gaze of our hearts toward the newborn Jesus Christ in the manger, so that, by considering how much He loves us, we might love Him with all our heart, mind and being. It is only through the love of Jesus Christ that we may become partakers by grace in His divine nature, just as through His love He shared in our human nature. Human-centered attempts and concepts, drug-induced states and ecstasies, together with similar non-Christian experiences do not lead to an encounter with the truly personal God of love. Rather, they lead to a deep cold darkness, to gloom of eternal destruction, as well as to a feeling of complete and abysmal emptiness.

For this reason, beloved children in the Lord, love Jesus Christ, Who out of love for us and for our salvation became human. Come to know the communion of His love, with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Indeed, there is nothing sweeter than the love of the personal God.

The supreme herald of divine love, the one who identified God as love, is St. John the Evangelist and Theologian, who first pronounced to us, "God is love." After him, the greatest herald is St. Paul the Apostle, who loved God to the end and who asked the fervent question: "What can separate us from the love of Christ?" Neither sorrow nor sword, neither death nor any other love can be more powerful than our love for Christ. In remembrance of the words and loving works of St. Paul, and in celebration of two millennia since his birth, we declare the coming year 2008 as the year of the Apostle Paul.

We pray paternally and fervently that Jesus Christ, Who was born in a manger out of love and for our salvation, may render our hearts to become like His manger: through the intercessions of His ever-Virgin Mother, as well as of our predecessor St. John Chrysostom, to whose memory we dedicated this past year, together with the intercessions of another Patriarchal predecessor, St. Niphon, restorer and second founder of the Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of St. Dionysius on Mount Athos, which next year celebrates the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary since his repose, as well as of Saints John and Paul the Apostles, par excellence heralds of God's love, and of all the saints, so that He may reveal to everyone the person of His love.

We invoke upon all of you His grace and rich mercy. Merry Christmas; may the twelve days of Christmas be blessed; and may the New Year be both spiritually and materially fruitful.

Phanar, Christmas 2007

+ **BARTHOLOMEW**

Fervent supplicant for all to God

### **FAST LIKE THE GREEK MONKS**

Fast Like The Greek Monks and Live To A Ripe Old Age!

Living like a monk can help you beat cancer.



Researchers studying the 1,500 inhabitants of 20 Greek monasteries found that they have some of the lowest rates of the disease in the world.

But, before you all rush off to take your monastic vows, let us point out the drawbacks. The monks daily regime begins with an hour of prayers before dawn. At breakfast—a piece of hard, dry bread and a cup of tea with no milk –they sit in silence while passages from the Greek scriptures are read from a pulpit in the refectory. Much of the day is taken up with manual labour in the gardens. The monks grow most of what they eat. But there is little dairy produce because female animals, as well as women, are banned. Olive oil is allowed, but only on alternate days. And fish is a treat reserved for feast days.

The good news is that they are allowed to drink the local red wine – but only on Tuesdays, Thursdays and at weekends.

The result of all this abstinence is that lung and bladder cancer are unknown on the remote, mountainous peninsula. Rates of prostate cancer are also extremely low.

Since 1994, when doctors began testing the monks regularly, only 11 have developed the disease. That works out at less than a quarter of the international average.

Haris Aidonopoulos, a urologist at the University of Thessaloniki, said the monks' diet could explain the difference in the statistics. "What seems to be the key is a diet that alternates between olive oil and non-olive oil days, and plenty of plant proteins. Small, simple meals at regular intervals are very important." Michalis Hourdakis, a dietician associated with Athens University, said:

"This limited consumption of calories has been found to lengthen life. "Meat has been associated with intestinal cancer, while fruit and vegetables help ward off prostate cancer."

A diet based on staple foods like fruit and vegetables, pasta, rice and soya dishes, as well as bread and olives is thought to be the key to the monks' good health. The lack of air pollution on Mount Athos, as well as their hard work in the fields, also play a part, the researchers said. Kim Hardwick, a senior nurse with charity Cancerbackup, said: "We know that people can reduce their risk of cancer by making lifestyle choices."

"Eating a well-balanced diet that includes five portions of fruit and vegetables and cutting down on the amount of red meat we eat has also been shown to reduce the risk of cancer."

Dr. Julie Sharp, of Cancer Research UK, said: "Our diet influences our risk of many cancers, including cancers of the bowel, stomach, mouth, throat and breast. You can reduce your cancer risk by eating a healthy, balanced diet that is high in fiber, fruit and vegetables, and low in red and processed meat and saturated fat."

By Jo Willey, Dec 7th, 2007, Daily Express

*Note: While good health is not the reason we fast, it appears that it is a good side benefit.*



## **Decani Monastery Relief Fund, Inc.**

Very Rev. Archimandrite Nektarios Serfes, President

2618 W. Bannock Street

Boise, ID 83702 USA

Tel: (208) 345-6147

E-Mail: [father@serfes.org](mailto:father@serfes.org)

1 December 2007

*Dear Beloved Christians of Kosovo,*

May the great peace and joy of this holy season give you comfort and strength! Be assured that whatever happens today or tomorrow or next year or ever, that God loves and cares about each and every one of you as individuals. Know that God is above nationalism, is above politics, is above all concerns about who owns what piece of earth or any other material thing in this world. Keep your faith in Christ our Lord. Remember all people are your neighbors and that Christ has commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Everything is in the hands of God.

Peace to your soul!

Humbly in Christ our Lord,

**+Very Reverend Archimandrite Nektarios Serfes**

President of the Decani Monastery Relief Fund Inc. USA

& Parish priest of Sts. Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Church

Boise, Idaho

USA

Who prays for you and with you all!

**LEST WE FORGET: Keeping Traditions**

*BY GINNY NIEUWSMA*

To hear Mother Victoria of St. Barbara's Monastery tell it, growing up in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was a rich and memorable experience at Christmastime. After carefully observing the Advent Fast in December, she remembers looking for the first star in the sky on the Eve of Nativity as a signal that the meal would begin. Before breaking bread, she and her family would always feed the animals first, in honor of their role on the night of Christ's birth. Then to the table they would go, where the meal consisted of twelve dishes ranging from appetizer to dessert, all honoring the Twelve Apostles. Under the tablecloth, straw or hay lay ceremoniously tucked away, and the meal would be interrupted from time to time with caroling.

It is almost axiomatic to say that the Orthodox Church is rich in traditions, and not just during the season of the Nativity. Yes, we are all familiar with our sacred, Holy Tradition, which is composed of our liturgical life, Scripture, the pronouncements from the Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the fathers. Doctrine about the Trinity, or teaching about feasts such as the Dormition and fasts such as the one before the Eucharist, all make up the venerable body of capital "T" Tradition within Orthodoxy.

Yet also woven into the tapestry of this vibrant hanging are numerous small "t" traditions practiced by the faithful down through the centuries. Layer upon layer, these colorful threads have been added, differing from culture to culture and evolving over the course of time. The examples cannot be exhausted: we bless fruit at the Transfiguration, decorate with flowers in our homes and churches throughout the year, eat special recipes and bake special breads at Pascha, throw bay leaves around the temple on Holy Saturday, make the sign of the cross over our pillows before going to bed, and bake our communion bread using unique prayers and procedures.

Why do we do these things? What difference does it make whether our dyed eggs on Pascha are red or blue? Why should we eat without plates on the day we commemorate the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist? Why does it matter if we make a special recipe to eat in remembrance of our departed loved ones?

### **A Vote for Our Ancestors**

The renowned Christian English writer and philosopher G. K. Chesterton used to be fond of saying that tradition is nothing more than giving our ancestors a vote. Or as an African saying puts it, "To go back to tradition is the first step forward." Nothing inverts today's conventional wisdom more than this idea, that people before us might actually have known something that we need to know. In our era, old age is a trial to be feared and avoided, through plastic surgery if necessary; youthful voices speak the loudest, and we trust most in the internet and our instant information sources. In this, we have lost a great deal, and the Church can restore this wisdom to us if we keep her traditions alive. Those who have come before speak with a collective wisdom about life and eternal truths, and about how to pass those on to the next generation. We must keep this process of hanging down the faith active. Strengthening this link between the past and the future is the best way to guarantee that our children will know what's important, and what must be cherished.

### **Building Blocks for Life**

"These customs and traditions serve life," writes Mary Paloumpis Hallick, "contribute to it, build it, and are to be maintained and upheld. It is these customs that provide a distinct identity to each group... (they are) our treasures...to be guarded, protected, proclaimed and passed on to the generations to come." As human beings, we crave events to look forward to, and anticipation sparks joy and creativity. In Orthodoxy, our lives and memories are built from event to event, in a cycle that repeats itself but somehow never gets old. Children especially, but all of us really, thrive on routine, and herein is built for us, and them, a sense of safety and security. Mother Victoria knew that every Nativity Eve, her family would eat with straw under the tablecloth, remembering the place of Christ's birth, and that made the event that much more memorable.

We don't just build our own nuclear family through keeping traditions, however; it is equally true that we are given the tools for building community within our parishes. One church's St. Nicholas night might be a high point in the year for the congregation, with an appearance from St. Nicholas or a play about his life, goody bags distributed in his memory, and the singing of traditional Christmas carols. It's not enough to celebrate the liturgy together, as central and foundational as that is. Today more than ever, in our disconnected and hectic culture, we almost need excuses to celebrate, or mourn, or pray together, in our church communities. Traditions give us the tools to do this.

### **Redeeming the Time**

Kathleen Norris says in her book, *The Quotidian Mysteries*, "We want life to have meaning, we want fulfillment, healing, and even ecstasy, but the human paradox is that we find these things by starting where we are, not where we wish we were. We must look for blessings to come from unlikely, everyday places – out of Galilee, as it were – and not in spectacular events, such as the coming of a comet."

What do our days consist of? We rise and dress, perhaps say our prayers, feed our family, go to our work at home or in an office, break for lunch, pick up clothes at the cleaners, shop for necessities, prepare an evening meal, study for a test, talk on the phone, take a shower, and prepare for bed. While this cycle is also punctuated from time to time with drama – a child wins an important award, a friend is diagnosed with cancer – we must admit that most of our lives are made up of ordinary moments. But when we light a candle, or knead communion bread in our kitchen, sing a festal song in honor of a saint, or bless our loved ones as they leave us, we turn ordinary moments into sacramental ones. In this way, we can pray by doing, and remind ourselves and those around us that truly, the Holy Spirit is everywhere and fills all things – it's just that we need to be reminded that this is true! We don't need to wait for the spectacular, such as a weeping icon or the visit of a patriarch, to redeem the time God has given us for this life. We can sanctify time each hour through keeping the traditions of our Church alive.

Our Lord has inspired the development of many of these traditions so that we might touch the eternal here, now, in the mundane. Why go through so much trouble

to make bread for church when it could be mass-produced, or we could just run to the store before church on Sunday morning? Many women who bake *prosphora* (communion bread) express how they sense the presence of Christ in the kitchen, as they mix loaves, impress the seal on the top, and wait for the bread to bake while the fragrance fills the house. Here is a way to pray with our food ingredients, our hands, our ordinary activity – prayer that is of the body and not just of the head.

“Each step we take forms us,” relates an Orthodox mother. “We can move to the left or move to the right, and each path will present its own finish. The small, everyday traditions that we embrace help guide us down a straight path. Prayer in the morning brings refreshment. Blessing our children as they leave for school keeps the angels close to them when they are far. Singing the Lord’s Prayer together before meals, all of these things – these supposed little things that we do each and every day – keep us straight in our way and provide for us and those around us a secure and familiar road leading toward heaven.”

### **The Church Comes Home**

Palm, Palm, Palm Sunday,  
Kolio fish we eat today;  
But when next Sunday comes around,  
We’ll eat the red-dyed eggs we’ve found!  
-- Greek Folk Verse

Isn’t it a help as women – mothers, godmothers, grandmothers, and aunts – to have the artificial line between “the secular” and “the sacred” erased by the traditions in our Church? There are many practices that bring the church home for us, whether it’s the food that we eat according to the calendar, the lamps that we light that resemble the ones by the icons in the sanctuary, the Holy Water we drink when we are sick or under stress, the nameday celebrations that we keep, or the censer we occasionally use that makes our homes smell like church. We are not just asked to try to create a little church within the four walls of our houses; we are given all the help we need to do so. >We have teaching tools at our disposal that involve all of the senses – touch, taste, smell, sound, sight. Good teachers always use visual aids and encourage hands-on activities, and through the traditions of the Church we can do the same with our children.

### **Lest We Forget**

We are all seeds cast by the Sower, but as in the parable, we can become choked by the cares and worries of our lives until we are not producing anything of value. Keeping the traditions of the church will help us remember God and keep Him at the center of our lives. This will not happen by accident. We must be deliberate and determined to repeat those things that have been given to us, and repeat them, and repeat them. Why? Because as humans, God knows we are so inclined to forget! Kyriakos Markides, in his book *The Mountain of Silence*, observed some monks and noted that the keeping of the traditional cycles was, literally, their salvation. “Evening vespers, the finale of the day’s cycle, was to take place in an hour. After the service

each monk would retreat to his cell and, before going to bed, engage in various spiritual exercises assigned to him....Everything was well-organized and cemented by long-established tradition. It was interesting to see these monks go through such ritual cycles without any complaints, when one takes into account that prior to dressing themselves in their black monastic robes they lived full lives in the secular world. They repeated these rituals day after day, year after year, without any sign of boredom...For father Maximos the answer was simple: They found what they were looking for...so why leave?"

Father Alexander Schmemmann worked for years with seminary students and spoke of how easily the presence of Christ would get buried there under "a thunderous downpour – of information, reports, knowledge, discussion, etc. And all of these flow around us, never sticking to us, immediately pushed away by the next deluge. Man becomes a slave of his always growing work." The solution for him? "There is a need for rhythm, detachment, slowness" such as the keeping of traditions provides. With Advent upon us, we have a great opportunity to begin, or to renew, our commitment to keeping traditions alive – to honor our forebears in the faith, to build goodness and truth into the lives of those around us, to redeem our time, to bring the church home, and most importantly, never to forget that which is of eternal importance. Perhaps we might just pick one new thing to try this year, and then we will reap the joy of Christmas and discern its profound mysteries, as Sir Walter Scott describes in "Marmion":

The damsel donned her kirtle sheen;  
The hall was dressed with holly green,  
Forth to the wood did merry-men go,  
To gather in the mistletoe,  
Then opened wide the baron's hall  
To vassal, tenant, serf and all...  
Then came the merry maskers in,  
And carols roared with blithesome din;  
If unmelodious was the song,  
It was a hearty note, and strong.  
Who lists may in their mumming see  
Traces of ancient mystery.

Ginny Nieuwsma lives in northern California with her husband and children. She is the editor of [Our Hearts' True Home: Fourteen Warm, Inspiring Stories of Women Discovering the Ancient Christian Faith](#) (Conciliar Press, 1996). The above article appeared in the Fall 2002 issue of The Handmaiden.

**COUNCIL OF BISHOPS**  
**UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE USA**  
P. O. Box 495  
South Bound Brook, NJ 08880

**Concerning the Western Eparchy UOC of USA**

Dearly Beloved Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of our Holy Church,

GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST!

We have passed through the most difficult and passion filled days of the repose and funeral services of our beloved brother and concelebrant in the Grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, His Eminence Archbishop Vsevolod, Ruling Hierarch of the Western Eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA. Following months of serious illness, suffering and pain, His Eminence now rests eternally as we have prayed fervently, in the loving embrace of our Lord, where there is no more pain, no more suffering and no more sorrow. We pray that at the second advent of our Lord, He will surely hear the sweet call we all long for: "Come my beloved, enter into the place prepared for you before the foundation of the world." We invite you to participation in memorial services on the 40th day following the Archbishop's repose, which will take place in parishes all throughout our Holy Church on Thursday, 24 January. St. Volodymyr Cathedral, Chicago, the cathedral seat of Archbishop Vsevolod, will be the site of the primary memorial service at 10:00 a.m. in Divine Liturgy and then at 7:00 p.m. on this day with His Eminence Archbishop Antony as primary celebrant.

We, your hierarchs, know the sorrow and the emptiness that fills the hearts and souls of those entrusted to Archbishop Vsevolod's pastoral care and we will not leave you as orphans without the spiritual care and compassion you most certainly need, especially during these difficult days and the initial days and months ahead until a new ruling hierarch is appointed. *During this period, Metropolitan Constantine will serve as Locum Tenens of the Eparchy and respond to your spiritual and administrative needs.* The Metropolitan is very familiar, as you all know, with Chicago and all the Western Eparchy, having served as the Ruling Hierarch there for the first twenty-four years of his episcopacy until the unification of all Ukrainian Orthodox Christians into our Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA in 1996 and thereafter, the appointment by the Council of Bishops of Archbishop Vsevolod as the new Ruling Hierarch in 1997.

We express our most sincere gratitude to the Orthodox hierarchs, the clergy and faithful of our Holy Church and other Orthodox jurisdictions in the USA, to the numerous ecumenical leaders and faithful from around the world, to the representatives of the government of Ukraine and Ukrainian community organizations who participated in the funeral services for Archbishop Vsevolod or sent condolences to our church and the Archbishop's family during this mournful time.

May the soul of our dear brother, Archbishop Vsevolod, rest eternally in the sweet comfort and compassion of our Lord, following his long and fruitful earthly pilgrimage. May our Lord bless and strengthen the members of the Archbishop's family – his sister Ilaria Majdansky-Krejer, her daughters and their families during the period of mourning making them certain in faith and trust in His Will. May his memory be eternal in God's Heavenly Kingdom and his prayers in our behalf be answered to our spiritual benefit.

We ask that you keep us in your daily prayers, dearly beloved, for it is through those prayers that we are strengthened and enabled in our priestly service in Christ's Vineyard. We assure you all of our unceasing prayers in your behalf.

*In our Lord's all-encompassing Love,*

+ Constantine, *Metropolitan*  
+ Antony, *Archbishop*

*Given this 28th day of December in the Year of our Lord 2007  
The Feast of Hieromartyr Eleutherius of Illyria, his Mother Anthia and Martyr Coribus*