

*The Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese  
Of North America*

*The Diocese of Eagle River and the Northwest  
Antiochian Orthodox Church of the Annunciation*

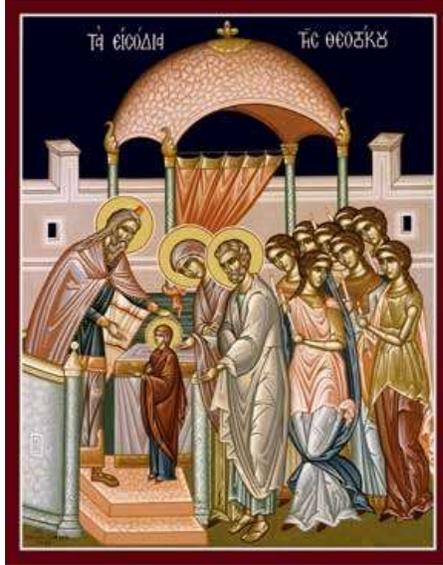
كنيسة البشارة الأرثوذكسية الأنطاكية

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**Sunday November 22nd, 2015**

**Tone 8 / Eothion 3**

**Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost & Ninth & Ninth Sunday of Luke**

**Sunday Services:**

**Vespers on Saturday 6:00 PM, Sunday Matins 9:30 AM**

**10:45 AM Divine Liturgy**

**THE FIRST ANTIPHON**

\* Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised: in the city of our God and in His holy mountain. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.

*Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us.*

\* God is known in her palaces for a refuge. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God.

*Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us.*

\* Glory... Both now... *Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us.*

**THE SECOND ANTIPHON**

\* The Most High hath sanctified His tabernacle. Holiness and majesty are in His sanctuary.

*Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead; who sing to Thee. Alleluia.*

\* This is the gate of the Lord, by which the righteous shall enter.

*Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead; who sing to Thee. Alleluia.*

\* Holy is Thy temple, and wonderful in righteousness. (*Refrain*)

*Save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead; who sing to Thee. Alleluia.*

\* Glory... Both now... *O, only begotten Son and Word of God...*

### THE THIRD ANTIPHON

Even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favor. The King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. Virgins shall be brought to the King after her: her companions shall be brought unto Thee. (*Now sing the Apolytikion of the Entrance "Today the Virgin" below.*)

*During the Little Entrance, after the verses of the Third Antiphon, chant the Apolytikion of the Entrance of the Theotokos. The Eisodikon (Entrance Hymn) is "O come, let us worship... save us, O Son of God, Who art risen from the dead..." as on ordinary Sundays. After the Little Entrance, chant the apolytikia in the following order:*

### RESURRECTIONAL APOLYTIKION IN TONE EIGHT

From the heights Thou didst descend, O compassionate One, and Thou didst submit to the three day burial, that Thou might deliver us from passion; Thou art our life and our Resurrection, O Lord, glory to Thee.

### APOLYTIKION OF THE ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS IN TONE FOUR

Today the Virgin is the foreshadowing of the pleasure of God, and the beginning of the preaching of the salvation of mankind. Thou hast appeared in the Temple of God openly and hast gone before, preaching Christ to all. Let us shout with one thrilling voice, saying: Rejoice, O thou who art the fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation.

• **Now sing the apolytikion of the patron saint or feast of the temple.**

### KONTAKION OF THE ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS IN TONE FOUR

(\*\*Thou Who wast raised up\*\*)

The all-pure temple of the Savior, the most precious bridal chamber and Virgin, the treasure house of the glory of God, today enters the Temple of the Lord, bringing with her the grace which is in the divine Spirit: whom also the angels of God do celebrate in song; for she is the heavenly tabernacle.

#### لأنديفونا الأولى

\* عظيم الرب ومسبح جداً في مدينة إلهنا، فيك قبيلات المفخر يا مدينة الله . . . بشفاعاة والددة الإله .

\* الله معروف في قصورها، مثلما سمعنا كذلك رأينا . . . بشفاعاة والددة الإله . .

\* المجد . . . الآن . . . بشفاعاة والددة الإله . .

#### الأنديفونا الثانية

\* لقد قدس العلي مسكنه، القداسة والجلال في مقدسه . . . خلصنا يا ابن الله، يا من قام من بين الأموات، لنرتل لك هليلويا.

\* هذا هو باب الرب ومنه يدخل الصديقون . . . خلصنا يا ابن الله، يا من قام من بين الأموات، لنرتل لك هليلويا.

\* قدوس هو هيكلك وأنت عجيب في عدالتك . . . خلصنا يا ابن الله، يا من قام من بين الأموات، لنرتل لك هليلويا.

\* المجد . . . الآن . . . يا كلمة الله . . . .

#### الأنديفونا الثالثة

وأغنياء الشعوب يبتهلون إليك، ابنة الملك كلها بهاء في خدرها، مكتسية بألبسة، مذهبة حواشيها، باردية مطرزة يؤتى بها إلى الملك، في إثرها العذارى صواحبها. (طروبارية دخول العذراء إلى الهيكل).

## الطروباريات:

( للقيامة – باللحن الثامن):

انحدرت من العلو يا متحنين/ وقبلت الدفن ذا الثلاثة الأيام/ لكي نُعتقنا من الآلام/ فيا حياتنا وقيامتنا يا ربُّ المجدُّ لك.

(طروبارية دخول العذراء إلى الهيكل – باللحن الرابع)

اليوم العذراء التي هي مقدمة مسرة الله، وابتداء الكرازة بخلص البشر، قد ظهرت في هيكل الله علانية، وسبقت مبشرةً للجميع بالمسيح، فلنهنف نحوها بصوتٍ عظيمٍ قائلين: إفرحي يا كمال تدبير الخالق.

ترتل طروبارية القديس شفيح الكنيسة

(للبشارة – باللحن الرابع)

اليوم رأس خلاصنا، وإعلان السر الذي منذ الدهور، لأن ابن الله يصير ابن البتول، وجيرانييل بالنعمة يبشّر، فلذلك ونحن معه لنهنف نحو والدة الإله، إفرحي أيتها الممتلئة نعمة الرب معك.

القتداق:

لدخول العذراء إلى الهيكل

اليوم الهيكل الذي للمخلص، الكلي النقاء العذراء الخدر، ذو الثمن الجزيل وهي الكنز الطاهر لمجد الإله، إذ تدخل بيت الرب تُدخل نعمة الروح الإلهي معها، فلنسبحها ملائكة الله، لأنها المظلة السماوية.

## The Epistle:

(For the Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost)

Make your vows to the Lord our God and perform them.

God is known in Judah; His Name is great in Israel.

**The Reading from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians. (4:1-7)**

Brethren, I, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, Who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

## الرسالة

أفسس ٤ : ١-٧

يا إخوة أطلب إليكم أنا الأسير في الرب أن تسلكوا كما يحقّ للدعوة التي دُعيتم بها بكل تواضع ووداعة وبطول أناة محتملين بعضكم بعضًا بالمحبة ومجتهدين في حفظ وحدة الروح برباط السلام. فإنكم جسد واحد وروح واحد كما دُعيتم إلى رجاء دعوتكم الواحد. رب واحد وإيمان واحد ومعمودية واحدة وإله أب للجميع واحد هو فوق الجميع وبالجميع وفي جميعكم. ولكل واحد منّا أُعطيت النعمة على مقدار موهبة المسيح.

## The Gospel

(For the Ninth Sunday of Luke)

**The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke. (12:16-21)**

The Lord spoke this parable: "The land of a rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'"

So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” As He said this, Jesus called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

## الإنجيل

فصل شريف من بشارة القديس لوقا الإنجيلي البشير

لوقا ١٢: ١٦-٢١

قال الرب هذا المثل: إنسان غنيّ أخصبت أرضه ففكر في نفسه قائلاً: ماذا أصنع فإنه ليس لي موضع أخزن فيه أثماري. ثم قال: أصنع هذا. أهدم أهراي وأبني أكبر منها وأجمع هناك كل غلاتي وخيراتي. وأقول لنفسي: يا نفس إن لك خيرات كثيرة موضوعة لسنين كثيرة فاستريحي وكلي واشربي وافرحي. فقال له الله: يا جاهل، في هذه الليلة تُطلب نفسك منك. فهذه التي أعددتها لمن تكون؟ فهكذا من يدخر لنفسه ولا يستغني بالله. ولما قال هذا نادى: من له أذنان للسمع فليسمع.

### THE SYNAXARION for the Entrance of the Mother of God

On November 21 in the Holy Orthodox Church we celebrate the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple.

Verses Within the temple, Gabriel feedeth thee, O Maid, And shortly he shall come and shall say to thee: Rejoice.

On the twenty-first Mary entereth the sacred fane. Leading the procession into the Temple were virgins with lighted tapers in their hands, then the three-year-old Most-holy Virgin, led by her father and mother. The Virgin was clad in vesture of royal magnificence and adornments as was befitting the “King’s daughter, the Bride of God” (Psalm 44:13-15). Following them were many kinsmen and friends, all with lighted tapers. Fifteen steps led up to the Temple. Joachim and Anna lifted the Virgin onto the first step, then she ran quickly to the top herself, where she was met by the High Priest Zachariah, who was to be the father of St. John the Forerunner. Taking her by the hand, he led her not only into the Temple, but into the “Holy of Holies,” the holiest of holy places, into which no one but the high priest ever entered, and only once each year, at that. Zachariah “was outside himself and possessed by God” when he led the Virgin into the holiest place in the Temple, beyond the second curtain—otherwise, his action could not be explained. The Most-holy Virgin remained in the Temple and dwelt there for nine full years. While her parents were alive, they visited her often. When God called her parents from this world, the Most-holy Virgin was left an orphan and did not wish to leave the Temple until death or to enter into marriage. The Most-holy Virgin Mary was the first of such life-vowed virgins, of the thousands and thousands of virgin men and women who would follow her in the Church of Christ. Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Christ God, have mercy upon us. Amen.

- ❖ **Do you skip Sundays:** Do you know Orthodox people are obligated to attend church on Sunday?
- ❖ **Fathers:** Do you stay home and send your wife and children to church, what example are we giving to our children? Be a good role model for your children and come to church as a family.
- ❖ **Your Help is needed:** Several new families are in need of a ride on Sunday from the NE area and 26 Ave SW. Some families are in need of the following: kitchen items, pots, dishes, silver ware etc. sofas, living rooms, coffee tables, bedroom dressers, towels, blankets, winter clothes for adults, teens and children. Please see Father, Skia, Mirna, or Hanan.
- ❖ **List of foods needed for the church food bank to be used for our new families to Calgary until they can find jobs:** Sugar, Dry Lentils, Flour, All Kinds of dry Beans, Butter, Dry Pastas, Margarine, All kinds of Frozen Veggie bags, Rice, Oil, Baking Powder, Dry Chick Peas, Baking Soda, Different

**Kinds of Dry Burgal, Pepper, Arabic Bread (Brown and White), All kinds of spices, Walnuts, Salt, dates, Potatoes, Tuna, onion, Garlic.**

**We are in need for 3 Electric food Processor Machines, mixers, and juicers, one Vacuum, Bedroom dressers, living room lamps, cutting boards.**

**Skia needs a few or more ladies to take turns in volunteering their time to take some of our refugee families to pick up foods from the SE Food Bank. We require people who have big vehicles. Please email [szidan66@hotmail.com](mailto:szidan66@hotmail.com) with your name/phone number because the families have to give their counselor a notice ahead of time.**

- ❖ **Bake Sale:** Any Kind of Arabic Pastries, Sweets, Foods bought or homemade that is needed for the bake Sale and or any kinds of crafts would be greatly appreciated and sent to the Church Hall on December 4, 2015 by 8:00 pm for organization and pricing to be ready for the bake sale on Dec 5 and Dec 6. We also need volunteers to help the executive ladies with all kinds of preparations on Dec 4 from 6-10:00 pm or as long as you can stay. **A time schedule has been created if you can volunteer to help the executive ladies on Dec 5 or 6 for few hours at a time. Please see Skia regarding time schedule.**
- ❖ **Giving back to God:** Everything we have belongs to God. If we come to church every few weeks or months and give only a few dollars, how can our church continue paying its bills? Give regularly and consistently.
- ❖ **Visit this website:** <http://www.antiochian.org/nativity> for more articles on the Nativity.
- ❖ **Can You Help:** Our brothers and sisters who arrived recently to our country of Canada need jobs. Are you an employer or do you know someone who is hiring? Please let Father know. Many are still struggling with English, so we need jobs where English is not needed a lot.
- ❖ **Teens Basketball:** Today after Liturgy. God willing Fr. George will play with the teens.
- ❖ **Business Directory:** Many people in our community own businesses. Please, give Father your business card, Father would like to create a business directory for our members. We should support our brothers and sisters, members of our Christian community in Calgary.

**The Bible in the Liturgy:** visit the following website: <http://almoutran.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/The-Bible-In-The-Liturgy.pdf>

### **UPCOMING DATES TO PUT ON YOUR CALENDARS**

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**The Nativity Fast:** The Nativity Fast starts on November 15<sup>th</sup> and continues until December 24<sup>th</sup> at midnight. It is as follows: Fish is permitted on Saturday and Sunday. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays no meat, poultry, dairy products, cheese, fish, Olive Oil or alcohol are permitted. On Tuesdays and Thursdays alcohol and olive oil are permitted. From December 21-24, these are strict fast days. If you have any question or if you are taking medications, please speak to Father.

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**What Orthodox People Do:** Every time we prepare for a major feast, we fast, we spend more time in prayers, we give alms to the poor, we repent from our sins by going to confession. Father is reminding everyone to go to confession before the Nativity of our Lord (Christmas). As Orthodox Christians during the fast we refrain from parties and all kind of worldly celebrations to concentrate on repentance and prayers.

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❖ **Christmas Play:** will be December 20<sup>th</sup> at St. Demetrius Greek Church from 4-8 PM. Tickets are \$15 adults, and \$10 for children. Please, print the flyer that you received in your email, cut out the ticket stub in the bottom right hand corner, fill it out with the number of adults and children. Give it to Mirna with your payment to reserve your seats. Space is limited so buy your tickets this week!

➤ **New Year's Party: 2016 NEW YEAR'S PARTY, December 31, 2015.**

**St. Stephen's Ukrainian Church Hall: 4903—45 St. SW, Calgary, AB.**

**Cocktails 6:30 pm, Dinner 8:00 pm**

**Prices: Adults \$70, children 6-10 Yrs. old \$35, Under 5 Yrs. Free.**

**Please see Hafiz or any parish council member for tickets.**

## **Announcements**

### **Call for Semi-Annual General Assembly**

Dear members of the Antiochian Orthodox Church of the Annunciation;

Christ is in our midst... He is and ever shall be

The Members of the Parish Council are pleased to invite you to attend the semi-annual general assembly which will be convened on Sunday December 13, 2015 after the Divine Liturgy. The purpose of this semi-annual general assembly is to approve releasing funds for the complete design of the new Church and to present the future steps towards building it.

We look forward seeing you all in the meeting to work together for the best of our Church.

Nov 9, 2015

**Acting Secretary of the Parish Council, *Hafez Massara***

**الدعوة الى الإجتماع النصف السنوي**

السادة أعضاء كنيسة البشارة الأنطاكية الأورثوذكسية:

المسيح فيما بيننا... كان و كائن و سيكون

يود أعضاء مجلس الرعية دعوتكم لحضور الاجتماع النصف السنوي المنعقد بتاريخ 13 كانون الأول 2015 بعد القداس الإلهي

للموافقة على صرف مبلغ مخصص للتصميم الكامل للكنيسة الجديدة و مناقشة الخطوات اللاحقة اللازمة لبنائها.

نأمل حضوركم جميعاً للعمل معاً لخير كنيستنا.

### **❖ Prayer For Peace – Evening Prayers**

Lord Jesus Christ, our God, You said to Your disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." We come before You in humility and ask that Your peace which surpasses all understanding will descend upon all people around the world, especially those currently in conflict and at war. Increase understanding and forgiveness

between nations. Awaken the longing for a peaceful life in all those who are filled with hatred for their neighbor. Extinguish every dispute and banish all temptations to disagreement. Grant wisdom to civil authorities. Free those held captive, protect those in danger, and comfort those who are suffering and displaced. Implant in all of us reverence for You, and confirm us in love for one another. Make us worthy to celebrate the Feast of Your Holy Nativity and to join with the angels in chanting: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men." For You are the King of Peace and the Savior of our souls and to You we give glory together with Your eternal Father and Your most-holy, gracious and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and forever.

Amen.

## الغنى الغبى

يحدّثنا إنجيل اليوم عن غنيّ انشغل بغناه. ويسوع يبيّن لنا في هذا المثل ان الذي جعل قلبه في المال لا يبقى في قلبه موضع لشيء آخر. وعلى العموم إذا جعلنا في القلب أي شيء أو أي شخص يتحكّم بنا لا يبقى في القلب مكان لشيء آخر.

مغزى النص الإنجيلي هو أن يكون المال خاضعاً للإنسان، أن يكون المال شيئاً نستعمله لا شيئاً يستعملنا. المال يُقتنى اقتناء ولا يُحبّ حباً. وبالتالي لا بدّ من تبيده، في وقت من الأوقات، في ظل النظام الذي نحيا فيه عندما يُعرقل حياتنا الأخلاقية.

تحدّث الإنجيل عن إنسان أراد أن يجمع الممتلكات لنفسه ولا يشارك فيها أحداً. ولكي تبقى له وحده، أراد ان يبني مخازن ومستودعات أكبر من التي لديه. فقال لنفسه أن استمتعي في هذه الحياة وكلّي واشربي، فالحياة كلها طعام ولذة، والحياة كلها أموال وما تشتريه الأموال.

هكذا قال هذا الرجل الذي وصفه الكتاب على انه غبيّ، والغباء هو في انه أقبل فقط على اللذات ولم يستلذّ بالله، لم يحب الخالق. كانت نفسه فارغة من ربّه، مليئة بالشهوة. أي انها كانت بالحقيقة لا شيء، كانت تتلاشى بتلاشي الشهوات، تتحطّ بانحطاط اللذات.

كيف يكون المال أداة ولا يكون هو غاية جهودنا؟ كل إنسان يعرف ان المال ممكن ان يملكه بدل ان يبقى سيّدا على ماله. المال أصلاً عبد يمكن ان ينقلب معبوداً. ولأن السيد يعرف هذا قال: «لا تقدرون ان تعبدوا الله والمال». إذا كثر المال أو لم يكثر وأحبيته كأنه معشوق أي تعيش ليس فقط به ولكن له، يحتلّ في قلبك مكانة الله. إذ ذاك يتحكّم بأعمالك من حيث انك في نهاية شوقك اليه يصبح في قلبك هو المعبود وإن صعب عليك ان تعترف بذلك. ولكن هذه هي الحال ان المال معبود كثيرين أغنياء كانوا أم فقراء. يحزنون جدا حتى الخوف إذا خسروه ويكون وحده موضع سرورهم الحقيقي فلا يعادله سرور آخر.

في الواقع النفسي يمكن ان يتحكّم بك المال تحكما حقيقيا فتتابع حياتك فقط لاقتنائه وينتهي سرورك عنده. وفي أقصى السقوط لا تفضل شيئاً عليه مهما ادعيت. إذ ذاك لا محل عندك للعاطفة وفي حالة تعلقك العظيم لا القريبى ولا الصداقة وربما لا التقوى لها مكانة عندك. يصبح المال إلهاً حقاً بمعنى انه يأخذ كل اهتمامك، كل عقلك، كل قلبك، وكل شيء آخر يصبح عندك وهماً أو خرافة أو كذبة. في أقصى التعلّق به تضحي بالناس جميعاً بما فيهم الأقربون. هو عندك بمثابة شخص حي. عندما يقول الناس هذا عاشق مال هم لا يبالغون. الكلمة في محلّها. عشق الجنس الآخر يتلاشى أمام عشق المال إذا طغى.

جاورجيوس مطران جبيل والبترون وما يليهما (جبيل لبنان)

## The Purpose of Fasting

The purpose of fasting is to focus on the things that are above, the Kingdom of God. It is a means of putting on virtue in reality, here and now. Through it we are freed from dependence on worldly things. We fast faithfully and in secret, not judging others, and not holding ourselves up as an example.

- Fasting in itself is not a means of pleasing God. Fasting is not a punishment for our sins. Nor is fasting a means of suffering and pain to be undertaken as some kind of atonement. Christ already redeemed us on His Cross. Salvation is a gift from God that is not bought by our hunger or thirst.
- We fast to be delivered from carnal passions so that God’s gift of Salvation may bear fruit in us.
- We fast and turn our eyes toward God in His Holy Church. Fasting and prayer go together.
- Fasting is not irrelevant. Fasting is not obsolete, and it is not something for someone else. Fasting is from God, for us, right here and right now.
- Most of all, we should not devour each other. We ask God to “set a watch and keep the door of our lips.”

### **Do Not Fast**

- between December 25 and January 5 (even on Wednesdays and Fridays);
- if you are pregnant or nursing a newborn;
- during serious illness;
- without prayer;
- without alms-giving;
- according to your own will without guidance from your spiritual father.
- 

## **The Advent Period in Home Life**

*by Sophie Koulomzin*

What is the meaning of the feast of the Nativity of Our Lord in our family life? How can we live through the preparatory period of Advent as a Christian family? Can this meaning be truly and naturally, unpretentiously, embodied in the experience of a family, a home with children, teenagers, adults and old people?

Of course, first of all, Christmas is a FEAST, a celebration, an occasion for joy. Understanding the real meaning of this joy (God coming to us to share our humanity) comes to every individual gradually, within the measure of his or her spiritual development, but the experience of joy, of rejoicing, of having a very happy time because it is Christmas is something that can be experienced by all members of the family, whatever their age, whatever their level of spirituality . . . if only there is someone within the family who remains a witness of the true meaning of this joy. The experience of a joyous celebration remains the foundation stone of understanding the meaning of the Lord’s Nativity.

### **CHRISTMAS MEANS JOY.**

All parents realize, I think, that attending church services is not sufficient to have children and young people sincerely experience joy. The real challenge for a Christian family is to find a form of home celebration that will be enjoyable and creative for all its members, young and old and will yet keep a kind of transparency, through which the true meaning of the feast can be perceived within the spiritual capacity of each one. It may be a festive meal, a distribution of presents, lighting the Christmas tree, carol singing, or many other things. It has to be something that comes naturally, remains spontaneous, is not artificially imposed. I was asked to write a short article on the theme of home activities during Advent. But, I believe

that most parents would agree with me, it is practically impossible to plan a program of activities for the family. The family is not a school, not an institution where the whole environment can be carefully controlled, a curriculum planned, study material provided, tests carried out. A family is a unit, a “oneness,” of individuals, of individual relationships, moods, different and constantly changing stages of development. Any attempt to **IMPOSE** a mood, a feeling, an emotion may call forth resentment and irritation that defeats the very purpose of the effort. Anything that will be felt by other members of the family as artificial or contrived and will not become a living part of the family experience. A family tradition has to be “grown into,” has to become a natural way of life for the family. In the past, individual Orthodox families lived within Orthodox societies and certain traditions were part of a general way of life, but today every family has to find its own **AUTHENTIC** way of living its own church life in a generally secular world.

I am afraid I am quite unable to write a theoretical article on the subject. I can only attempt to share with you how we tried to prepare for Christmas and live through the feast as **ONE** family.

I think a festive Christmas meal is enjoyed more and becomes more meaningful when it is preceded by a period of fasting and abstinence in whatever form, and for whatever length of time this is possible in your particular family situation. After the **ALL NIGHT VIGIL** on Christmas Eve we returned to a special lenten supper which we had around the Christmas Tree (my own particular idiosyncrasy was observed in that on that quiet occasion we lit real candles and not electric lights.) I have Ukrainian friends who have a very traditional Christmas Eve supper menu, but in our home we had never known that particular tradition.

I always wanted preparations for Christmas to involve the children’s creativity. For many, many years our home celebration involved a home Christmas play. I am fond of theatricals, especially of the kind that draws upon the children’s imagination and creativity. Old Christmas folk stories and legends adapted themselves easily to whatever number of children or grandchildren were available. Costumes and scenery were made up of odd stuff found in an old trunk in the attic, with the help of colored paper, tinsel, glue, paints. Rehearsals were part of the Advent time and they did involve a sense of effort and work in preparation for celebrating Christmas. In our particular case it also served the purpose of teaching children Russian. On Christmas Day, after Divine Liturgy, the whole family clan assembled for a festive dinner which lasted quite long. As soon as it grew dark it was time for the play. Looking back at those plays so many years later, I can see how well they are remembered by my children (now parents of growing families), and many of our now adult grandchildren.

After the play, someone dressed up as Santa Claus, brought in all the gifts from grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins and from children to each other and to adults. It made a huge pile. We never made a big issue of “believing in Santa Claus.” I guess the smallest children, up to about three or four years old accepted him in good faith, but whenever they began to ask questions, I always told them the story of Saint Nicholas bringing gifts secretly and how the tradition of Santa Claus was established in his memory.

Our Advent activities were usually various forms of preparing for celebrating Christmas. Sometime before Christmas (in the days of “two calendars” it was usually on the “new style” Christmas) we built a manger scene, a “crèche” as we called it. Making the cave, the landscape around it, the clay figures, the lighting effects depended on the age and sophistication of the young artists and varied from year to year. We made decorations for the home, for the Christmas tree.

And then, of course, we prepared gifts. I am sure that, in terms of Christian experience of life, expressing our love to others through preparing gifts for them is a good way of preparing for the feast of Christmas. Obviously the children expected to receive gifts, just as we expect to receive a lot of things from our Heavenly Father, but they also gave gifts and that involved a lot of work, imagination and planning on their part (baking, building, sewing, painting, carpentering, etc. . .) I regret now that we did not know how to involve our children in trying to give pleasure to people outside the family. I do believe that gift giving has to be a part of a personal relationship and I always felt hesitant about dumping useless little impersonal gifts on old people in a Nursing Home. But as I look back, I believe that it might have been possible to interest children in a personal and continued relationship with a particular person who might be lonely or friendless.

In our family in days past, the Pre Christmas period was always linked to what used to be called “govenye”, “making one’s devotions” or what is now sometimes called a “retreat.” That meant that we attended church, for several week days we abstained from certain foods and amusements and went to confession and received Holy Communion on Christmas Day. It was a family experience. I realize that today when frequent communion is practiced in many families, the situation is different, but I do believe that a kind of family retreat before great Holidays is very helpful. Of course, we made sure, as the children grew up, that they all knew well the Gospel Nativity stories and the special Christmas liturgical hymns sung in church. If there is time and place in the structure of family life for special Pre-Christmas instruction, many helpful suggestions can be found in the booklets “THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS” published by the OCEC. I do not think that any family can ever say with self satisfaction that it has carried out a perfect program in preparation for the celebration of a great church feast, yet I know that many young adults, who have to a certain extent drifted away from taking part in the life of the Church, still cherish the family celebration of Christmas and Easter, and this experience remains for them a link with the experience of Church life.

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