

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 December 18th, 2016



Saturday Service: Vespers at 6 PM

Sunday Services: Matins 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy 10:30 AM

"Not only should the mouth fast, but the eyes and the legs and the arms and all the other parts of the body should fast as well. Let the hands fast, remaining clean from stealing and greediness. Let the legs fast, avoiding roads which lead to sinful sights. Let the eyes fast by not fixing themselves on beautiful faces and by not observing the beauty of others. You are not eating meat, are you? You should not eat debauchery with your eyes as well. **Let your hearing also fast. The fast of hearing is not to accept bad talk against others and sly defamations.**" St. John Chrysostom, On Fasting.

الأحد الذي قبل عيد الميلاد (أحد النسبة)

The Sunday before the Nativity of Christ (The Genealogy)

تغييرات في القداس

Changes in the Liturgy

الايصوذيكون

هلم لنسجد ونركع للمسيح ملكنا والهنا، خلصنا يا ابن الله يا من قام من بين الاموات، لنرتل لك هلوليا!

Entrance Hymn

O Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ.

Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, who sing to Thee: Alleluia!

طروبارية القيامة (باللحن الأول)

إِنَّ الْحَجَرَ لَمَّا خُتِمَ مِنَ الْيَهُودِ، وَجَسَدَكَ الطَّاهِرَ حُفِظَ مِنَ الْجُنْدِ، قُمْتَ فِي الْيَوْمِ الثَّلَاثِ أَيُّهَا الْمَخْلُصُ، مَانِحاً الْعَالَمَ الْحَيَاةَ. لَذَلِكَ قَوَاتُ السَّمَاوَاتِ هَتَفُوا إِلَيْكَ يَا وَاهِبَ الْحَيَاةِ: الْمَجْدُ لِقِيَامَتِكَ أَيُّهَا الْمَسِيحُ، الْمَجْدُ لِمُلْكِكَ، الْمَجْدُ لِتَدْبِيرِكَ، يَا مُحَبَّ الْبَشَرِ وَحَدِكَ.

Troparion of the Resurrection (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.

للأحد الذي قبل الميلاد (باللحن الثاني) طروبارية

عظيمة هي تقويمات الإيمان، لأن الثلاثة الفتيّة القديسين قد ابتهجوا في ينبوع اللهب كأنهم على ماء الراحة. والنبى دانيال ظهر راعياً للسباع كأنها غنم. فبتوسلاتهم أيها المسيح الإله ارحمنا.

Troparion of the Sunday before the Nativity (Tone Two)

Great are the accomplishments of faith; for the three holy youths rejoiced in the fountain of flames as though at waters of rest. And the Prophet Daniel appeared a shepherd to the lions as though they were sheep. Wherefore, by their pleadings, O Christ God, save our souls.

Troparion of the Annunciation – Tone 4

Today is the beginning of our salvation, and the manifestation of the mystery from the ages; for the Son of God becometh the Son of the Virgin, and Gabriel proclaimeth grace. Wherefore, do we shout with him to the Theotokos, Rejoice, O full of grace! The Lord is with thee.

(البشارة – باللحن الرابع)

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

(باللحن الثالث) القنداق لتقدمة عيد الميلاد

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

Kontakion of the Fore-feast of the Nativity (Tone Three)

Today the Virgin cometh unto the cave to give birth to the Word who was born before all ages, begotten in a manner that defies description. Rejoice, therefore, O universe if thou shouldst hear and glorify with the Angels and the shepherds. Glorify Him who by His will shall become a new-born Babe and who is our God before the ages.

الرسالة للأحد الذي قبل الميلاد

Epistle for the Sunday before the Nativity

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our Fathers!

For Thou are just in all that Thou hast done to us!

The Reading is from St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews (11:9-10, 32-40).

Brethren, by faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, and put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to

مبارك أنت يا رب إله آبائنا!

لأنك عدلٌ في كلِّ ما صنعت بنا!

(11:9-10, 32-40) . فصل من رسالة القديس بولس الرسول إلى العبرانيين

يا اخوة بالإيمان نزل إبراهيم في أرض الميعاد نزولاً في أرض غريبة وسكن في خيام مع اسحق ويعقوب الوارثين معه للموعد بعينه* لأنه انتظر المدينة ذات الأسس التي الله صانعها وبارئها* وماذا أقول أيضاً. إنه يضيق بي الوقت إن أخبرت عن جدعون وباراق وشمشون ويفتاح وداود وصموئيل والأنبياء* الذين بالإيمان قهرؤا الممالك وعملوا البر ونالوا المواعد وسدوا أفواه الأسود* وأطفأوا حدة النار ونجوا من حد السيف وتقوا من ضعف وصاروا أشداء في الحرب وكسروا معسكرات الأجانب* وأخذت نساء أمواتهن بالقيامة. وعذب آخرون بتوتير الأعضاء والضرب ولم يقبلوا بالنجاة ليحصلوا على قيامة أفضل* وآخرون ذاقوا الهزء والجلد والقيود أيضاً والسجن* ورجموا ونشروا وامتنحوا وماتوا بحد السيف وساحوا في جلود غنم ومعز وهم معوزون مضايقون مجهودون* (ولم يكن العالم مستحقاً لهم*). وكانوا تائبين في البراري والجبال والمغاور وكهوف الأرض* فهؤلاء كلهم مشهوداً لهم بالإيمان لم ينالوا المواعد* لأن الله سبق فنظر لنا شيئاً أفضل أن لا يكملوا بدوننا.

accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

الإنجيل للأحد الذي قبل الميلاد

Gospel for the Sunday before the Nativity

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew (1:1-25).

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of

(1:1-25) فصل شريف من بشارة القديس متى الإنجيلي البشير، التلميذ الطاهر

كتاب ميلاد يسوع المسيح ابن داود ابن إبراهيم* فإبراهيم ولد إسحق وإسحق ولد يعقوب ويعقوب ولد يهوذا وإخوته* ويهوذا ولد فارص وزارح من تمار وفارص ولد حصرون وحصرون ولد آرام* وأرام ولد عميناداب وعميناداب ولد نحشون ونحشون ولد سلمون* وسلمون ولد بوعر من راحاب وبوعر ولد عوبيد من راعوث وعوبيد ولد يسى ويسى ولد داود الملك* وداود الملك ولد سليمان من التي كانت لأريأ* وسليمان ولد رحبعام ورحبعام ولد أيبا وأيبا ولد آسا* وآسا ولد يوشافاط و يوشافاط ولد يورام ويورام ولد عزيا* وعزيا ولد يوتام ويوتام ولد آحاز وآحاز ولد جزقيا* وجزقيا ولد منسى ومنسى ولد آمون وآمون ولد يوشيا* ويوشيا ولد يكنيا وإخوته في جلاء بابل* ومن بعد جلاء بابل يكنيا ولد شالتنيل وشالتنيل ولد زربابل* وزربابل ولد أبيهود وأبيهود ولد ألياقيم وألياقيم ولد عازور* وعازور ولد صادوق وصادوق ولد آخيم وآخيم ولد أليهود* وأليهود ولد ألعازار وألعازار ولد مثنان ومثنان ولد يعقوب* ويعقوب ولد يوسف رجل مريم التي ولد منها يسوع الذي يدعى المسيح* فكل الأجيال من إبراهيم إلى داود أربعة عشر جيلاً ومن داود

David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa, and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, Who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ were fourteen generations. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this

إلى جلاء بابل أربعة عشر جيلاً ومن جلاء بابل إلى المسيح أربعة عشر جيلاً* أمّا مولد يسوع المسيح فكان هكذا. لَمَّا خُطِبَتْ مَرْيَمُ أُمُّهُ لِيُوسُفَ وَوَجِدَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَجْتَمِعَا حُبْلَى مِنَ الرُّوحِ الْقُدُسِ* وَإِذْ كَانَ يُوسُفُ رَجُلًا صَدِيقًا وَلَمْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يُشْهِرَها هَمَّ بِتَخْلِيَتِهَا سِرًّا* وَفِيمَا هُوَ مُتَّفَكِّرٌ فِي ذَلِكَ إِذَا بِمَلَاكِ الرَّبِّ ظَهَرَ لَهُ فِي الْحُلُمِ قَائِلًا يَا يُوسُفُ ابْنَ دَاوُدَ لَا تَخَفْ أَنْ تَأْخُذَ امْرَأَتَكَ مَرْيَمَ. فَإِنَّ الْمَوْلُودَ فِيهَا إِنَّمَا هُوَ مِنَ الرُّوحِ الْقُدُسِ* وَسَتَلِدُ ابْنًا فَتَسَمِيهِ يَسُوعَ فَإِنَّهُ هُوَ يُخَلِّصُ شَعْبَهُ مِنْ خَطَايَاهُمْ* (وَكَانَ هَذَا كُلُّهُ لِيَتِمَّ مَا قِيلَ مِنَ الرَّبِّ بِالنَّبِيِّ الْقَائِلِ. هَا إِنَّ الْعَذْرَاءَ تَحْبَلُ وَتَلِدُ ابْنًا وَيُدْعَى عِمَّاؤُئِيلَ الَّذِي تَفْسِيرُهُ اللهُ مَعَنَا)* فَلَمَّا نَهَضَ يُوسُفُ مِنَ النَّوْمِ صَنَعَ كَمَا أَمَرَهُ مَلَاكُ الرَّبِّ. فَأَخَذَ امْرَأَتَهُ* وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْهَا حَتَّى وُلِدَتْ ابْنُهَا الْبِكْرَ وَسَمَّاهُ يَسُوعَ.

way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His Name shall be called Emmanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called His Name Jesus.

A Prayer from the Fathers of Optina

"Lord, help me face all that today brings with peace of mind. Help me surrender myself completely to Thy holy will. Enlighten and strengthen me each hour of the day. Whatever news I may receive this day, teach me to receive it with stillness and the confidence that nothing happens unless Thou allow it. Guide my thoughts and my feeling in all my deeds and words. In all unforeseen circumstances, don't let me forget that all comes from Thee. Teach me to conduct myself toward every member of my family with goodness and wisdom, so that I may not upset or annoy anyone. Lord, give me the strength to bear the fatigue and all the occurrences of this day in its duration. Guide my will and teach me to pray, to believe, to be patient, to forgive and to love. Amen".

❖ Church Announcements

- **Christmas Play:** the children's Christmas Play will be today December 18th at the Greek Church from 4 PM to 8 PM. Tickets are currently on sale now for \$10 Each. Please see Khouria Manal.

- **The Nativity of Our Lord Services:** **Friday December 23rd at 9:30 AM the Hours. Saturday December 24th 9:30 AM Great Vespers. Saturday December 24th at 5 PM Festal Orthros and Divine Liturgy of the Nativity of our Lord in the Flesh.**

- **A reminder: we go to confession as we prepare for the Nativity of Christ/Christmas.**
- **Know Your Priest:** Fr. George Dahdouh at the age of 18 went to the desert in Sinai, in Egypt spending one month in the heat of the desert praying and searching for God's will for his life. God revealed to him the words of St. Paul: Woe to me if I don't preach the Word of God. Father understood his calling to evangelize those who have not heard the message of the Gospel. Father joined the order of the Comboni Fathers who are missionaries around the world. After Father finished his journey in the desert, he went back to Sudan to finish his education and get ready to travel to Italy for his preparation for the Priesthood.
- **Visit Orthodox Christian Mission Center www.ocmc.org:** if you are interested to become a missionary for a short period of time.
- **Not our tradition:** there are some parts in the prayers of the church for the priest and others for the people. For example, "For thine is the kingdom power and the glory" is for the priest to say. If the priest is not present then the Orthodox Christian will say: "through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us. Amen". Where it says: Priest, it is for the priest to say. Once we confuse the roles, our liturgical life will fail.
- **The Nativity Fast: see below for explanation.** Visit www.antiochian.org/nativity.
- **Paraklesis during the Nativity Fast:** Every Wednesday during the Nativity Fast at 7 PM instead of Vespers we will have the Nativity Paraklesis to the Mother of God.
- **Coffee Hour:** Please, observe the fasting rules when serving refreshments downstairs. Thanks
- **World Food Day 2016: Canned Food Drive** requested by the Archdiocese from October to December. Please bring a nonperishable food and body hygiene items to donate to Inn from the Cold and other needy people. Here are some of the items that the Mustard Seed request: **Thermal/wool socks, underwear (new), Toques and scarves, Gloves, hand and toe warmers, travel mugs, tissues, hygiene items, canned food for the holiday.**

- **Calendars for 2017:** please, take one calendar for 2017 from the table, it has all the church readings, feasts and fasting days.
- **Church School this Saturday December 17th at 3:00 PM.**
- **Giving back to God:** Our church depends on your generous giving back to God for all His blessings in your life. **Please, give generously and regularly and God will bless you back a 100 times.** Give a percentage of your income. Write your name on the envelope for a receipt.
- **Don't forget to visit:** www.ancientfaith.com www.myocf.net

+++The Lionheart: COMING SOON TO A CHURCH NEAR YOUR HEART! "The Lionheart"

The challenges of Fatherhood and becoming a great role-model to your children are immense. What about the value of being a loving and caring husband to your wife? Sickness OR health, remember that? Men, you will gain appreciation from your family, by engaging in a most meaningful course as the "Lionheart". This is a "Pursuit of God" put together by the Orthodox faith. For ages 18+, as you may be a husband or father, so prepare for it. Society is at times, suffocating with social problems: drugs, depression and lack of Leadership in our homes and place of worship. Within a short 4 week term, you will likely find many problem-solving techniques to becoming a better man. We can learn from the DVD or from each others experiences, hopefully in confidence. We can communicate our feeling, or we can just listen and learn. After this program you will thank our Lord for the experience! **Lou Salloum** is assisting Father in forming a Christian men group. Please, signup with Lou Salloum.

- **Missing Sunday Liturgy:** Attending Sunday Liturgy should be part of our regular life as a family, we should not miss church unless we are really sick. Make attending church every Sunday an important part of your family life. **The family that worships together, stays together.**

The Winter Pascha, Chapter 16: The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

*The following is an excerpt from **The Winter Pascha**, by Fr. Thomas Hopko*

The gospel reading for the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday before Christmas is "the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham," taken from the gospel according to St. Matthew. This genealogy lists the generations of people from Abraham to David, to the Babylonian captivity of the people of Israel, to the birth of Jesus. It is a selected genealogy, ending in the appearance of "Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ" (Mt 1:16). It differs from the genealogy presented in St. Luke's gospel which begins with Jesus "being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph," and goes back all the way not simply to Abraham but to Adam (Lk 3:23-38).

There are many purposes for presenting the genealogy of Jesus in the gospels, chief among which is the affirmation that Jesus, being in truth the Son of God, as all the gospels testify, has come "in the flesh" as a real human being. This affirmation was critically important in the time of the apostles and the first Christian generations because, unlike today, the temptation of the early period of Christianity was not to deny Jesus' divinity, but to deny His real and authentic humanity.

As a matter of historical fact, the first Christian heretics were those who said that Jesus was some sort of divine being (how this was explained had many variations and versions) who only appeared to be a true man, but was not really one since "flesh and blood" were taken to be intrinsically degrading if not downright evil. Thus the apostle Paul had to insist that in Jesus, who belongs to the Jews "according to the flesh" (Rom 9:5), the "whole fulness of deity dwells *bodily*" (Col 2:9), and that it is the same Jesus who died and was buried and raised in the flesh as a real man, who is Messiah and Lord.

...

The genealogies in the gospels of Saints Matthew and Luke are made to and from Joseph. This is not to give the impression that Jesus came from Joseph's seed. Both gospels are absolutely clear on this point. Jesus is born from the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. The point is rather that Joseph is Jesus' father according to the law, and it is from the father that one's lawful descent is to be traced. Jesus' legal father is "Joseph, son of David," the legal husband of Mary (Mt 1:20).

One other important point is made in listing the human generations which led to the birth of Jesus. This is the fact that God is faithful to His promises even though His chosen people are often not faithful. Among the people from whom Jesus came are both sinners and heathens. In a word, Jesus comes not only from the righteous and holy, but from the wicked and sinful. And He comes not only from Jews, but from Gentiles. The names of the four women specifically mentioned in St. Matthew's list-- Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba)-- were noted, not to say notorious, Gentiles, including one of David's own wives, the mother of Solomon. The point to be seen here is one beautifully made in an early Christian hymn quoted in the Bible in the second letter to Timothy:

If we have died with Him,
we shall also live with Him;
If we endure,
we shall also reign with Him;
If we deny Him,
He also will deny us;
If we are faithless,
He remains faithful-- for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Tim 2:11-13)

This is the wonderful witness of the genealogies of Jesus: If we are faithless, the Lord God remains faithful-- for he cannot deny Himself!

Behold, the time of our salvation is at hand.
Prepare yourself, O cavern,
For the Virgin approaches to give birth to her Son.
Be glad and rejoice, O Bethlehem, land of Judah,
For from you our Lord shines forth as the dawn.
Give ear, you mountains and hills

And all lands surrounding Judea,
For Christ is coming to save the people
Whom He has created and whom He loves.¹
¹Vespers of the Sunday before the Nativity

شهر الأعياد أم استهلاك حتى الهلاك؟

في كل عام، وكلما اقترب شهر كانون الأول، تنطلق في الأجواء حولنا زينة العيد. فقاعات الأسواق تتكاثر مع الأيام وتعمي أبصارنا وتحجب عنا رؤية الأمور على حقيقتها.

يقولون لك إنه شهر الأعياد. وأسأل: وأي يوم من السنة ليس فيه عيد كنسي؟ أعياد السيّد، للقديسين، للملائكة، لأنبياء، لشهداء، لكهنة، لرؤساء كهنة....

نعم، إنه الشهر الذي نحتفل في الخامس والعشرين منه بميلاد ربنا وإلهنا يسوع المسيح. هو اليوم الذي أعلن فيه ورود مخلص العالم إلى الأرض. نبدأ بالاستعداد له، منذ الخامس عشر من شهر تشرين الثاني، بمسيرة صوم نهبيّ أنفسنا من خلالها لاستقبال المولود الإلهي، ومشاركة الملائكة بالتهليل والتمجيد، والرعاة بالفرح بروية عمّانويل، والمجوس بتقديم الهدايا.

ما هذا الجنون الذي يصيب الناس، والأسواق، والطرق، والبلدات، في مسابقات محمومة لنصب أكبر وأجمل وأغرب ما يسمونه شجرة الميلاد؟ وقلمًا تشبه في شكلها أية شجرة، أو تجد في معناها ما يمتد إلى ميلاد المسيح. عاما بعد عام يزداد انتشار الأشكال الغريبة في شوارع المدن وكلها تحت مُسمّى واحد هو "زينة الميلاد".

طبيعيّ أن يبتدع التجار والأسواق والساعون إلى الربح وجمع الأموال شتى أنواع السبل والوسائل لجذب المشترين. ومن ناحية أخرى، تجد الناس يدخلون المتاجر بأعداد كبيرة ويخرجون محمّلين بما يسمونه زينة الميلاد، وهو زينة بالحقيقة، ولكنها ليست للميلاد بل لقلب مظهر البيت، من بيت عاديّ يرتاح فيه سكانه بعد تعب النهار إلى صالة عرض لألوان مختلفة متداخلة وأضواء تومض وتشتدّ وتنخفض معلقة على شجرة طبيعيّة أو اصطناعية، تختلف من بيت إلى بيت، بحجمها وشكلها، لكي تدلّ على سخاء أصحابها وثرانهم. وحتى الذين لا يملكون ما يسمح لهم بذلك، لا يحجمون عن تبديد القليل الذي يملكونه، وربما يستدينون، لكي يملؤوا بيوتهم بالأوراق المزخرفة والبلاستيك الملون، طائنين أنّهم بذلك يحتفلون بالميلاد.

أين المؤمنون بالمولود الإلهيّ من هذا الطوفان الدنيويّ العالميّ، البعيد، بما لا يقاس، عن المعنى الحقيقيّ لميلاد ربنا ومخلصنا وفادينا الذي انتظرته البشرية منذ سقوطها؟

وهناك من يطلق على بعض التصرفات تفسيرات يلبسونها ثوب التقليد الليتورجيّ أو حتى الكتابي، فتجدهم يتركون الشجرة منصوبة بانتظار زيارة الكاهن لبيتهم، لنضحها بالماء المقدّس بعد عيد الظهور الإلهي، حتى ولو تأخرت زيارة الكاهن إلى ما بعد نهاية شهر كانون الثاني، معلّين ذلك بأنه تقليد كنسي، وكأنّ الشجرة هي ميلاد سيّدنا يسوع المسيح وهي التي تختصر كلّ معانيه.

لا ننكر هنا على الناس إضافة بعض التغييرات واللمسات التجميليّة إلى منازلهم على سبيل التغيير وكسر الروتين اليوميّ، ولم لا؟ التعبير الخارجيّ والمادّي عن الفرح جيّد، لكن مع الانتباه إلى عدم الوصول إلى حدّ المبالغة والمغالاة في التعبير الخارجيّ، على حساب الاهتمام بجوهر المعنى الروحيّ للمشاركة بالاحتفال الكنسيّ بالعيد.

متى سنستفيق من السبات الدنيويّ؟ متى سنعرف أنّنا، منذ نزولنا في جرن المعموديّة، اصطبغنا بصبغة الروح القدس، واقتبّلنا جسد ودم مخلصنا الذي ولد على الأرض من أجلنا، من أجل تحريرنا من قيود العالم، ومن أجل رفعنا إليه، لنكون بصحبة ملائكته وقديسيه.

ليكن فرحنا بميلاد ربنا فرحًا سماويًا، فرحًا حقيقيًا لا ينزع منّا، فرحًا لا يجلبه ورق ملون وأضواء، وأموال تبذرها في الأسواق.

يقول الرب يسوع عن تلاميذه وأخصائه: "ليسوا من العالم كما أتت من العالم" (يو 17:16).

Guidelines for the Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast (November 15 through December 24)

The Nativity Fast is one of the four Canonical Fasting Seasons in the Church year. **This is a joyous fast** in anticipation of the Nativity of Christ. That is the reason it is less strict than other fasting periods. The fast is divided into two periods. The 1st period is November 15th through December 19th when the traditional fasting discipline (no meat, dairy, fish, wine, and oil) is observed. There is dispensation given for wine and oil on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Similarly, fish, wine, and oil are permitted on Saturdays and Sundays. The 2nd period is December 20th through 24th when the traditional fasting discipline (no meat, dairy, fish, wine, and oil) is observed. There is dispensation given for wine and oil only on Saturday and Sunday during this period. Here are the guidelines:

Meat	Dairy	Fish	Wine	Oil
beef, chicken, pork, turkey, elk, veal, lamb, deer, rabbit, buffalo, and so forth	milk, eggs, cheese, butter, yogurt, cream, and so forth	fish with a backbone (not including shrimp, octopus, shellfish, squid, or other seafood.	(some include all types of alcohol in this category)	(some include all types of oil in this category)
Abstain.	Abstain.	Permitted only on Saturdays and Sundays before December 20. (some permit fish Tuesdays and Thursdays also)	Permitted only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, & Sundays before December 20.	Permitted only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, & Sundays before December 20.

Abstinence includes refraining from the food and drink mentioned above, as well as from smoking. The Eucharistic Fast means abstaining from at least the previous midnight for communing at a morning Liturgy.

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.**

What is Christian Stewardship? Christian Stewardship is : learning how to be a responsible and concerned caretaker of Christ's Church; it is learning how to enjoy Church life and be happy in Church work., for in Her dwells the fullness of the Spirit of God. ...our active commitment to use all our **time, talent and treasure** for the benefit of humankind in grateful acknowledgment of Christ's redeeming love. ...caring for the needs of others. ...offering one's self to God as He offered Himself to us. ...what a person does after saying “I believe...”, as proof of that belief. ...devotion and service to God and His Church as persons, as families, as diocese, as national Church and as Church universal. (Williams & McKibben in Oriented Leadership) Christian Stewardship is about becoming good caretakers of all that God has given us. God has given each of us special and unique gifts. And through Holy Scripture He teaches us all that what we have is a loan. He lends everything to us, and reminds us that one day He will ask us to give a detailed accounting of what we have done with the gifts He has given us. Archbishop Anastasios of Albania has noted that “we find ourselves by offering ourselves.” Have we learned the blessedness of generously giving to others of all we have? Everything we have is temporal. We don't know for how long we have it. The fundamental question, though, is how will we use all that we have for the glory of God?