

# HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH

THROUGH THE CROSS JOY HAS COME INTO ALL THE WORLD

Rev. Fr. Christopher Foley  
frc@holycrossoca.org

645 Greensboro Rd., High Point, NC  
336-688-9820

www.holycrossoca.org

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## A HOMILY FOR THOSE REJOICING IN THE NATIVITY FAST

Archpriest Artemy Vladimirov 11/27/2011



Our Mother the Church, dear reader, has the custom of preparing her children, well in advance of the actual holy day, for extraordinary events which the central axle of both earthly and eternal existence. Beyond a doubt, the feast of Nativity of Christ, the appearance of God in the flesh, belongs to this very category.

The whole history of humankind, which began with the fall of our forefather and mother, Adam and Eve, the continuation of history through their descendants, the history of peoples and kingdoms (especially the history of ancient Israel), all led up to and arrived at Bethlehem, to the mysterious cave, where Christ the Savior of the world manifested His wondrous infant countenance to us.

It is no surprise that even two thousand years later, we, the children of Christ's Church, do not suddenly or immediately celebrate the Lord's Nativity, but rather embark upon a forty-day fast (as the holy fathers have ordained of old), so that we might be gradually illuminated by the wondrous light of the Nativity night.

This period of fasting begins directly after the commemoration of the Holy Apostle Philip, on the 15th November (new style, November 28) according to the Church calendar, and concludes with the Feast itself, on Christmas night, December 25/January 7. The last day before the fast when we can eat non-fasting foods falls this year on Thursday (26 November, 2009)—the commemoration day of

St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople. The rubrics of this labor of fasting are not so strict as those of Great Lent or the Dormition fast: fish can be eaten on every Saturday and Sunday, as well as on festal days of the Church calendar that do not fall on Wednesday or Friday (if the All-night Vigil is not served the evening before). The fast becomes stricter with the onset of the Forefast of the Nativity on December 20/January 2 (on which day we also commemorate the Holy Martyr Ignatius the God-bearer), when fish is completely excluded from the table of those who strive to observe the Church rubrics in all strictness.

We should also speak a little about the Eve (in Russian, *Sochelnik*) of the Feast (December 24/January 6). From ancient times on this day, Christians ate *sochiva* (this is where the name *Sochelnik* comes from)—vegetables cooked in their own juice.[1] The table is laid after the clergy have placed a lighted candle on the candle stand and sung the Troparion and Kontakion of the Feast, directing our gaze toward the icon of the Nativity of Christ, which has been carried out [from the altar] to the center of the church. Pious Russian people have always deferred eating until the first star has appeared in the sky, in remembrance of the star of Bethlehem as symbolized by the lighted candle placed before the Nativity icon. But enough about "meals"...

Let us place our attention, dear reader, upon the essential aspect of fasting; or, as they used to say in olden times, *govenie*, that is, the "preparation" for receiving the Holy Mysteries of Christ (and not only once) during the course of the Nativity fast. What thoughts and feelings shall we encounter if we might open our minds and hearts (if only they might obey the desire of our spirit), enlightened by grace?

We can find support for these thoughts and feelings in the Gospels, in the writings of the Holy Apostles Matthew (chapters 1 and 2) and Luke (chapter 2), which contain

the substantial basis of the text of the Nativity service. Having read and re-read these Gospel chapters beforehand, together with the daily practice of fervently reading and fulfilling the morning and evening prayer rule (which the Church requires of a Christian), and zealously attending the pre-Nativity services, we are now called to lift up our minds “to the unseen regions,” having taught our own hearts to immerse and satiate us with these luminous contemplations. We shall not forget, our reader, that a sincere confession of sins, and communion “with fear and trembling” of the Most Pure Body and Blood of Christ, united with an earnest attempt to correct our lives, marks a Christian’s entire life with Divine power. Grace makes possible the impossible, and changes a dark-minded, hard-hearted sinner into a bright and meek child of God. New thoughts and feelings enter into the mind and heart, and a new world opens up before the true, sincere disciple of Christ...

Thus, casting aside and leaving behind all wavering and doubt, trustingly give me your hand, dear reader; and guided invisibly by the holy fathers, we shall step into the sacred world of Gospel Revelation, hidden from the wearying din of vain activity around us...

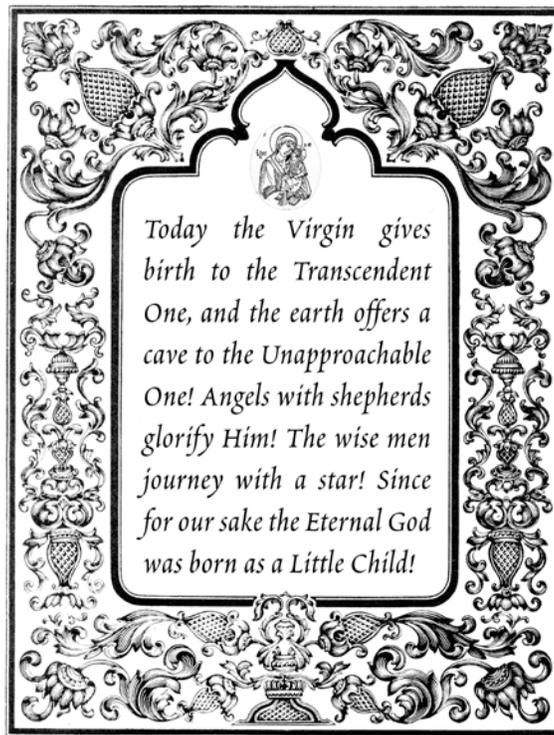
I will by no means show you everything, but you will see the most important thing. Having seen it, strive to remember it, so that later in solitude you might contemplate on all else that is included in the history of Our Lord Jesus Christ’s Nativity.

Here before you are the wise men of the East, who have left their homes, family, and native lands—to follow the mysterious star which shone upon them *from Jacob...* How many dangers did they overcome, what courage they revealed, such firmness of purpose, until they reached the cherished aim of their wandering and finally placed the wondrous gift of gold, frankincense, and myrrh before the Divine Christ Child, Who created the stars they once worshipped! Are you ready, are we ready to reject all service to those deceitful idols which destroy us—our own passions

of pride, lust, and love of money—in order to leave nothing in our souls other than golden faith in the Redeemer, fragrant with the hope in His care for us and His love, *strong as death*, conquering death itself? Will we be found to be as strong as Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior,[2] so that we might not fear the punishments of Harod—the world which lies in evil—and depart from him *by another way* to “our own country,” to the country of holy silence and heartfelt prayer, which is the greatest adornment of a soul that loves God?...

And now turn your gaze, gracious reader (I hope that I do not insult you with this name or evoke an ironic smile), towards the place well-known to any modern pilgrim of the Holy Land called the “shepherds’ field.” There they are: the humble and guileless shepherds; pure in heart like children, heartily and vigilantly watching the cold, winter night... To them, to them, and not to the envying Pharisees or the self-righteous Scribes, hardened in their cold academia that gave nothing to the minds or heart of the people of Israel, did the Angel of God appear with the words, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger* (Luke 2:10–12).

Can you or I boast of such purity of heart and clearness of mind as did allow the Bethlehem shepherds not only to receive the revelation, but even to fulfill the Angel’s bidding straightway, not hesitating a moment? Can we find in ourselves the shepherds’ saving self-denial, which did not allow them to fall into the deep and heavy sleep enveloping the entire city—the city which neither knew nor heeded the *time of its visitation*? Learn, O reader, from the example of the shepherds, how important for the soul’s salvation it is to “attend to yourself,” that is, to always direct your spiritual gaze at the field of your heart, never allow-



*Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One! Angels with shepherds glorify Him! The wise men journey with a star! Since for our sake the Eternal God was born as a Little Child!*

ing wolves (vicious and evil thoughts) into the sheepfold. Meek sheep are the peace and quiet of the heart, balanced emotional powers, which the enemy of our salvation, the soul-destroying devil, unceasingly seeks to disrupt.

If you have the strength and fortitude, behold the horrifying scene of the murder of the innocent Bethlehem children, the first martyrs for Christ, who spilled their infant blood because of Harod's truly satanic guile... Killed without having ever sinned; they finished their earthly life that had not even begun! Believe with the whole Church in the mysterious, providential, prophetic meaning of these sufferings which cannot be rationally understood... And we shall say with the nineteenth century poet:[3]

*The wisdom of Our God Above  
Is not for us to search and measure:  
With humble heart and trusting love  
We patiently await the treasure...*

Like the stars in the sky, the eternal souls of the Bethlehem infants shine to us who live in the night of this age ("in which righteousness is often lacking"), and testify that "righteousness lives in the heavens,"[4] where "there is neither sickness, nor sorrow, nor sighing, but life everlasting"[5]... May our faith be strengthened in the all-good and all-powerful Divine Providence, which turns even the most horrifying acts by criminal human hands into beneficial consequences for their innocent victims...

The closer we come to the end of the fast, the brighter the wondrous Bethlehem star is enkindled above our heads, proclaiming to the Magi the time of the Infant's birth, and the place where He lay... The rays of this rational star (according to the holy fathers, this star was actually an angelic power, and not a dead astronomical body) illumine with their incorruptible, unfading light the twilight in the cave—the rib cage encasing each of our hearts... The rays of this star bring the soul, which has but scarcely touched it, to inexplicable trembling and heavenly joy, the likes of which we shall not find here on this sinful world with its sensuous, quickly passing pleasures, disappearing like smoke. *I am ... the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16), testifies the Lord. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give ... the morning star. He that hath an ear [to hear], let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (Rev. 2:26, 28–29). Ye do well, repeats the Apostle Peter, that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts (2 Pet. 1:19).*

The morning star is hidden prayer of the heart! It is made not with lips or fingers, but with the mind and heart; it turns all of man's existence to the Lord, and places the disciple before the most radiant face of his Teacher...

Illumined by the unwaning light of the Nativity star, let us pass, obedient reader, under the canopy of the very cave in Bethlehem... and let us timely stop, that we might not overstep the bounds laid for us sinners, and be scorched by that radiance from the Divine Child, Who rests in the oxen manger...

There He is, the Angel of Great Counsel, the King of the world, the Father of the age to come, as the "Old Testament Evangelist," the holy Prophet Isaiah, exclaimed in prophetic, sober inebriation. There He is, the Yearning of the nations, the Expectation of all peoples, the Great Light that has come into the world to enlighten those sitting in darkness! Already celebrating the Forefeast of the Nativity night that is bright as day, let us sing, O reader, with the whole Church, "Christ is born, give ye glory... Christ is on earth, let us be exalted. Sing unto the Lord all the earth..."[6]

Concluding this narrative, I leave you, beloved reader, and entrust you to the action of God's grace, which, according to the words of the Apostle, can instruct its friends more aptly than feeble human words, though they be pronounced from the heart...

[1] *Sok in Russian means "juice." Sochiva is what the Russians have called the boiled grains and fruit mixed with honey that are served on the Eves of the Nativity and Theophany. We also know this preparation as koliva. —Trans.*

[2] *Sacred history has preserved their names for us, as well as the actual relics of the Magi, which are in the famous Gothic cathedral of Koln, Germany*

[3] *From the poem entitled, "Faith and Unbelief," by Evgeny Abramovich Baratynsky.*

[4] *These quotes are taken from the Old Testament*

[5] *From the Pannikhida, or requiem service. —Trans.*

[6] *From the katavasia of the Nativity (the Nativity canon Irmoi), sung for the canon each Sunday during Advent. —Trans.*



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Moleben on our property:** We will continue serving a weekly short prayer service on our property in Kernersville. This is a service of supplication (Molieben) that Archbishop Dimitri of blessed memory blessed for the use of parishes in the diocese. Fr. Christopher will be serving it on Friday mornings at 10 AM except where noted in the calendar. Our property is located at 1320 Masten Drive in Kernersville.

**Akathist of Thanksgiving** - As a way of offering a prayer service connected to our Thanksgiving holiday, we will be serving the Akathist service called "Glory to God For All Things." It is a beautiful hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God for all of the ways that He pours forth His love upon all of creation. From the pravoslavie.ru website,

*This Akathist, also called the "Akathist of Thanksgiving," was composed by Protopresbyter Gregory Petrov shortly before his death in a prison camp in 1940. The title is from the words of Saint John Chrysostom as he was dying in exile. It is a song of praise from amidst the most terrible sufferings. On this, our national day of Thanksgiving, we offer this reminder of all the blessings God has bestowed on our nation.*

**Sisterhood of the Holy Myrrhbearers:** The Sisterhood will meet at 6:00PM on Tuesday, November 19 and 6:30PM on Tuesday, December 17. This month (November) we have the distinct privilege of hosting one of the sisters from the St. Elisabeth Convent in Minsk, Belarus for our next gathering. The sisters will have a table set up with items to sell. Please consider making a purchase or giving a monetary donation to support them - the holi-

days are coming so it might be a good way to get a head start on some gifts! The evening is planned as follows:

6PM: Compline

6:15PM: Film and presentation

7:15PM: Adjourn to local restaurant for supper (options include Rice Paper or the Blue Moon Oyster bar)

**Order Gift Cards Through Holy Cross!** Scrip cards are available from hundreds of retailers and don't cost any more than the face value of the gift card. It's a "free" fundraiser to benefit the Holy Cross building fund! Contact Karen Brudnak-Slate.



*Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been planted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels.*

*St. John Chrysostom*

## FINANCIAL SUMMARY

October	Actual	Budgeted
Income	\$12,330	\$12,738
Expense	\$11,094	\$11,297



## The Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

*Heaven and earth are united today, for Christ is born. Today has God come upon earth, and man gone up to heaven. Today for man's sake is seen in the flesh He who by nature is invisible. Therefore let us also give glory and cry aloud to Him: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, which Thy coming has bestowed upon us, O Saviour: glory to Thee.*

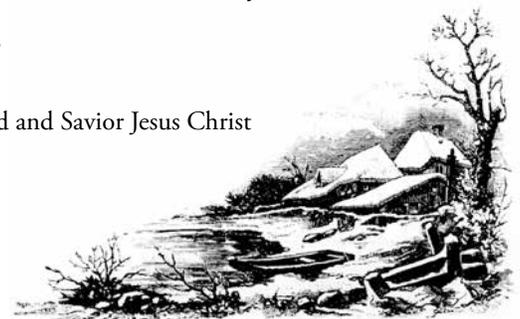
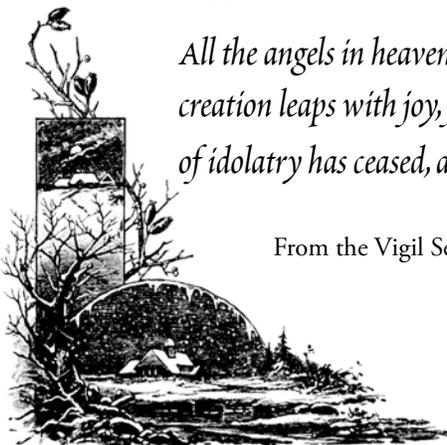
*'Glory to God in the highest,' I hear today in Bethlehem from the angels, glory to Him whose good pleasure it was that there be peace on earth. The Virgin is now more spacious than the heavens. Light has shone upon those in darkness, and has exalted the lowly who sing like the angels: Glory to God in the highest.*

*Beholding him that was in God's image and likeness fallen through the transgression, Jesus bowed the heavens and came down, and without changing He took up His dwelling in a Virgin womb: that thereby He might fashion corrupt Adam anew, who cried to Him: 'Glory to Thine Epiphany O my Deliverer and my God.'*

*The Magi, kings of Persia, knew with assurance that Thou, the heavenly King, wast born on earth. Led by the light of a star they came to Bethlehem, and offered their chosen gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. Falling before Thee they worshipped Thee: for they saw Thee who art timeless lying as a babe in the cave,*

*All the angels in heaven are of good cheer and greatly rejoice today. The whole creation leaps with joy, for the Saviour and Lord is born in Bethlehem. Every error of idolatry has ceased, and Christ reigns unto all ages.*

From the Vigil Service for the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ



# HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					<b>1</b> 10AM Prayers at the Property	<b>2</b> 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>3</b> 9AM Church School 9AM Adult Class 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b> 6:30PM Compline & Catechism Class	<b>7</b> 6PM Parish Council	<b>8</b> 10AM Prayers at the Property	<b>9</b> 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>10</b> 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 6:30PM OCAT Home Meeting	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> 7:30 PM Choir Rehearsal	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b> Nativity Fast 10AM Prayers at the Property	<b>16</b> Nativity Fast 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>17</b> Nativity Fast 9AM Church School 9AM Adult Class 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	<b>18</b> Nativity Fast	<b>19</b> Nativity Fast 6PM Sister- hood	<b>20</b> Nativity Fast 6:30PM Great Vespers	<b>21 ENTRANCE of the Theotokos</b> Nativity Fast 8AM Divine Liturgy	<b>22</b> Nativity Fast 10AM Prayers at the Property	<b>23</b> Nativity Fast 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>24</b> Nativity Fast 9AM Church School 9AM Adult Class 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	<b>25</b> Nativity Fast	<b>26</b> Nativity Fast 6:30PM Akathist: Glory to God for All Things	<b>27</b> Nativity Fast	<b>28</b> Nativity Fast	<b>29</b> Nativity Fast NO Prayers at the Property	<b>30</b> Nativity Fast 6 PM Great Vespers



# HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>1</b> Nativity Fast NO school 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	<b>2</b> Nativity Fast	<b>3</b> Nativity Fast	<b>4</b> Nativity Fast 6:30PM Compline & Catechism Class	<b>5</b> Nativity Fast 6PM Parish Council	<b>6</b> Nativity Fast 10AM Prayers at the Property	<b>7</b> Nativity Fast 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>8</b> Nativity Fast 9AM Church School 9AM Adult Class 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 12PM St. Nicholas Visit 6PM OCAT Home Meeting	<b>9</b> Nativity Fast	<b>10</b> Nativity Fast	<b>11</b> Nativity Fast 6:30PM Compline & Catechism Class	<b>12</b> Nativity Fast	<b>13</b> Nativity Fast 10AM Prayers at the Property	<b>14</b> Nativity Fast 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>15</b> Nativity Fast 9AM Church School 9AM Adult Class 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	<b>16</b> Nativity Fast	<b>17</b> Nativity Fast 6:30PM Sisterhood	<b>18</b> Nativity Fast	<b>19</b> Nativity Fast	<b>20</b> Nativity Fast 10AM Prayers at the Property	<b>21</b> Nativity Fast 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>22</b> Nativity Fast NO School 9:15 Baptism of Sebastian Keller 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy 6:30PM Pre-Feast Vespers and Compline	<b>23</b> Nativity Fast 6:30PM Pre-Feast Vespers and Compline	<b>24</b> Nativity Fast 2:30PM Vesperal Liturgy & Baptisms 5PM Holy Supper Lenten Meal 7PM Nativity Vigil Service	<b>25 NATIVITY of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ</b> 9AM Divine Liturgy	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b> 10AM Prayers at the Property 5PM Open Door	<b>28</b> 6 PM Great Vespers
<b>29</b> NO School 9:40AM Hours 10AM Divine Liturgy	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>				