
❖ THE TORCHBEARER ❖

Vol. 8 ... No. 3

November, 1999

From the Pastor...

Beloved in the Lord:

This month brings two events that are important to the parish for different reasons. The first is our annual bazaar, which will be held on the weekend of November 5th. It is amazing to see the hard work of all those on the various committees who gather in the hall each night prior to the first day of this annual event. It is equally amazing to witness the crowds of people from near and far who have made this bazaar part of their yearly activities. If you look at the church's budget it is clear to see why the bazaar is so vital. However, the bazaar is vital for another reason too. It provides the parish with a common goal. It allows parishioners to meet each other and to feel united. The bazaar shows us in a very real way what this parish can accomplish when it sets in mind on something. The bazaar to be sure is vital to the "fellowship" aspect of the parish, but the "spiritual" aspect of the parish is just as important.

In addition to the bazaar, November also marks the start of our preparation for our Lord's birth. If you have looked at your mail recently, you can already see "holiday" catalogues being sent. I know that what I am about to say has been said before and will be said again, but I really feel that we must stop this trend. Christmas is not a holiday. Christmas is the birthday of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. If Christ were not born, what would our chances be for salvation? When Advent or "the fast of St. Philip" starts on November 15th what

will our response be? This is the key word – response.

In theology classes in the seminary, we learned about a very important word. The word is *synergia* (synergy). As Bishop Kallistos Ware says in his classic book *The Orthodox Church*, "To describe the relation between the grace of God and free will of man, Orthodoxy uses the term cooperation or synergy; in (St.) Paul's words: 'We

are fellowworkers with God' (I Cor. 3:9). If man is to achieve full fellowship with God, he cannot do so without God's help, yet he must also play his own part: man as well as God must make his contribution to the common work, although what God does is of immeasurably greater importance than which man does." (p. 226) To repeat: **If man is to achieve full fellowship with God, he cannot do so without God's help, yet he must also play his own part.**



For some reason, people think that the only fasting period that the Church has is Great Lent. How sad! Advent, like the other three major fasting periods, allows us the chance to return to God. To refocus our minds, bodies, and souls toward that which is needful. Advent requires our full attention.

God gives us so much; can't we give him a little of ourselves? Can't we deny ourselves just a little? Just a little? To be sure, the church is fellowship. I can't think of anyone who enjoys Arabic music, as much as I do, yet is this the sole purpose of the Church? I can't think of anyone else who enjoys the cooking of the Middle East as much as I do, but is this the sole purpose of the Church? The essence of the Church is being a member of the Body of Christ is full union with each other and in full communion with God through the life giving mystery of the Eucharist.

Make this Advent different. Make this Advent a time of reflection; reflecting on God's great love for us. Make this time a period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (giving to the poor). Instead of going to parties before Christmas, encourage your friends and family to celebrate AFTER the Feast. Would any one of us even consider celebrating before Easter? Would anyone of us even consider chanting "Christ is risen..." on Good Friday? Then why would we "party" before Christmas?!

It is my fervent hope that all of us view Advent in a new way, a fresh way. It is my hope that our common journey towards Bethlehem allows us to once again find the right way back to God. It is my hope that we can gather in this holy Church of St. John of Damascus on Friday, December 24th at 6 p.m. to pray together, to be together, to share in the Eucharist together, to celebrate

together, and to shout from the depths of our hearts that "Christ is Born!! Glorify Him!!"

Assuring you of my love and prayers and wishing you all a most blessed Thanksgiving, I remain,

In Christ,

Rev. Fr. John K. Teebagy, Pastor

From the Chairman...

I hope and pray that this edition of the Torchbearer finds you and your family in good health.

Mark your calendar, November 5-7, is our Annual Church Bazaar. The Church is full of the delightful aroma of grapeleaves and pastries thanks to the dedicated work of our Parishioners, who are very busy in the Kitchen. As always there is plenty for everyone to enjoy, so make sure to support the Church, by attending this years Bazaar.

On a financial note, the Bazaar provides about 20% of the Operating Budget of the Church. It is extremely important that we all work together to make sure the Bazaar is as successful as possible.

Historically, the Executive Board meets on the first Monday of each Month. This year has been no different. However, in addition to the first Monday, the Executive Board has been meeting on the Third Monday as well. The Executive Board recently sat down to address "Where Are We Going?" We had a Long Term Planning Meeting and began the process of setting the Goals and Objectives of the Executive Board and the Parish for 1999, 2000 and beyond. It is our hope and desire to create a "Blue Print" for the success of St. John's and Orthodoxy. As Our newly formed Long Range Planning Committee moves forward and puts the thoughts and ideas into action the parish will be kept informed and up to date.

At the writing of this "message", another special meeting is scheduled to address the financial needs of the parish. To be more specific, a short and long-term fundraising program. Recently, with parish approval, the Executive Board took out a mortgage on the Parish Home to help pay for the new roof on the Church. The Executive Board (and the Parish) needs to know how we are going to pay off this mortgage. The parish needs to plan for other large capital expenditures without becoming a financial burden on our parishioners.

While the Executive Board is comprised of 21 members, it takes all 1000 parishioners to make the Church of St. John of Damascus a strong and united spiritual family. It

is up to each parishioner to get involved. It is up to each and every parishioner to help make our church (and family) stronger.

If you have any suggestions or ideas please do not hesitate to bring them to the attention of the Executive Board. We want you to feel free to approach any Board Member, including Fr. John, with your comments.

May God Bless You,

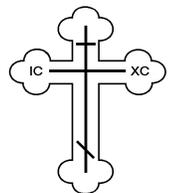
Robert P. Zahka
Chairman, Executive Board

Liturgical Notes...

- Please remember that the Christmas Fast begins on Monday, November 15th. Like other Lenten periods, the Church calls us to increase (or even start) our efforts in prayer, fasting, and giving to the poor. It is also the perfect time to have your Confession heard. Confessions are heard on Sunday morning from 8:30 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. or by appointment. Please note, as in past years, Confessions will not be heard on Christmas evening. Let's all do something to prepare ourselves for our Lord's birth!
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Church Records...

"Blessed are they whom thou has chosen and taken O Lord!"



William A. Ash (74) of Revere, MA fell asleep in the Lord on October 1, 1999. He is survived by his wife, son, three daughters and other family members. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery.

Memory Eternal!!

Announcements...

- Year 2000 Pledge Forms will be sent out in the coming weeks. As in the past, we ask that everyone who considers St. John's "their church" to return this form. As always, the amount you pledge is confidential. It is from your response, that the Finance Committee can prepare the year 2000 budget. Failures to return the Pledge Form will result in your pledge being automatically set by the computer at a default pledge of \$416 per year. Please help the church by sending this form back. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation!

- The deadline for the Christmas bulletin and the bulletin for Sunday, December 26th will be Tuesday, December 21st at 12 noon.

These deadlines must be strictly adhered to – please plan ahead.

From the Fellowship of St. John the Divine...

The Annual Senior Citizen Christmas Dinner will be held on Sunday, December 12th immediately following Liturgy. Watch for your invitation in the mail!



DO YOUR CHRISTMAS SHOPPING AT CHURCH??!! WHAT A GREAT IDEA!!!!

We have a great selection of Christmas gifts for your family and friends. Check out our unique gift ideas:

- *Crosses* – both 14kt gold and wooden wall crosses.
- *Icons* – in various sizes for your home, car or office – of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Hospitality of Abraham, St. George, St. Christina, St. Christopher, the Mystical Supper and others.

A Thanksgiving Prayer

By Fr. Alexander Schememann



Everyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation and eternal joy.

Thank you, O Lord, for having accepted this Eucharist, which is offered to the Holy

Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and which filled our hearts with “the joy, peace and righteousness in the Holy Spirit.”

Thank you, O Lord, for having revealed Yourself unto us and for giving us the foretaste of your Kingdom.

Thank you, O Lord, for having untied us to one another, in serving you and your Holy Church.

Thank you, O Lord, for having helped us to overcome all difficulties, tensions, passions, and temptations and for having restored peace, mutual love and joy in sharing the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you, O Lord, for the sufferings you bestowed upon us, for they are purifying us from selfishness and

- *Books for all ages* – Prayer books for children and adults, cookbooks, bookmarks, and the best selling book, “The Orthodox Study Bible.”
- *Children’s gifts* – coloring books, activity books, puzzles, and communion bibs. Choir, “First Fruits”, with members from our sister Church of St. Mary’s in Cambridge, and our Antiochian folk songs from “Kerygma.”
- *Advent Activity Books* – Why not start the advent season with the Children’s advent activity book – “The Biggest Birthday Party.”

Our beautiful, hand-painted icons make a wonderful gift for all occasions. Consider a special gift for weddings, baptisms, housewarming, birthdays, anniversaries and other special occasions.

The showcase will be open during coffee hour each Sunday until Christmas. If you have a special request, please contact Cindy Haddad at (781) 647-7122 or the Church office at (781) 326-3046. We will try our best to have your order in for Christmas.

Let Christ be a part of your Christmas celebration! He is the reason for the season!

remind us of the one thing needed: your eternal Kingdom.”

Thank you, O Lord, for having given us this country where we are free to worship You.

Thank you, O Lord, for this school, where the name of God is proclaimed.

Thank you, O Lord, for our families: husbands, wives and, especially children, who teach us how to celebrate Your holy Name, in joy, movement and holy noise.

Thank you, O Lord, for everyone and everything. Great are you, O Lord, and marvelous are your deeds, and no word is sufficient to celebrate Your miracles.

Lord, it is good to be here! Amen.

Fr. Alexander Schememann, of blessed memory, was the Dean of St. Vladimir’s Seminary

Christmas in the Orthodox Home

Some suggestions for a more meaningful Christmas Fast (Advent)

1. Prepare for the feasts of Christmas and Theophany AS A FAMILY. Abstain from meat at least on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

2. Intensify your prayer life and be sure to read the Holy Scriptures DAILY.

3. In your Christmas preparations remember the poor and needy. Your care gives them hope.

4. Make a good Advent Confession and receive Holy Communion - the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ often during the Advent season.

5. Be sure to make Christ the center of your Christmas celebration.

6. Plan on bringing yourself and your family to the Christmas Divine Liturgy and that all are prepared to partake of Holy Communion.

7. And last, but not least , please remember - **OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IS THE REASON FOR THE SEASON.**



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 have been 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.

DO YOU HAVE AN E-MAIL ADDRESS?

We are trying to have as many parishioners, young and old, join our e-mail mailing list. As we get this list to grow, we will be able to send out information to all parishioners much quicker than the old way through U.S. Mail. Not only that, but eventually, we could save our church hundreds of dollars in postage in the long run.

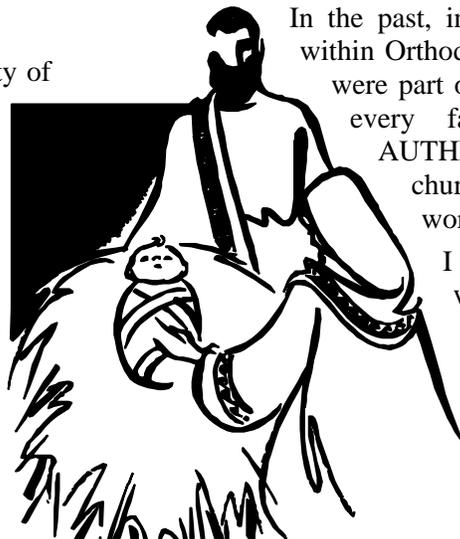
It's easy to join ... just follow the instructions on the church web page at <http://www.stjohnd.org>. Encourage your parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles and aunts to join also. We currently have about 25 members. We'd like this to grow to over 200! You can help do this by joining today. Thanks again. Hope to see you on the mailing list soon!

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)



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. Some time 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 weekdays 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.

Taken from The Word, December 1985

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A Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

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Services: Sunday-Matins 9:00 a.m.,
Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Church Office Hours...
Monday through Thursday, 8 a.m. - 2 p.m.
The deadline for the Sunday bulletin is Thursday at 10 a.m.
Please plan accordingly.

DEADLINE for the **DECEMBER TORCHBEARER**
will be **November 10th.**

Please consult the Weekly Sunday Bulletin for any changes, corrections, etc.

A Blessed and Happy Thanksgiving



to You
and Your
Loved Ones

Entrance into the Temple of our most Holy Lady, the Mother of God and Virgin Mary

According to the Tradition of the Church, The Mother of God was brought to the Temple at three years of age, where she was consecrated to God and spent her days until she was fourteen or fifteen years; and then, as a mature maiden, by common counsel of the priests (since her parents had reposed some three years before), she was betrothed to Joseph.

Kontakion for the Presentation of the Entrance of Mary

The all-pure temple of the Savior, the most precious bridal-chamber and Virgin, the treasure-house of the glory of God, today entered 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.

* * * * *

Troparion of the Presentation of the Theotokos

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.



November 21st