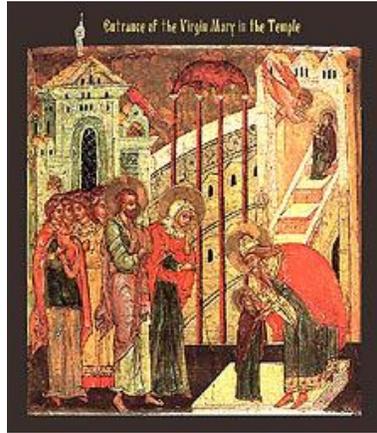


**St. Nikolai Orthodox Mission of Alliance, as part of Orthodox Campus Fellowship
at the University of Mount Union, Dewald Chapel. Divine Liturgy, 9:00 am
Very Reverend Father Joseph Cervo, Archpriest (AOCANA-retired)
Rev. Protodeacon James Gresh, Mission Administrator (Bulgarian Diocese OCA)
November 17, 2013: 21st Sunday after Pentecost/St Gregory the Wonderworker**



"Entry of the Theotokos to the Temple"

Tone 4 Troparion (Resurrection)

When the women Disciples of the Lord learned from the Angel the joyous message of the Resurrection, they cast away the ancestral curse and elatedly told the Apostles:
“Death is overthrown! Christ God is risen,// granting the world great mercy!”

Tone 8 Troparion (St Gregory the Wonderworker)

You became worthy of your name through your way of life: through your vigilance in prayer and your constant works of mercy.
Therefore, O Father Gregory, beseech Christ God to enlighten our minds, that we may not sleep in sin, which leads to death!

Tone 4 Troparion (St. Nikolai)

In truth you were revealed to your flock as a rule of faith, an image of humility and a teacher of abstinence; your humility exalted you; your poverty enriched you. Hierarch Father Nikolai, entreat Christ our God that our souls may be saved!

Tone 4 Kontakion (Resurrection)

My Savior and Redeemer as God rose from the tomb and delivered the earth-born from their chains.
He has shattered the gates of hell, and as Master,// He has risen on the third day!

Tone 8 Troparion (St Gregory the Wonderworker)

You received the power to perform miracles, frightening the devils and healing the sick through your wonderworking.
All-wise Father Gregory, your deeds truly entitle you to be called “Wonderworker.”

Tone 4 Prokeimenon

O Lord, how manifold are Your works; in wisdom have You made them all.
v: Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord, my God, You are very great!

Epistle: Galatians 2:16-20

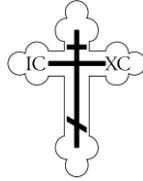
Tone 4 Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

v. Go forth, prosper and reign, for the sake of meekness, righteousness and truth!
v. For You love righteousness, and hate iniquity.

Gospel: Luke 12:16-21

Communion Hymn

Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise Him in the highest! Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!



Evening Liturgy this Wednesday evening, November 20, 7 pm. for the Great Feast of "The Entry of the Theotokos to the Temple" (Nov. 21).

Those preparing to receive Holy Communion are expected to observe a total fast, after eating lunch, until the evening liturgy.

Note: If health reasons preclude following a total fast, please discuss your situation with Father.

The Nativity Fast (Advent) November 15 through December 24

The Nativity Fast is one of the four Canonical Fasting Seasons in the Church year. This is a *joyous* fast in anticipation of the Nativity of Christ. Because of this, it is less strict than other fasting periods. The fast is divided into two periods. The 1st period is November 15th through December 19th when a less strict fasting discipline is observed. The 2nd period is December 20th through 24th when the traditional fasting discipline is observed.

The Purpose of Fasting

The purpose of fasting is to focus on the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. It is a means of not allowing worldly things to control us. Faithful fasting should not be done in a manner to draw attention to us, not holding ourselves up as an example and not done while judging others, especially those who do not fast as we may.

- Fasting in itself is not a means of pleasing God. Fasting is not a punishment for our sins. Nor is fasting a means of suffering and pain to be undertaken as some kind of penance. Christ already redeemed us on His Cross. Salvation is a gift from God that is not earned by our hunger or thirst.
- We fast to be delivered from the passions of our senses so that God's gift of Salvation may bear fruit in us.
- We fast and turn our eyes toward worshipping and following the Lord in His Holy Church. Fasting and prayer go together.
- Fasting is not irrelevant. Fasting is not obsolete, and it is not something for someone else. Fasting was and is prescribed by Christ, for His followers.
- Most of all, as St. John Chrysostom says, we should not abstain from eating meat while we devour each other. We ask God to "set a watch and keep the door of our lips."

When Not to Fast

- between December 25 and January 5.
- if you are pregnant or nursing a newborn;

- if you have a serious physical illness;
- without prayer;
- without alms-giving;
- according to your own will without guidance from your spiritual father.

What we should do to prepare for Christmas?

***By increasing our prayer.** Says Fr. Anthony Coniaris, “The two great movements of the soul have always been withdrawal and return...withdrawal into God’s presence through prayer for strength...without prayer, the quality of our service deteriorates.” Advent is a time to remember that in God, we move and breathe and have our being, and we must be *with* Him and consciously *in* Him before we can have authentic love and relationship with others.

***By giving alms.** There is something almost poetic about giving money and perhaps even more important in these busy times, our time, to others who are in need at Christmas time. We can battle our self indulgence with self sacrifice, by giving freely, with joy and gratitude to God for His good gifts to us. St. John Chrysostom writes, “It is not enough to help the poor. We must help them with generosity and without grumbling. And it is not enough to help them without grumbling. We must help them gladly and happily. When the poor are helped there ought to be these two conditions: generosity and joy.”

***By going to Church more often.** The Advent season provides some additional opportunities (feasts & vespers) to be in the atmosphere of worship. Sometimes it is so hard to get there and so many things crowd our calendars but the rewards are always great. As the late Father +Alexander Schmemmann wrote: “There is no need to preach constantly on ‘sin,’ to judge and condemn. It is when a man is challenged with the real contents of the Gospel, with its Divine depth and wisdom, beauty and all embracing meaning, that he becomes ‘capable of repentance,’ for true repentance is precisely the discovery by the man of the abyss that separates him from God and from His real offer to man. It is when the man sees the bridal chamber adorned that he realizes that he has no garment for entering it.”

***By going to confession.** If there is any act out of step with the vain and persuasive holiday atmosphere presented to us by the spirit of this age, it is the act of the repentant Christian confessing his or her sins. Going to confession is hard, hard to confess our imperfections, hard the longer we haven’t done so, and we wrack our brain for even the beginnings of sins against charity, chastity, sins of distraction, greed, sloth or gluttony. We do not want to make too much of our constant imperfections and easily excused sins, but we want to drag them out to the light of day as the first step in getting rid of them...I have sinned. These are my sins. That is all we are supposed to tell; not the sins of others, or our own virtues, but only our unpleasant, gray, dreary, repetitive sins. Blessed are those who mourn, for it is precisely in this mourning that we receive comfort. These are the “tidings of comfort and joy” that the Christmas carol alludes - redemption from guilt and the weight of sin!

***By incorporating the Church’s traditions** in ways that make sense for us here and now. Because of the multi-pluralistic society that we live, it is extremely difficult to follow traditional Orthodox fasting parameters,

nevertheless, we can eat more simply and frugally in the season of Advent. Saving the money from costly food and giving it to the poor and hungry. When we decorate our tree and home, we should leave it up through Theophany. For the Feast of St. Nicholas, we should read about his life, and embrace his overflowing love and goodness. We may enjoy listening to Orthodox Christmas music via the Internet (try Ancient Faith Radio) or CD's. We can hardly follow all the traditions that our ancestors brought from the old country, but we can improvise and create our own traditions, taking from the old and from the contemporary. In other words, we can adapt, albeit imperfectly, our own cultural traditions to incorporate the spirit of Orthodox doctrine, worship and emphasis at this time of year.

Americans, especially over the past 50 years have adopted the celebration of Christmas in a backwards fashion. Just as the guest of honor walks through the door, it's all over. This year, may we embrace the Orthodox vision of holy preparation, so that when Christmas arrives, we will be ready to receive Christ in the feast of the "Winter Pascha" - His Nativity!

St. Nikolai of Zica
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