
❖ THE TORCHBEARER ❖

Vol. 9, No. 3 & 4

November/December, 2000

From the Pastor

“Two, Four, Six, Eight.....”

During my sophomore and junior years at Catholic Memorial High School in West Roxbury, I had the “privilege” of being on the varsity football team’s “scout team,” which is a nice way of saying I almost got sued by my body for neglect! The scout team is comprised of those players who duplicate our next week’s opponents and show what offense/defense they are likely to show. Every day I got pounded by upper classmen who, at that time, were bigger, stronger, and faster than me. On game day, I had the “privilege” of knowing that my efforts helped the team be prepared for the game, while I watched from the sidelines listening to, no memorizing, the cheers of the cheerleaders. On the night before a big game, I would go out with friends knowing full well that the coaches would not call my house to check up on me, because my work was done. I was on the sidelines; I sometimes did not even know what “down” was coming up or other aspects of the game. I was oftentimes disengaged - because I was, not by my choice mind you, on the sidelines.

Does this sound familiar? No, not the football part, but the part about being on the sidelines not caring, not participating, not getting anything out of a particular effort? The same theme is often present in our relationship to God and His Holy Church. So many times I meet parishioners who do not come to Liturgy or even church dinners or dances because they are on the sidelines and don’t know how to get back into the game. As we know, when we do not feel connected with our environment or feel that we don’t have a stake in the direct success or failure of our endeavor we often loose heart.

To be a Christian in this day and age is not an easy task, but come to think of it, when has it ever been easy? We must realize that our very life - in the present and in the resurrection- depends on our relationship with each other and with God. We must realize that a Christian life on the sidelines is just that - wasting a chance to know ourselves, the world around us and those in it, and Jesus Christ. The direct success or failure of this community, or any

community for that matter, is directly proportional to the involvement of its members. Imagine coming to Liturgy and finding the church full to capacity? Imagine a fifty voice choir? Imagine four or five chanters? Imagine, imagine, imagine! The choices are numerous and the need for them is real. The choice is also clear-cut. To feel part of the team or to be on the sidelines.

This church does so many wonderful things. Whether it be sending a donation to the Worcester Fire Department in memory of the six fireman, who died last December; assisting one of our teens spend her Spring break in Mexico building shelter for the homeless; to helping send our children to the Antiochian Village; raising over \$8,000(!) for the Food for Hungry People program, or the Legacy Fund, whose sole purpose it to help the church. The list goes on, but imagine how far the list would extend to if those who are reading this who don’t come to church got involved? I get excited just thinking about this!

In the month of Thanksgiving and Christmas, we have much reason to be grateful. The most important thing to be thankful for, in my opinion, is that God “(brought) us from non-existence into being, and when we had fallen away didst raise us up again, and didst not cease to do all things until thou hast brought us back to heaven, and hast endowed us with thy kingdom which is to come.” God wants us to know Him, love Him, and serve Him. Don’t we feel the least bit compelled to do this? Aren’t we tired of listening to the cheerleaders, instead of concentrating on the game? We need you! The clock is ticking - the team needs you. Can we count on you? Can God count on you?

Wishing all of you a most blessed Thanksgiving and Christmas, I remain

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Fr. John K. Teebagy
Pastor

Executive Board

I hope this newsletter finds you and your family in the best of health and enjoying the fall season.

I know it's only been a couple months since the summer ended and our church parish life got back into full swing, but I am very encouraged over the amount of activity and the involvement of many parishioners in the various programs and events. I am very optimistic for a wonderful year ahead. You can read about these activities throughout this newsletter.

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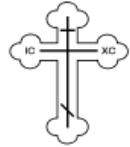
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As always, your comments and suggests are very important. I'd love to hear from you. Feel free to give me a call or drop me an e-mail at execboard@stjohnd.org.

Thanks for all your support ...

John M. Haddad
Chairman, Executive Board

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Many Years!

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Dr. Ralph Cahaly and **Susan Serris** were married on July 8, 2000. They resided in Waltham.

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Many Years!

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

George Spear (90) of Hyde Park fell asleep in the Lord on September 8, 2000. He is survived by his son. Burial was at the National Cemetery in Bourne.

Thomas Robbat (75) fell asleep in the Lord on September 21, 2000. He is survived by his two sisters and their families. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park.

Alice R. Salhaney (88) fell asleep in the Lord on October 1, 2000. She is survived by a daughter, grandchildren and their families. Burial was at Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge.

Memory Eternal!

Announcements...

- ◆ Year 2001 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 2001 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 Eve bulletin and the bulletin for Sunday, December 24th will be Wednesday, **December 20th at 12 noon.**
- ◆ **These deadlines must be strictly adhered to – please plan ahead.**

The Feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God, one of the twelve major days of the church, is November 21st. To observe this feast, a Vespertal Liturgy will be celebrated at our sister church of St. George, Norwood on Monday night November 20th at 6 p.m. If you plan on receiving the Eucharist that evening, please fast from your noon meal.

The Council of Eastern Orthodox Churches of Central MA and the St. Nina's Quarterly invites you to "Gifts of the Spirit," a conference for Orthodox Christian Women, to be held on Friday, November 17th and Saturday, Nov 18th here at St. John's. Deadline to register is November 6th. For further information, please contact Chris Bezreh at (781) 449-1230 or cbezreh@mediaone.net

Orthodox Etiquette

Being Around A Bishop



With the arrival of His Grace, Bishop DEMETRI in December for our Feast Day Weekend, it is good to go over proper etiquette in the presence of a bishop.

First of all, we look to the bishop as an icon of Christ in our midst. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his epistle to the Smyrneans, "Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church" (8.2). We honor Christ through showing honor to the bishop.

Therefore, here are a few tips of etiquette to follow during Saidna DEMETRI'S visit to our parish. (Actually, most of these tips of etiquette are also applicable when around a priest, although much of this has fall out of practice in America.)

- ◆ When a bishop enters a room or is introduced, everyone should stand and remain standing until he is seated.
- ◆ When greeting the bishop or when being introduced to him, it is proper to kiss his right hand.
- ◆ When addressing an Orthodox bishop, one uses his title before his first name (i.e. Metropolitan PHILIP, Bishop DEMETRI, etc.). Orthodox bishops use only their first name, not their last. In conversation, a Metropolitan is addressed as Your Eminence, a bishop as Your Grace. It is also acceptable to address him as "Saidna" (Arabic for Master).

It is important that we show the proper respect to Bishop DEMETRI. Be sure to teach your children these rules of etiquette, too. They need to know how to greet their bishop as well.

Liturgical Notes...

- ◆ The Christmas Fast begins on November 15th. The Church, in Her wisdom, gives us this unique gift to prepare ourselves for the mystery of Christ's Incarnation so that we may be able to meditate on its great significance in our lives.



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 confession! What better way to prepare for Christmas than by having your confession heard. Confessions are before the Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings from 8:30 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. and by appointment. Confessions, however, will NOT be heard on Christmas Eve. Let's all do something to prepare ourselves for our Lord's birth!



Please join us on Sunday evening, December 24th to celebrate our Lord's birth. That evening the Divine Liturgy will be at 6 p.m. Liturgy is being held at this time so that families can worship together before going to visit friends and families. Let's ALL plan on coming to Christmas

Liturgy so that with one voice we may all shout, "Christ is Born! Glorify Him!"

- ◆ Notices regarding House Blessings will be mailed shortly. If you would like Fr. John to visit your home to bless it, kindly return the form by Sunday, December 31st. If you have not yet received this form, or have misplaced it, please call the church office. **Please return the form by the deadline** so that Father can visit you when he is in your town. Thank you!

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

The Annual Senior Citizen Christmas Dinner will be held on Sunday, December 10th immediately following Liturgy. Watch for your invitation in the mail!

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.**

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 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.

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

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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, carpentry, 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

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 united 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 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.

From the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch

Dear Fellow Parishioners

I am writing to ask you to join me on December 3, 2000 as I become a member of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch.

I am aware that I am not an original “daughter” of St. John’s (I was baptized at St. George Church of Boston and after marriage was a member of St. Mary’s of Cambridge for a number of years.) It may seem as though I do not know the “history” of this parish enough to understand why there are not more members of the Order in this parish. But I can tell you my own feelings about St. Ignatius.

When the Order was established twenty-five years ago, I was among the many who thought of it as a special club for rich people who could pour money into the Archdiocese. I saw the red ribbons and titles as elitist, something I would never do. I could not afford it at the time, anyway. As the years passed, I began to see what good the Order was doing, especially when my younger sister went to Antiochian Village and helped with the Special Olympics. But, I reasoned, shouldn’t my money stay in my own parish? And so that’s what I did. Now, my own children have attended the Village, along with many children of St. John’s parish. Now, I know people who have participated in Project Mexico, who are residents of the Holy Trinity Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, who have started missions with a handful of faithful people. I have been to the Heritage and Learning Center, to the museum and library housed there. Now, I realize that my church is bigger than this parish.

Any of you who have seen the enthusiasm of the youngsters who have been to the Village must understand how important this experience is for them in their roles as the future leaders of our parish. Their faith is an inspiration to all of us. So, if you have a son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter, niece or nephew, or friend who has had the experience of Antiochian Village, it is time for you to come forward and join the Order. If you are ready to show the children of this parish how important they are to you, it is time to join.

It is not about the money. Five hundred dollars a year is not a huge amount. Consider that for a year \$500 buys a daily coffee and muffin, a pack of cigarettes a day, two video rentals a week, or lottery tickets.

Still not convinced? Consider how the Order of St. Ignatius helps our parish. Our annual assessment is half what it would have to be; the Christian Education department is partially

funded by the order, which directly affects our Church School; the Clergy Retirement Fund receives an annual donation from the Order; the Order provides Antiochian Village scholarships. The list goes on and on.

So, please join me on December 3. It will make the weekend, with Bishop Demetri in attendance and with the elevation of Father John, even more special if we have a large group inducted. Please feel free to call me at 449-1230 if you would like to discuss it further.

Christine Bezreh

Church of St. John of Damascus
300 West Street
Dedham, MA 02026-5594

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is the Newsletter of the Church of St. John of Damascus

A parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

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♦Web Page: www.stjohnd.org

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

Church Office Hours
Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

The deadline for the Sunday bulletin is Thursday at 10:00 a.m.

Please plan accordingly.

**DEADLINE for the January/February TORCHBEARER will be December 10th.
Please consult the Weekly Sunday Bulletin for any changes, corrections, etc.**

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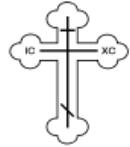
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Steven Mathew Haddad and **Martha (Bangs) Haddad** were married on July 9, 2000. They reside in Arlington.

Dr. Jeffrey Ristaino and **Laurie Marie Cahaly** were married on September 2, 2000. They reside in Acton.

Michael Rawan and **Pamela Beers** were married on September 9, 2000. They reside in Jamaica Plain.

Michael DeCristoforo and **Aimee Farah** were married on September 17, 2000. They reside in Attleboro

Many Years!

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

George Spear (90) of Hyde Park fell asleep in the Lord on September 8, 2000. He is survived by his son. Burial was at the National Cemetery in Bourne.

Thomas Robbat (75) fell asleep in the Lord on September 21, 2000. He is survived by his two sisters and their families. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park.

Alice R. Salhaney (88) fell asleep in the Lord on October 1, 2000. She is survived by a daughter, grandchildren and their families. Burial was at Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge.

Memory Eternal!

Announcements...

- ◆ Year 2001 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 2001 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 Eve bulletin and the bulletin for Sunday, December 24th will be Wednesday, **December 20th at 12 noon.**
- ◆ **These deadlines must be strictly adhered to – please plan ahead.**

The Feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God, one of the twelve major days of the church, is November 21st. To observe this feast, a Vespertal Liturgy will be celebrated at our sister church of St. George, Norwood on Monday night November 20th at 6 p.m. If you plan on receiving the Eucharist that evening, please fast from your noon meal.

The Council of Eastern Orthodox Churches of Central MA and the St. Nina's Quarterly invites you to "Gifts of the Spirit," a conference for Orthodox Christian Women, to be held on Friday, November 17th and Saturday, Nov 18th here at St. John's. Deadline to register is November 6th. For further information, please contact Chris Bezreh at (781) 449-1230 or cbezreh@mediaone.net

Orthodox Etiquette

Being Around A Bishop



With the arrival of His Grace, Bishop DEMETRI in December for our Feast Day Weekend, it is good to go over proper etiquette in the presence of a bishop.

First of all, we look to the bishop as an icon of Christ in our midst. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his epistle to the Smyrneans, "Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church" (8.2). We honor Christ through showing honor to the bishop.

Therefore, here are a few tips of etiquette to follow during Saidna DEMETRI'S visit to our parish. (Actually, most of these tips of etiquette are also applicable when around a priest, although much of this has fall out of practice in America.)

- ◆ When a bishop enters a room or is introduced, everyone should stand and remain standing until he is seated.
- ◆ When greeting the bishop or when being introduced to him, it is proper to kiss his right hand.
- ◆ When addressing an Orthodox bishop, one uses his title before his first name (i.e. Metropolitan PHILIP, Bishop DEMETRI, etc.). Orthodox bishops use only their first name, not their last. In conversation, a Metropolitan is addressed as Your Eminence, a bishop as Your Grace. It is also acceptable to address him as "Saidna" (Arabic for Master).

It is important that we show the proper respect to Bishop DEMETRI. Be sure to teach your children these rules of etiquette, too. They need to know how to greet their bishop as well.

Liturgical Notes...

- ◆ The Christmas Fast begins on November 15th. The Church, in Her wisdom, gives us this unique gift to prepare ourselves for the mystery of Christ's Incarnation so that we may be able to meditate on its great significance in our lives.



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 confession! What better way to prepare for Christmas than by having your confession heard. Confessions are before the Divine Liturgy on Sunday mornings from 8:30 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. and by appointment. Confessions, however, will NOT be heard on Christmas Eve. Let's all do something to prepare ourselves for our Lord's birth!



Please join us on Sunday evening, December 24th to celebrate our Lord's birth. That evening the Divine Liturgy will be at 6 p.m. Liturgy is being held at this time so that families can worship together before going to visit friends and families. Let's ALL plan on coming to Christmas

Liturgy so that with one voice we may all shout, "Christ is Born! Glorify Him!"

- ◆ Notices regarding House Blessings will be mailed shortly. If you would like Fr. John to visit your home to bless it, kindly return the form by Sunday, December 31st. If you have not yet received this form, or have misplaced it, please call the church office. **Please return the form by the deadline** so that Father can visit you when he is in your town. Thank you!

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

The Annual Senior Citizen Christmas Dinner will be held on Sunday, December 10th immediately following Liturgy. Watch for your invitation in the mail!

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.**

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 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.

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

"The experience of a joyous celebration remains the foundation stone of understanding the meaning of the Lord's Nativity. CHRISTMAS MEANS JOY."

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, carpentry, 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

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 united 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 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.

From the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch

Dear Fellow Parishioners

I am writing to ask you to join me on December 3, 2000 as I become a member of the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch.

I am aware that I am not an original “daughter” of St. John’s (I was baptized at St. George Church of Boston and after marriage was a member of St. Mary’s of Cambridge for a number of years.) It may seem as though I do not know the “history” of this parish enough to understand why there are not more members of the Order in this parish. But I can tell you my own feelings about St. Ignatius.

When the Order was established twenty-five years ago, I was among the many who thought of it as a special club for rich people who could pour money into the Archdiocese. I saw the red ribbons and titles as elitist, something I would never do. I could not afford it at the time, anyway. As the years passed, I began to see what good the Order was doing, especially when my younger sister went to Antiochian Village and helped with the Special Olympics. But, I reasoned, shouldn’t my money stay in my own parish? And so that’s what I did. Now, my own children have attended the Village, along with many children of St. John’s parish. Now, I know people who have participated in Project Mexico, who are residents of the Holy Trinity Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, who have started missions with a handful of faithful people. I have been to the Heritage and Learning Center, to the museum and library housed there. Now, I realize that my church is bigger than this parish.

Any of you who have seen the enthusiasm of the youngsters who have been to the Village must understand how important this experience is for them in their roles as the future leaders of our parish. Their faith is an inspiration to all of us. So, if you have a son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter, niece or nephew, or friend who has had the experience of Antiochian Village, it is time for you to come forward and join the Order. If you are ready to show the children of this parish how important they are to you, it is time to join.

It is not about the money. Five hundred dollars a year is not a huge amount. Consider that for a year \$500 buys a daily coffee and muffin, a pack of cigarettes a day, two video rentals a week, or lottery tickets.

Still not convinced? Consider how the Order of St. Ignatius helps our parish. Our annual assessment is half what it would have to be; the Christian Education department is partially

funded by the order, which directly affects our Church School; the Clergy Retirement Fund receives an annual donation from the Order; the Order provides Antiochian Village scholarships. The list goes on and on.

So, please join me on December 3. It will make the weekend, with Bishop Demetri in attendance and with the elevation of Father John, even more special if we have a large group inducted. Please feel free to call me at 449-1230 if you would like to discuss it further.

Christine Bezreh

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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 Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

The deadline for the Sunday bulletin is Thursday at 10:00 a.m.

Please plan accordingly.

**DEADLINE for the January/February TORCHBEARER will be December 10th.
Please consult the Weekly Sunday Bulletin for any changes, corrections, etc.**