

*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

3107-40th Street SW, Calgary, AB T3E 3J9

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Sunday November 29th, 2015

Tone 1 / Eothinon 4

Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost & Thirteenth Sunday of Luke

Sunday Services:

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

10:45 AM Divine Liturgy

RESURRECTIONAL APOLYTIKION IN TONE ONE

While the stone was sealed by the Jews, and the soldiers were guarding Thy most pure body, Thou didst arise on the third day, O Savior, granting life to the world. For which cause the heavenly powers cried aloud unto Thee, O giver of life. Glory to Thy Resurrection O Christ, glory to Thy kingdom, glory to Thy providence, O Thou Who alone art the lover of mankind.

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

KONTAKION OF PREPARATION OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY IN TONE THREE

(The original melody**)**

Today the Virgin cometh to the cave where she will give birth in an ineffable manner to the Word Who is before all the ages. Rejoice, therefore, O universe, when thou hearest it

heralded: Glorify Him, with the angels and the shepherds, Who chose to be seen as a new-born babe, the God Who is before all the ages.

الطروبريات:

(للقيامة – باللحن الأول):

إن الحجرَ لما حُتِمَ مِنَ اليهود / وجسدك الطاهرَ حُفِظَ مِنَ الجند / قمتَ في اليوم الثالثِ أيها المخلص / مانحاً العالمَ الحياةَ / لذلك قواثُ السمواتِ / هتفوا إليك يا واهبَ الحياةَ / ألمجدُ لقيامتكِ أيها المسيح / ألمجدُ لمُلكِكِ / ألمجدُ لتدبيرك يا مُجِبَّ البشرِ وحدك.

ترتل طروبارية القديس شفيح الكنيسة

(للبنشارة – باللحن الرابع)

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

القدائق:

اليوم العذراء، تأتي إلى المغارة، لتلد الكلمة الذي قبل الدهور، ولادة لا تفسّر ولا يُنطق بها، فافرحي أيتها المسكونة إذا سمعتي، ومجدي مع الملائكة والرعاة، الذي سيظهر بمشيئته طفلاً جديداً، وهو إلهاً قبل الدهور.

The Epistle:

(For the Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost)

Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us. Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous.

The Reading from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians. (5:8-19)

Brethren, walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.

الرسالة

الرسالة: أفسس 5: 8-19

يا إخوة، اسلكوا كأولاد للنور، فإن ثمر الروح هو في كل صلاح وبرّ وح، مختبرين ما هو مرضي لدى الرب. ولا تشتركوا في أعمال الظلمة غير المثمرة بل بالأحرى وبخوا عليها، فإن الأفعال التي يفعلونها سرّاً يقبح ذكرها أيضاً، لكن كل ما يوبّخ عليه يُعلن بالنور، فإن كل ما يُعلن هو نور. ولذلك يقول استيقظ أيها النائم وقم من بين الأموات فيضيء لك المسيح. فانظروا إذاً أن تسلكوا بحذر لا كجهلاء، بل كحكماء مفتدين الوقت فإن الأيام شريرة. فلذلك لا تكونوا أغبياء بل افهموا ما مشيئة الرب، ولا تسكروا بالخمير التي فيها الدعارة بل امتلئوا بالروح، مكلمين بعضكم بعضاً بمزامير وتسابيح وأغاني روحية، مرنمين ومرتلين في قلوبكم للرب.

The Gospel

(For the Thirteenth Sunday of Luke)

The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke. (18:18-27)

At that time, a man came testing Jesus and asking, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery. Do not kill. Do not steal. Do not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother.'" And the man said, "All these I have observed from my youth." And when Jesus heard

it, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." But when the man heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus, seeing him sad, said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

الإنجيل

فصل شريف من بشارة القديس لوقا الإنجيلي البشير

الإنجيل: لوقا 18: 27-18

في ذلك الزمان دنا إلى يسوع إنسان مجرباً له وقائلاً: أيها المعلم الصالح، ماذا أعمل لأرث الحياة الأبدية؟ فقال له يسوع: لماذا تدعوني صالحاً، وما صالح إلا واحد وهو الله. انك تعرف الوصايا: لا تزن، لا تقتل، لا تسرق، لا تشهد بالزور، أكرم أباك وأمك. فقال: كل هذا حفظته منذ صباي. فلما سمع يسوع ذلك قال له: واحدة تعوزك بعد: بع كل شيء لك ووزعه على المساكين، فيكون لك كنز في السماء وتعال اتبعني. فلما سمع ذلك حزن لأنه كان غنياً جداً. فلما رآه يسوع قد حزن قال: ما أعسر على ذوي الأموال أن يدخلوا ملكوت الله. انه لأسهل أن يدخل الجمل في ثقب الإبرة من أن يدخل غني ملكوت الله. فقال السامعون: فمن يستطيع اذن أن يخلص؟ فقال: ما لا يُستطاع عند الناس مستطاع عند الله.

تعال اتبعني

يأتي رجل إلى السيد ليجربه. كان هذا الرجل جيداً لأنه حفظ الوصايا وتبعها كلها: لا تسرق، لا تزن، لا تشهد بالزور... ومع ذلك قال له السيد: «واحدة تعوزك: بع كل ما لك ووزعه على المساكين... وتعال اتبعني»، أي أنك لست كاملاً إذا حفظت الوصايا فقط.

إذا قبلك المساكين في قلوبهم قبلك أبي في ملكوته. أي إن لم يكن الفقراء راضين عن أحدهم لا يكون الله راضياً عنه. رضى الفقراء من رضى الله.

قال داود في المزامير عن البار: «بَدَدَ أعطى المساكين، فيدوم برّه إلى الأبد» (مزمو 112: 3). لم يقل تصدق بألف ليرة أو بخمسة آلاف. قال: بَدَدَ. ماذا نقول اليوم والنظام نظام سعي لتكديس الأموال ونظام مصارف ووفرة مالية؟ ما دام هذا النظام قائماً، كيف يستطيع الانسان ان يبَدَدَ؟ أبأونا اللاهوتيون الكبار كباسيليوس الكبير ويوحنا الذهبي الفم قالوا ان كلاً منّا وكيل على ما يملك. انت موكل على مالك لمصلحة الجماعة.

الغني فعلاً هو الذي يكون الله كبيراً في عينيه، وهذا يكون حاراً كالأنبياء لا ممالقاً ولا مستزلاً. نحن علينا أن نساوي في عقولنا الغني والفقير، أن نعظم الذين يسلكون سلوك الأنبياء وأن يجذبنا الأبرار. الضعيف والمريض والحقير والمسكين والمرذول في مجتمعنا هذا هو الذي يُعظم.

لماذا يحرص الناس على ما عندهم؟ لماذا يُمسكون عن العطاء؟ لأنهم يخافون الموت. يخافون أن يلقاهم الموت وهم بلا مال في قبضة أيديهم. يعرفون أنهم سيذهبون إلى القبر عراة حفاة، ومع ذلك لا يتعلمون. من عنده يستزيد، ومن ليس عنده يستزيد، وكلها سباق إلى «الشطارة». كلها مباريات إلى الأمجاد، وتنتهي المباراة في القبر.

اذن ماذا نعمل؟ نفتح القلوب إلى القلوب. ليست القضية بأن نعطي دراهم قليلة أو وفيرة، لكن القضية أن ينكسر القلب أمام المريض والضعيف والمرذول والمُحتقر، والقضية الكبرى ان نعتبر أنفسنا كلاً شيء. من اعتبر نفسه انه لا شيء، هذا يجعله ربه شيئاً. القلوب مغلقة متحجرة لأنها متكبرة. اما من أراد ان يشابه المسيح فهذا يعتبر نفسه كلاً شيء. ربنا كُسر على الصليب وديس تحت الصليب، ولذلك ارتفع إلى أعلى السماوات. دعوتنا الكبرى أن نُحب الناس، كل الناس. عزتُنا الكبرى ان نرفعهم فوق رؤوسنا. كرامتنا بأن نُحب، بأن ننسى معاصي الناس. أنت عظيم إذا داسك الناس واضطهدوك وعرفت أنك محبوب من المسيح. ما همك من الناس؟ ان يقولوا فيك الشيء الحسن؟ هذه تجربة شيطانية. «ويل لكم إذا قال فيكم جميع الناس حسناً» (لوقا 6: 26). هذا يعني انكم تريدون المديح. الإنسان البار يأبى المديح.

أن ندخل الملكوت يعني أن نُعابن الخير. ملكوت الله يعني المحبة والحقيقة. أن ندخل الملكوت يعني أن ندخل إلى نطاق الحقيقة وإلى نطاق البر وأن نكون صالحين بالحق. وهذا يعني ان تنكسر قلوبنا أمام كل الناس، وان نصمد، وان نحب،

وان نطيع، وان نمتدّ بالمحبّة إلى أقاصي الدنيا، وان نفتح قلوبنا لندخل إليها الفقراء والمضطهدين والمرذولين والذين ليس لهم اسم ولا مجد ولا كرامة. إذا دخل هؤلاء إلى قلوبنا واتحدنا بهم وأحببناهم والتصقنا بهم، عندئذ نكون كالمسيح واصلين إلى قمة المجد.

جاورجيوس مطران جبيل والبترون وما يليهما (جبل لبنان)

❖ Church Announcements

- ❖ **Second Collection this Sunday:** There will be a second collection this Sunday. The money will be used **ONLY** for the needs of the new families arrived from Syria.
- ❖ **Father is out of town:** With the blessing of His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph, Fr. George and Ky. Manal/Mary will be traveling to Houston, Texas to bring their furniture back to Calgary. Father will be away the whole week, in case of emergency please call Father on his cell phone.
- ❖ **Services for the Nativity of Christ:** Thursday December 24th: The Hours at 8 AM. Thursday December 24th: Vesperal Liturgy at 3 PM. Friday December 25th: The Nativity of our Lord- Orthros 10 AM followed by the Divine Liturgy at 11 AM.
- ❖ **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.

****Skia needs a few 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 need people who have big vehicles. Please email 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 6:00-10:00 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 a few hours at a time. Please see Skia regarding time schedule.**
- ❖ **Visit this website:** <http://www.antiochian.org/nativity> for more articles on the Nativity.
- ❖ **<http://www.ocf.net/7-things-that-mean-something-completely-different-to-orthodox-people>**

- ❖ **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.

UPCOMING DATES TO PUT ON YOUR CALENDARS

The Nativity Fast: The Nativity Fast starts on November 15th and continues until December 24th 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.

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.

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 الاجتماع 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.

❖ **Christmas Play:** will be December 20th 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.

❖ **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 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."

❖ **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. Give a portion of your income back to God. Look at the suggested guide below.

Guide to Proportionate Giving

Annual Income	10%	8%	6%	4%	3%
\$25,000	2,500	2,000	1,500	1,000	750
\$35,000	3,000	2,800	2,100	1,400	1,050
\$40,000	4,000	3,200	2,400	1,600	1,200
\$50,000	5,000	4,000	3,000	2,000	1,500
\$60,000	6,000	4,800	3,600	2,400	1,800
\$70,000	7,000	5,600	4,200	2,800	2,100
\$80,000	8,000	6,400	4,800	3,200	2,400
\$90,000	9,000	7,200	5,400	3,600	2,700
\$100,000	10,000	8,000	6,000	4,000	3,000
\$120,000	12,000	9,600	7,200	4,800	3,600
\$150,000	15,000	12,000	9,000	6,000	4,500

Unless the Lord Comes to Us: Advent Reflections By Virginia Nieuwsma

“Unless the Lord comes to us, we are completely helpless.”

--St. Maximos, Greek ascetic, the 4th Century

It is November 16 as I write this. My mailbox is now brimming every day with glossy catalogs proclaiming the virtues of the triumphant, capitalistic existence of comfort and indulgence that we have all imbibed to one degree or another.

Yet on this second day of the Orthodox Advent season, I am acutely aware of my spiritual poverty. I have charged through my days heedless, as the mellowed northern California fall sun has illumined a fiery display of gold and magenta, flaming orange and russet red. Glory to God! the colors have shouted, but most of the time I have been too busy to stop and notice. My cell phone rings, my car needs gas, my errand list is a mile long, my work beckons, and my children need rides or tutoring or food. Squeezing in morning prayers here and there and attending church on Sunday, I nod to God before getting back to the “real” business at hand.

Sometimes I am running from Him, burying myself with my busyness because I don’t want to be alone with Him. I’m avoiding the silence of prayer and time spent before our icons, because it is there that I confront myself stripped away of any false pretense of piety. This confrontation with my sin and hard heartedness is painful; indeed, trying to practice the disciplines of the Church in the midst of Christmas season is definitely an uphill climb! I don’t want to think about fasting, or almsgiving,

or being more consistent in prayer. When I first turned over my calendar this year and saw the November 15 date, my first thought was that I simply didn't have the strength or the desire to enter into the fast this year.

Yet mercifully, the longing for God's presence regularly surfaces despite the noise and distractions. Oftentimes I am acutely aware of the void within, as was the Psalmist when he plaintively penned, "As a deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God," (Ps. 42).

It always seems that, just when I need it, the holy season of Advent arrives. Rather than being burdensome, the spiritual habits and proscriptions given to us in the Church are a lifeline. Certainly, there have been times when I have struggled to understand why we approach Christmas with such sobriety. This is a season for parties! For gifts! For happy celebrations! For family! What's this fasting in the midst, this remembrance of His death, these extra services that mirror the somber services of Holy Week?

Father Thomas Hopko explains in his book, *The Winter Pascha* [1]:

"The Lord's birth and baptism are directly connected to His dying and rising. He was born in order to die...the harmony between the events is overwhelming...Jesus lay as an infant in the cavern in the reign of Caesar Augustus that He might lay in the tomb under Pontius Pilate. He was hounded by Herod that He might be caught by Caiaphas...He was worshipped by wise men that the whole of creation might adore Him in His triumph over death."

Christ comes to us, then, and we do rejoice, for we are indeed helpless and have no life apart from Him. But the shadow of a cross falls over the tender and peaceful scene at the stable. His suffering life, His sacrifice, the weight of the world's sins; all are implicit in, and present at, His birth. So our Advent celebrations should be tempered by this reality; in a sense, the bright Lenten sadness is there at the manger, too. Some years, I have had no trouble entering into sober Advent reflection during the 40 days of preparation prior to the Nativity Feast. The year my father died, for instance, the quiet, reflective spirit of Orthodox Advent was a comfort. Anyone who has suffered a deep loss or sorrow through illness or death knows about the "bright sadness" that accompanies Christmas, and the shadow of the cross is indeed long for those grieving hearts. Yet even in my most sanguine years, I must prepare my heart if I hope to receive "the King of All," and this inner struggle is my cross which is present at the manger. Somehow I must find ways to screen out the sentimental, saccharine messages daily delivered via TV, radio, Internet, social gatherings, the printed page, and the billboard. Just as the waning winter light bids me flee the cold and light a fire in the sanctuary of my home, Advent is a time for me to enter into the sanctuary of my soul, stoking the fires of my heart through repentance, cleaning out the cobwebs in preparation for the birth of God in the center of my being.

How can we prepare for Christ's arrival?

***By increasing our prayer.** Says Fr. Anthony Coniaris, "The two great movements of the soul have always been withdrawal and return...withdrawal into God's presence through prayer for strength...without prayer, the quality of our service deteriorates. Without prayer we forget the world; with prayer we remember." Advent is a time to remember that in God, we move and breathe and have our being, and we must be *with* Him and consciously *in* Him before we can have authentic love and relationship with others.

***By giving alms.** There is something almost poetic about giving money and perhaps even more important in these busy times, our time, to others who are in need at Christmas time. We can battle our self-indulgence with self-sacrifice, by giving freely, with joy and gratitude to God for His good gifts to us. St. John Chrysostom writes, "It is not enough to help the poor. We must help them with generosity and without grumbling. And it is not enough to help them without grumbling. We must help them gladly and happily. When the poor are helped there ought to be these two conditions: generosity and joy."

***By going to Church more often.** The Advent season provides extra opportunities to be in the atmosphere of worship. Isn't it true that when we walk into the doors of our parishes, and those doors swing shut behind us, the flickering candles and the sights and smells of icons and incense before us, aid us in our seasonal preparations? Sometimes it is so hard to get there and so many things crowd our calendars but the rewards are always great. As Fr. Alexander Schmemmann writes, "There is no need to preach constantly on 'sin,' to judge and condemn. It is when a man is challenged with the real contents of the Gospel, with its Divine depth and wisdom, beauty and all embracing meaning, that he becomes 'capable of repentance,' for true repentance is precisely the discovery by the man of the abyss that separates him from God and from His real offer to man. It is when the man sees the bridal chamber adorned that he realizes that he has no garment for entering it."

***By remembering some of the unique and remarkable saints of the Advent season,** reading about their lives and celebrating their days of remembrance. Of course, we remember St. Nicholas (December 6) as he is commonly honored at this time of year, but what about some of the others? St. Herman of Alaska (December 13) exemplified the spirit of this time of year to perfection, and he belongs to us here in America, so let's not let the day go by without reading about him and recalling his sacrificial life with the people of Alaska. St. Stephen the protomartyr is remembered on December 26, immediately following the Nativity service, and he too can be venerated for his godly example. On New Year's Day, we can speak of the brilliant St. Basil, who spoke with erudition and intelligence to the issues of his day in a manner which transformed the Church.

***By going to confession.** If there is any act out of step with the vain and glib holiday atmosphere presented to us by the spirit of this age, it is act of the repentant Christian confessing his or her sins. Said Dorothy Day, “Going to confession is hard, hard when you have sins to confess, hard when you haven’t, and you wrack your brain for even the beginnings of sins against charity, chastity, sins of distraction, sloth or gluttony. You do not want to make too much of your constant imperfections and venial sins, but you want to drag them out to the light of day as the first step in getting rid of them....I have sinned. These are my sins. That is all you are supposed to tell; not the sins of others, or your own virtues, but only your ugly, gray, drab, monotonous sins.” Blessed are those who mourn, for it is precisely in this mourning that we receive comfort. These are the tidings of comfort and joy that the Christmas carol songwriter celebrates—redemption from guilt and the weight of sin!

***By incorporating the Church’s traditions** in ways that make sense for us here and now. Though we are not perfect fasters by any means, our family eats more simply in the season of Advent. We celebrate St. Nicholas’ Feast Day by putting out shoes on the night of December 5th so that “St. Nicholas” can fill them with gold coins while the children sleep. We read about his life, marveling at his overflowing love and goodness. We listening to Orthodox Christmas music and we keep an Advent wreath and calendar for six Sundays instead of four. We enjoy a traditional Christmas Eve dinner incorporating old world traditions. We have adapted, albeit imperfectly, our own cultural traditions to incorporate the spirit of Orthodox worship and emphasis at this time of year.

Author Matthew Gallatin has said that we in America have traditionally celebrated the Christmas season in backwards fashion. “Just as the guest of honor walks through the door, it’s all over,” he notes. This year, may we embrace the Orthodox vision of holy preparation, so that when December 25th dawns, we will be ready to receive Christ in the feast, the “Winter Pascha” of Nativity!

Originally published in OrthodoxCircle—Return Ezine ^[2]; reprinted with the author's permission.