

The Nativity of Christ in the Orthodox Church

by Fr. Thomas Hopko

The celebration of the feast of the Nativity of Christ in the Orthodox Church is patterned after the celebration of the feast of the Lord's Resurrection. A fast of forty days precedes the feast, with special preparatory days announcing the approaching birth of the Saviour. Thus, on Saint Andrew's Day (November 30) and Saint Nicholas Day (December 6) songs are sung to announce the coming birthday of the Lord:

Adorn yourself, O Cavern. Make ready, O Manger. O Shepherds and wisemen, bring your gifts and bear witness. For the Virgin is coming bearing Christ in her womb. (Vespers Hymn of Saint Nicholas Day)

On the eve of Christmas, the Royal Hours are read and the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil is served with Vespers. At these services the Old Testament prophecies of Christ's birth are chanted, emphasizing the prophecy of Micah which foretells Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Saviour, and the prophecies of Isaiah about the appearance and character of the Messiah:

The Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel, which translated is, God with us (Is 7.14-15).

God is with us, understand all ye nations, and submit yourselves, for God is with us (Is 8.9).

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulders, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor; the Everlasting Father; the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end (Is 9.6-7).

The Vigil of Christmas [includes] the blessing of the five loaves of bread together with the wheat and the wine of which the faithful partake and the oil with which they are anointed. This part of the festal vigil, which is done on all great feasts, is called the *litya* (in Greek, the *artoklasia* or the breaking of the bread).

At the Christmas services... all of the hymns and verses glorify His appearance on earth:

Christ is born, glorify Him! Christ is from heaven, go to meet Him! Christ is on earth, be ye lifted up! Sing to the Lord, all the earth, sing out with gladness, all ye people! For He is glorified!

(First Ode of the Christmas Canon)



The Christmas Liturgy begins with psalms of glorification and praise. The troparion and kontakion mark the entrance with the Book of the Gospels. The baptismal line from Galatians 3.27 once again replaces the Thrice-Holy. The Epistle reading is from Galatians:

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So through God, you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir (Gal 4.4-7).

"God became man so that man might become god."

~ St Athanasius of Alexandria

The Gospel reading is the familiar Christmas story from Matthew (2.1-12), and the liturgy continues in the normal fashion. A specific two-day celebration follows, dedicated to Mary the Theotokos and Saint Stephen, the First Martyr. The period of Christmas rejoicing extends to Epiphany during which time the Christmas songs are sung and fasting and kneeling in prayer are not called for by the Church.

The feast of Christmas is formally entitled *the Nativity in the Flesh of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ*. At Christmas we celebrate the birth as a man of the Son of God, the one who together with the Father and the Holy Spirit is truly God from all eternity. Thus, we sing in the Church:

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 the star! Since for our sake the Eternal God is born as a little child. (Kontakion for the Feast)

Thus, the feast of Christmas is the celebration of the world's salvation through the Son of God who became man for our sake that, through him, we might ourselves become divine, sons of God the Father by the indwelling of his Holy Spirit in us.

(From *The Orthodox Faith*, online edition at OCA.org)

"Pure is the present night, in which the Pure One appeared, Who came to purify us! Let our hearing be pure, and the sight of our eyes chaste, and the feeling of the heart holy, and the speech of the mouth sincere!"

~ St Ephraim the Syrian

For more resources for the Nativity and Theophany of Christ, visit our parish website.



ACTIVITY



of CHRIST

2021



CHRIST THE SAVIOR~HOLY SPIRIT
ORTHODOX CHURCH

Fr. Steven C. Kostoff, Rector

4285 Ashland Ave • Cincinnati OH 45212
513-351-0907 • www.christthesavioroca.org

NATIVITY TO THEOPHANY

PREFEAST of NATIVITY

Sun. Dec. 19 - Thu. Dec 23

Prefeast Vespers ~ 7:00pm each evening

EVE of NATIVITY (STRICT FAST)

Friday, December 24

Royal Hours: 9am/10/11/Noon

Festal Matins ~ 7:00pm

NATIVITY of CHRIST

Saturday, December 25

Divine Liturgy ~ 9:30am

SYNAXIS of the THEOTOKOS

Sunday, December 26

Divine Liturgy ~ 9:30am

ST STEPHEN the PROTOMARTYR

Monday, December 27

Divine Liturgy ~ 9:30am

ST. BASIL/CIVIL NEW YEAR

Friday, December 31

Great Vespers ~ 7:00pm

Saturday, January 1

Divine Liturgy ~ 9:30am

PREFEAST of THEOPHANY

Sun. Jan. 2 - Tue. Jan. 4

Prefeast Vespers ~ TBA

EVE of THEOPHANY (STRICT FAST)

Wednesday, January 5

Royal Hours ~ 9:00am, 12 Noon

Festal Vespers w/OT Readings ~ 7:00pm

THEOPHANY of the LORD

Thursday, January 6

Divine Liturgy ~ 9:30am

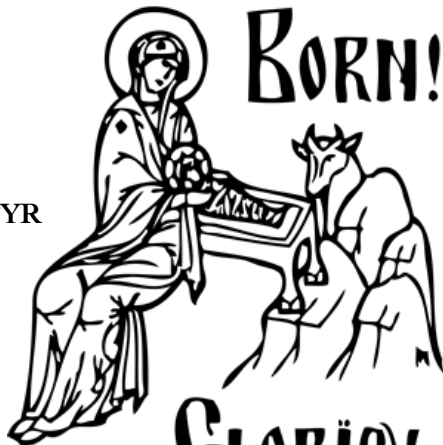
Great Blessing of Waters ~ immediately following Liturgy



NATIVITY FAST 2021



CHRIST IS
BORN!
GLORIFY
HIM!



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
NOVEMBER 14 Holy Apostle Philip 9:10 Hours 9:30 Divine Liturgy	Beginning of Nativity Fast 15 7:00pm Vespers & Fall Adult Class	F/W/O 16 Holy Apostle & Evangelist Matthew 7:00am Akathist to St. Matthew	17	W/O 18 9:00pm Compline	19 KEY: F = Fish allowed W = Wine O = Oil	F/W/O 20 9am-Noon Confessions 6pm Festal Vespers
F/W/O 21 Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple 9:10 Hours 9:30 Divine Liturgy	22 7:00pm Vespers & Fall Adult Class	W/O 23 9:00pm Compline	24 Greatmartyr Catherine	F/W/O 25 Leavetaking of the Entrance Thanksgiving Day 9:30am Divine Liturgy	26 	F/W/O 27 9am-Noon Confessions 6pm Great Vespers and Confessions
F/W/O 28 9:10 Hours 9:30 Divine Liturgy	29 7:00pm Vespers & Fall Adult Class	F/W/O 30 Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called	DECEMBER 1	W/O 2 Prophet Habbakuk Ven. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia 9:00pm Compline	3 	F/W/O 4 Greatmartyr Barbara 9am-Noon Confessions 6pm Great Vespers and Confessions
F/W/O 5 9:10 Hours 9:30 Divine Liturgy	F/W/O 6 St. Nicholas the Wonderworker 9:30am Divine Liturgy	W/O 7 7:00am Akathist to St. Nicholas	8 	W/O 9 Conception by Righteous Anna of the Theotokos 9:00pm Compline	10	F/W/O 11 9am-Noon Confessions 6pm Great Vespers and Confessions
F/W/O 12 Holy Forefathers 9:30 Divine Liturgy St Nicholas Pageant & Charity Dinner	F/W/O 13 St Herman of Alaska 9:30am Divine Liturgy	W/O 14	15	W/O 16 Prophet Haggai 9:00pm Compline	W/O 17 Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths	F/W/O 18 9am-Noon Confessions 6pm Great Vespers and Confessions
F/W/O 19 Sunday before Nativity 9:10 Hours 9:30 Divine Liturgy 7pm Prefeast Vespers	Prefeast of Nativity 20 7pm Prefeast Vespers	Prefeast of Nativity 21 7pm Prefeast Vespers	Prefeast of Nativity 22 7pm Prefeast Vespers	Prefeast of Nativity 23 7pm Prefeast Vespers	STRICT FAST 24 Eve of Nativity 9:00am Royal Hours 7:00pm Festal Matins	NATIVITY 25 of CHRIST 9:30am Divine Liturgy Fast-Free
2nd Day of Nativity 26 Synaxis of Theotokos 9:10 Hours 9:30 Divine Liturgy Fast-Free	3rd Day of Nativity 27 Protomartyr Stephen 9:30am Divine Liturgy Fast-Free	28 Fast-Free	29 14,000 Holy Innocents Fast-Free	30 Fast-Free	Leavetaking of Nativity 31 7pm Great Vespers Fast-Free	JANUARY 1 Circumcision of Christ St Basil the Great 9:30am Divine Liturgy Fast-Free

