

CHRISTMAS
IN THE
ORTHODOX CHURCH



ORTHODOX
SPIRITUAL RESOURCES
IN PREPARATION
FOR THE
NATIVITY OF CHRIST

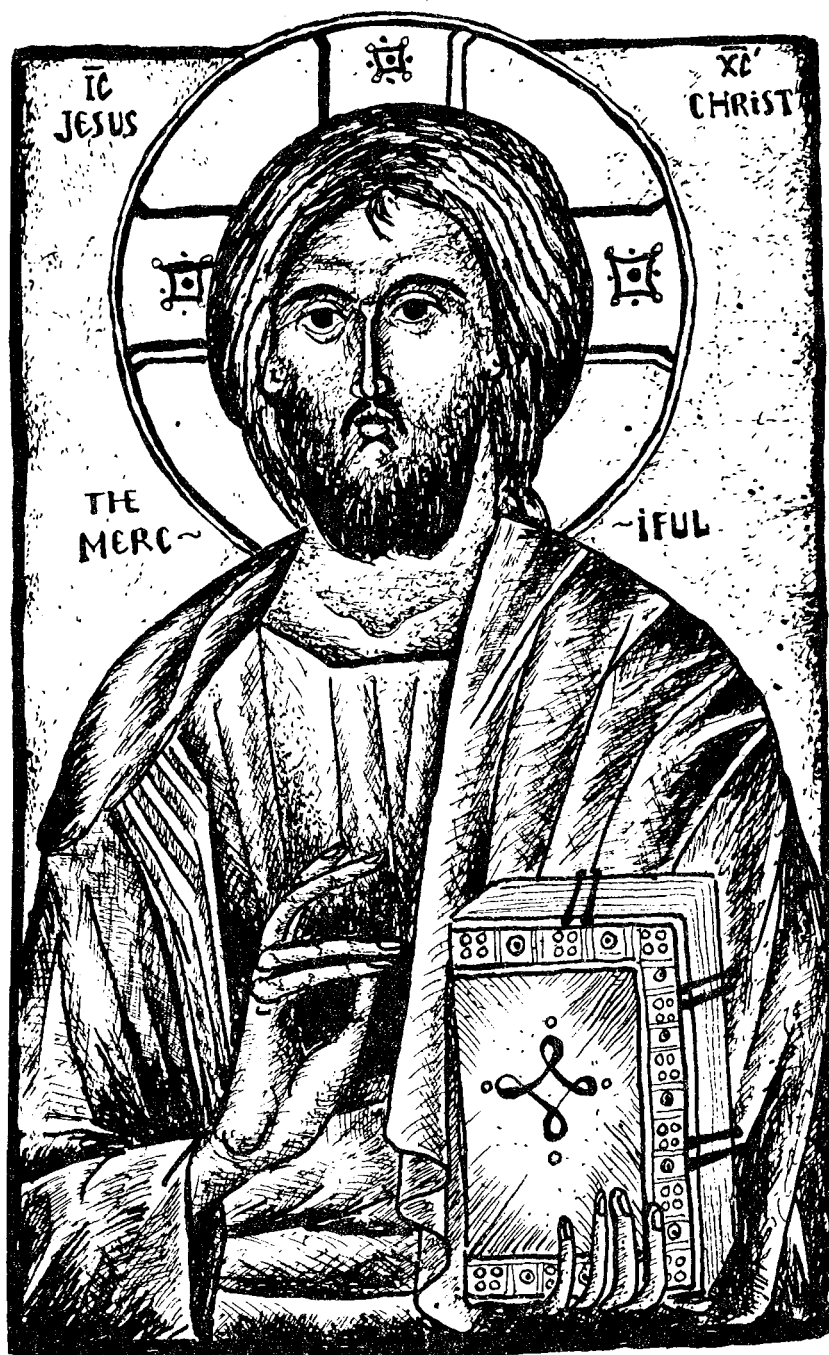
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FOREWARD

The Easter issue of Spiritual Resources was so well received that the Commission decided to do a similiar manual for Christmas, which offers even a greater variety of material.

It is intended primarily for our church school teachers, who can refer to it for their work with the children. It is also being distributed to AROY members, who will find much inspirational reading matter in it.

In keeping with it's policy to promote religious education among it's members, the National AROY Board has borne the expenses of it's printing and mailing.

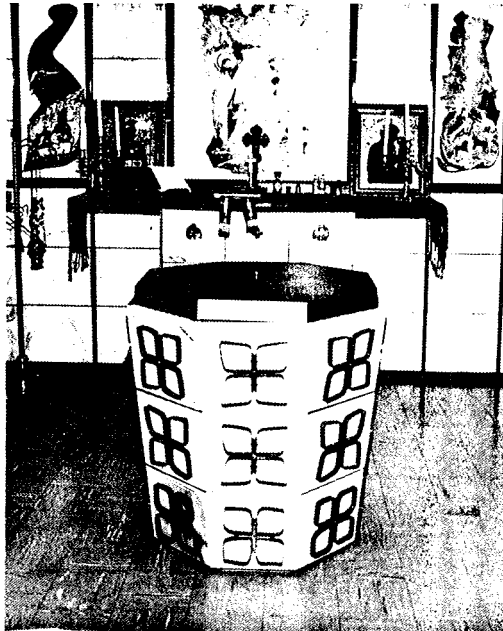
The Commission on Religious Education of the Episcopate hopes that it will enrich the knowledge of all readers, offer many practical suggestions and ideas for our church school teachers and deepen the spiritual insight during the Christmas season of all who will read it.

We invite suggestions, comments and new ideas for future use.

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THE SACRED TASK OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Few, if any, men come upon the Christian Church by some visionary experience or spring from ignorance to divine knowledge in the space of a moment. Spiritual learning is a slow and consistent process. It took the Lord thousands of years before He revealed the full glory of His truth in the Person of His Son.

The Orthodox Church in America is faced with the great challenge of nurturing it's younger generation, it's first truly American Orthodox, in the rudiments of the Faith. And yet, even though such a challenge is an enormous responsibility on our part, our efforts to meet it have, on the most part been feebly and tardy. Many of our church schools are staffed by teachers, most of them sincere, who nevertheless know precious little about the Orthodox faith, and many of whom are in their teen years. The great majority of the younger Orthodox generation will be lost to the Church or only nominal members of it, if our educational standards do not improve and if we continue to believe naively in the inevitable success of good intentions.

The task before the Church in this country in the area of religious education is one that must be faced seriously. There are thousands of men and women who have the potential of becoming good Orthodox teachers if the parishes of which they are members will make the effort to seek them out, to train them and inculcate in them the sacred nature of religious education. The educational commissions, the religious education conferences, the fine material being produced on a growing scale by Orthodox jurisdictions for the purposed of teaching the Faith can all be utilized in setting up on the parish level a sound Orthodox educational program.

The problem really boils down to the question of how seriously we take our religion. Do we really believe in the salvation of the soul? Do we really believe in the need to learn about God? Do we really believe that a spiritual education is superior to a secular one?

- Brother Sergius -

HOLIDAY OR HOLY DAY ?

Most of the holidays in our calendar are primarily religious, but here in America they have been largely secularized. On Halloween, which is All Saints Day, we trick or treat. On Thanksgiving Day, when the pioneers went to church to thank God for another fruitful year, we go to the football game and stuff ourselves with turkey and all the trimmings. Christmas, Christ's Nativity, has been so commercialized and St. Nicholas so denatured, that any similarity with the intent and purpose of the religious significance is purely coincidental. On New Year's Day, when we commemorate the Circumcision, St. Basil and the beginning of another year, we sleep off a hangover and in the afternoon are glued to endless games of football.

On Epiphany we get blessed and renew our baptismal vows only if we have nothing better to do -- which many of us, unfortunately, find to do.

Lent is for the "old folks" and sinners -- which, naturally, we are not. It is outdated and means nothing. We might have some compunction on Good Friday to at least fast partially and give some thought to the Crucifixion. Easter is a good excuse to "break fast", which many of us have not kept in the first place.

Secularization is rampant in America. Holy days have become holidays -- to enjoy physical pleasures and completely neglect our spiritual well-being.

Much of our religion, our habits, our customs and traditions we learn in the home and the church. It is incumbent upon church school teachers to stress the true religious significance of each holy day, to strive to observe its original intent, and urge parents to set a good example for their children. Start by going to church on the particular holy day. By so doing, our children will be brought up in the true observance of each holy day and will be much better for it.

- Rev. Fr. Vasile Hategan -

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

As Christians, we prepare ourselves for the Birth of Christ as a Church community, as family units and as individuals. Of course, church and family are composed of many individuals, but our salvation comes through being members of the Church. Each and every one should strive to fix his eyes of the feast and what it means. This calls for reflection. Children as well as adults are capable of grasping the beauty and importance of the coming of God on earth to live among his creatures.

COMMUNAL PREPARATION

PARISH - The public services in the parish Church during the 40 days of preparation remind us of the approaching birth of the Messiah, that we live in a blessed age after the anticipation of centuries was fulfilled. To emphasize the anticipation of joy, certain things are not done during this time: 1) we fast and organize no dinners at which meat is served; 2) we organize no festivities or parties; 3) we organize no weddings. These things only take away from the building up of celebrating the actual feast. Life is made pleasant by contrasts and change. Like nibbling before meals cuts down the appetite and the full enjoyment of a good meal, so the listed above events take away the sense of sacrifice and dedication, true preparation before the feast. Fast first! Feast later! The Sundays of preparation are listed elsewhere and give a theological understanding of the feast.

HOME - Families ought to take some part in observing the fast. The reason for the fast, the preparation for a big feast should be emphasized. Children are prone to offer this kind of sacrifice to the baby Jesus because it is something real that they can undertake.

A family ceremony centered around the Bible would emphasize the anticipation. A candle, symbol of Christ could be lighted every evening and passages from the Prophets or Gospels read. A list is given elsewhere. All members of the family should take turns reading.

The entire family should prepare itself by receiving the Holy Mysteries of Confession and Holy Communion. This should be undertaken with the guidance of the parish priest or spiritual father.

INDIVIDUAL PREPARATION - The true preparation for the Birth of Christ takes place in the unseen depths of each Christian. But, we are creatures with bodies and we influence the world of people and events around us. Therefore, it is necessary to show signs of our preparation. To complain of the "over-commercialization" of Christmas is not solving the problem. It rests with each one of us to emphasize the spiritual preparation and this too involves real material sacrifices.

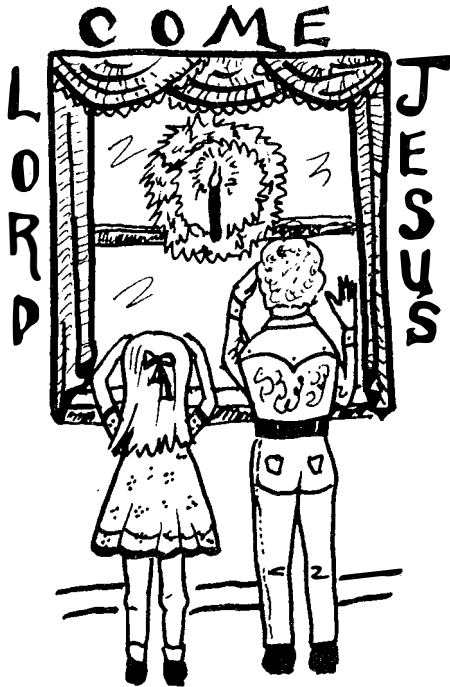
Children might be taught to daily offer a gift to the Christ child. This could be a deed well done, a bad thing not undertaken, an act of real charity in giving to a benefit or some other concrete expression of the child's realization that he is able to do good and that such actions are pleasing to God and are accepted as gifts!

It is more important that a child know who Christ is, why he came to live on earth, how he died and where he now is than to spend too much time on the learning of carols and such which are sung but once a year. Secondly, all meaning for these carols and other acts of the Church School throughout the year find their basis in this real understanding of the person of Christ as learned at this time of the Church year.

- An Orthodox Monk -



40 DAYS BEFORE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST



The second command of the Church is to observe the proper fasts which occur before a feast. This directive is for the good of body and of soul.

Fasting is a positive action of restraining from eating or, in the case of the ill, from eating certain foods. We also refrain from drinking all beverages. This is all so that the Christian may come to pray easier, make peace with God and thus control the body and make oneself a worthy receptacle of God's grace. In short, fasting strengthens the body and cleanses the soul.

The Fast Before the Nativity is a time in which we should prepare ourselves for the birth of our Lord. Coming before the feast, it represents the night of ages in which men lived before the birth of the Messiah. It was a time when the patriarchs and righteous ones of the Old Law waited anxiously for his coming and fasted and prayed.

In Fasting for the forty days before the birth of Christ, we recall the 40 day fast of Moses before he received the Commandments in the desert, on the mountain (Ex 34:28) It also recalls the 40 day fast of the prophet Elias (3 Kings 19:8).

St. John Chrysostom says about fasting: "Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works! What kind of Works? If you see a poor man, take pity on him! If you see an enemy be reconciled to him! If you see a friend honored, don't envy

him! If you see an attractive person, do not be aroused! Do not let just the mouth fast, but also the eyes, the ears, the feet, the hands and the entire body. Let the hands fast by being pure from grasping and greed. Let the feet fast by ceasing to run to distracting shows, lewd productions. Let the eyes fast by being taught to not attach themselves to beautiful appearances."

Traditional fasting is that on the day before the Nativity, no one eats or drinks before the appearance of the first star of the evening. This star represents the star which brought the magi to the Christ. Then, we observe the "dry" fast: bread and water, dry fruits and nuts. Some go caroling from house to house, carrying an icon of the Birth of Jesus Christ and singing the Tropar of the feast.

- An Orthodox Monk -

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FAST OF THE NATIVITY OR CHRISTMAS ADVENT?

As Orthodox Catholics living in a non-Orthodox environment, we are faced with the real problem of expressing our worship in an understandable manner.

We have these possible solutions:

- a) to use Old-World names: "Craciun" for the Nativity, etc. which lacks missionary spirit and reveals a narrowness.
- b) assume words used by non-Orthodox in their worship
- c) follow the tradition of the Church through the centuries and coin new words and expressions to make the Faith self-expressive and comprehensible.

In the above title there are present both solutions (b) and (c). But, our position would be (c). In taking this way, let's see the reasoning for it, keeping in mind the tradition of the Church and her mission to evangelize the world.

"Christmas Advent": Christmas is from the Latin and basically means the Mass of Christ, or the Roman Catholic celebration of the Mass on the Nativity of Jesus Christ. In time, it became, in English speaking countries, Christ's Mass or Christmas! In other countries where the Roman Catholics predominate, it is still from the ecclesiastical title: Nativitas Domini, or Nativity of the Lord. Advent is also from the Latin and means, the "coming" or "approach" and signifies two things: a) the 4 Sundays before the Nativity of the Lord or b) the Second and glorious Coming of our Lord.

Neither of the two words express our Orthodox needs. We do not celebrate a "Mass" but the Divine Liturgy which connotes a different worship. And, although we celebrate a form of preparation for the Nativity of Christ, it extends for a longer period of time. Our preparation begins 6 weeks before and only the two Sundays before the Nativity have special meaning.

There is also a difference of meaning between the words, "lent" and "fast". Lent is from the Anglo-saxon [an indication that the Christian missionaries to the Angle-Saxons also used our proposed solution (c) to spread the Gospel] and it means spring, lencten. Obviously it cannot be applied to this time of the year! Another adverse point is that it is not self-explanatory.

The word fast means just that, to abstain. It can be used at any and all periods of the year and have the same meaning. The time of a "fast" may vary and for Orthodox Christians it does. "Lent" is restricted to the 40 day period before the Resurrection and cannot properly be used elsewhere. The word fast is also more acceptable to and understood by those Christians who observe no set-period of preparation for various feasts.

Thus, of the two possible titles for this time of preparation for the Nativity of Christ, the first one, "Fast of the Nativity" is much more expressive, correct and in keeping with the Church's purpose of evangelizing.

It is true that in the face of commercialization of the feast, business people would hesitate to use the title "Nativity of Christ" because of its totally religious expression. But, the feasts belong to the Orthodox Catholic Christian and are the Church's celebration and therefore ought to be different from any association of profit and non-religious sentiment.

- An Orthodox Monk -

† † † †

WHERE DO WE DRAW THE LINE?

As we begin preparations for Christmas Lent this year as individuals, parents, and teachers, let us briefly examine the function and purpose of this holiday in the Christian cyclical year with relation to the world we live in.

Christmas Lent begins November 15, lasts for forty days and ends on the Nativity of Our Lord, December 25. During this time special attention is given to the spiritual cleansing of our souls and bodies. Prayer, fasting, reading from Holy Scripture and the writings of our Church Fathers and alms giving are means to this end. There are days (St. Andrew's Day, November 30; St. Nicholas' Day, December 6) that special prayers are said to remind us of the approaching birth of our Saviour. As the period of celebration draws near, the Sundays before Christmas emphasize the link between the Old and New Testaments in calling to remembrance the ancestors of Christ and those in harmony with God from the beginning of time. The last days of the lenten period (from December 20 to 24) better known as the five days of the forefeast, shift the emphasis from the past to the event itself, the Nativity of our Lord, Jesus Christ, born from the womb of a woman. The One who has created all things allowed Himself to be created. The One who has given food, warmth and love to all mankind has Himself taken love, warmth and nourishment as a newborn infant.

This is the beauty and significance of the Nativity that we try to comprehend and pass on to others. The birth of God as the Son of Man so that men might become the sons of God is truly an event worth understanding and sharing.

Yet, in the midst of all this, there is an odd occurrence in our community. We who profess the Holy Orthodox Faith many times find ourselves being a reflection of the very things to which we as Orthodox Christians are opposed. There is always a group of us who are moved by something other than Christian Love to "give" during Christmas time. Cannot we recall and instill in our lives the Christian virtue of our St. Nicholas who gave away all his wealth to those who truly needed it? And he did so in such a fashion that those who received it did not where from where it came.

It seems we accept and practice a distorted version of this Christian charity. Yes, we give gifts. As a matter of fact, we even spend hours thinking of what to buy Dad, Mom, or the kids because they do seem to have most everything. But, at last, we figure out something and begin the process of shoving elbows and hips in huge crowds and lines to buy our dear ones that "special gift" which more than likely they have two of already. Naturally, we make sure it can be exchanged.

By what kind of disease are we affected? What kind of gift is it that will bring a smile onto one's face and warmth in one's heart when he knows he will get something for Christmas? How can one enjoy giving when those who are to receive expect a gift? And those who receive the "wrong" gift look at you and say, "but this isn't what I wanted."

If only gentle St. Nicholas could see us today! Where do we draw the line? Are we the changers of the world or the affected?

As we begin preparation for Christmas Lent this year as individuals, parents, and teachers, let us prepare to proclaim on Christmas Day

"Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, has shone to the
world the light of wisdom! For by it, those who
worshipped the stars were taught by a Star to adore
Thee, the Sun of Righteousness and to know Thee,
the Orient from on high."

- Dimitrie Vincent -

† † † † † †

THE PRESENTATION OF THE BIRTHGIVER OF GOD, THE VIRGIN MARY, IN THE TEMPLE

This is one of the four feasts of the Virgin Mary. As it comes just before the Feast of the Nativity of Christ, it can also be used to emphasize the period of preparation.

There were many "gospels" written in the time of and immediately following the Apostles. The church chose of these the four that we have today to be read in the services and serve as a basis for our Faith. The Church did not reject all the rest but considers them as "useful". In fact, much of the hymnography is based on these other "gospel" accounts.

The Presentation of the Virgin Mary is not found in the four gospels we know of in the New Testament but is found in the Protoevangelium of James which is one of the "Infancy Gospels", which have much material concerning the youth of the Virgin and the birth and childhood of Jesus Christ.

We find in it that St. James, the brother of the Lord, is the son of Joseph by a former wife. It was probably written about the middle of the 2nd century. From this book we also learn the names of the Virgin's parents, Joachim and Anna.

The basis for the presentation is this: that Joachim and his wife, Anna, had no child. They asked God to give them one and in turn, they promised to dedicate the child to his service. This shows that the

Virgin Mary was not born of the desires of her parents, of "flesh" but was born of the will of God for a special part in the plan of salvation.

On her first birthday, Mary was the center of a great feast, for her parents had invited the priests and scribes and elders and the people to come and bless their daughter. This is the blessing of the priests:

O God of our fathers, bless this child and give her a name renowned for
ever among all generations.

And the people replied: So be it!! Amen!! Amen!!

And the high priests blessed her saying:

O God on high, look on this child and bless her with the last blessing which has
no successor.

At two years, Joachim suggested to take the child to the temple to fulfill their vow. But Anna said to wait until she was three so that she wouldn't long for her parents. Then at three years of age she was presented to the high priest who kissed her, blessed her, and accepted her to stay in the temple where she remained until she was 12 years of age.

- An Orthodox Monk -

† † † † †

ST. NICHOLAS - THE MOST POPULAR SAINT



Almost all Christian people know at least something about Saint Nicholas, whose feast day the church celebrates on December 6th. There are many tales regarding the saint, his life and the miracles he performed both while he was alive and after his death. Most of these stories are much more than just pious legends; however they may have altered considerably throughout the centuries as each nationality varied the stories and perhaps added little additional sequences to fit a particular situation. There is the most famous story concerning our saint that is so well known in all Christian countries throughout the world that is without doubt based on a true occurrence. The story tells us about the saint's generosity and love for others. It is, of course, the one about his secretly delivering small gifts of gold in order to provide a dowry for three daughters of a formerly wealthy businessman so that they could marry rather than fall into sin. It was only on the last visit that the girl's father discovered who was providing his family with the gold.

There are many other stories of how the saint saved sailors during storms at sea and appeared to children who were lost or kidnapped and helped them in returning to their parents. One such incident tells us about a certain young Basil, son of a peasant, who lived along the coast not far from Myra. Arabs from Crete captured him one day while the Vesper Service for Saint Nicholas was taking place in the church of Saint Nicholas. The Emir decided to make Basil his personal cupbearer. His parents were so upset that the following year Basil's mother refused to celebrate the saint's feast until her husband begged her to go to the church. While they were talking, they heard a noise in the yard, going out to investigate, they saw their son wearing Arab dress and awaking from a sleep. When he was fully awake, he told them how he was suddenly snatched away from his abductors by Saint Nicholas and brought back to his home.

Because of these many miracles, not to mention the countless numbers of healings that are attributed to him, Saint Nicholas has not been forgotten during the years that separate us from when he actually lived and was abishop in fourth century Myra. He has remained a very personal saint. A bishop, who even though removed from us the living, continues to act through the Church and aid those who seek his help. At present, there are over two thousand churches, hospitals and monasteries that have him as their patron. He is also regarded as the patron saint of lawyers, sailors, fishermen, bakers, prisoners, and even bridges. Besides this, the church dedicates every Thursday to his memory along with the Apostles.

Originally it was on his feast of December 6th when people exchanged gifts in remembrance of his gift to the merchant's three daughters, but as Christmas grew in popularity and the time of its preparation lengthened, the customs of exchanging gifts was transferred to that day and was gradually accepted throughout most of the Christian world by the middle ages. The idea of connecting Saint Nicholas with Christ's birth became popular at this time by using a Saint Nicholas figure as the gift-bearer. Each country and each nationality have their own characterization of Saint Nicholas. There is Father Christmas, Kris Kringle, and we have Santa Claus in our country. It is worth noting that the custom of popularizing saints is not frequently encountered in countries with an Orthodox background and culture. The reasons for this are because the Church closely guards the memory of her saints mainly by the observance of feast days with a service composed particularly for the saint and in the service, Orthodox Christians as the Church, pray to the saint for intercession, honor his holy memory and recall the life he lived in Christ as an example and path for us. The Church also gives us icons of the saints to venerate. We bow before them and we kiss the image of the saint, praying to its heavenly counterpart. Relics are another way of honoring the saints. By treating the bodies of holy men and women with honor, we acknowledge them as vessels of the grace and glory of Christ. It is little wonder then, that this attitude would not give rise to a familiarization of the holy saints along with the legends and fictionalizing that easily follow such as happened in 15th century England and Germany. It seems that at that time Saint Nicholas was not only the gift-giver and rewarder of good children, but he was also the punisher of those who had misbehaved during the past year. Eventually the punishing aspect overshadowed the generous one and Saint Nicholas was characterized as a crotchety, bearded tormentor of naughty children, often seen stealing children away from their parents in a big sack. What a switch this was from the savior of lost children.

Icons of Saint Nicholas are so common in all the churches and in many Orthodox homes that they are easily recognized. Some of them depict the saint in connection with one or more of his miracles but many of them are of the saint alone. Either style, he always appears with a high, noble forehead, and a bare head surrounded by a crown of white hair and an equally white beard. From the shoulders, the omophorion can be seen meeting in the front and hanging down the chest as a sign he is a bishop. He holds the gospel with his left hand and raises his right hand in a blessing.

Historically what has come down to us about Saint Nicholas is scant. He was definitely the bishop of Myra in Lycia in the fourth century. Lycia is a part of Asia Minor and lies on the coast of the Aegean Sea. During the saint's time, this area was important both politically and ecclesiastically. It was first evangelized by Saint Paul and by the time Saint Nicholas was bishop, the entire land was Christian. Converts to Christianity did so at the risk of their lives since these were times of terrible persecution for the Church under the imperors Diocletian and Licinius until Constantine made Christianity the state religion in 324 AD. The life of Saint Nicholas bridged the time from savage persecution to the peace and flourishing of the church. This peace lasted for several hundred years until in the seventh and eighth centuries, Saracens ravaged the coast, frequently attacking the sea port of Myra. After them, Arab pirates terrorized the area. Finally, the Turks in 1071 occupied the city as they advanced along the coast, extending their boundaries. The Christian inhabitants, who had often prayed before the tomb of their beloved bishop, fled to the hills outside the city in fear of the invader, leaving the saint's relics behind in the tomb.

In the confusion that followed the Turkish conquest of Asia Minor, Saint Nicholas's relics remained undisturbed in the cathedral. Slowly, the faithful moved back into Myra and once again prayed to the saint whose relics had given off a sweet-smelling and healing oil after his entombment. Then in 1087, some merchants and sailors along with two priests from Bari, Italy, went from Antioch to Myra and stole the relics from the church after forcing the monks who were guarding the church to show them the tomb. The thieves successfully carried the relics back to Italy and placed them in a monastery church until a new church could be built to house them since they insisted that they would only consent to leave them permanently in a new building. At last on October 1, 1089, the church dedicated to Saint Nicholas was completed and his remains were laid in the crypt.

Troparul Sf. Nicolae

(După melodia bis. din Ardeal)

Se poate cânta cu $\frac{1}{2}$
treaptă mai sus.

Corului bis. S. Nicolae din
Braşov al cărui dir. am fost
(Sept. 1896 - Aug. 1899)

T. Popovici

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Moderat

S. A. T. B.

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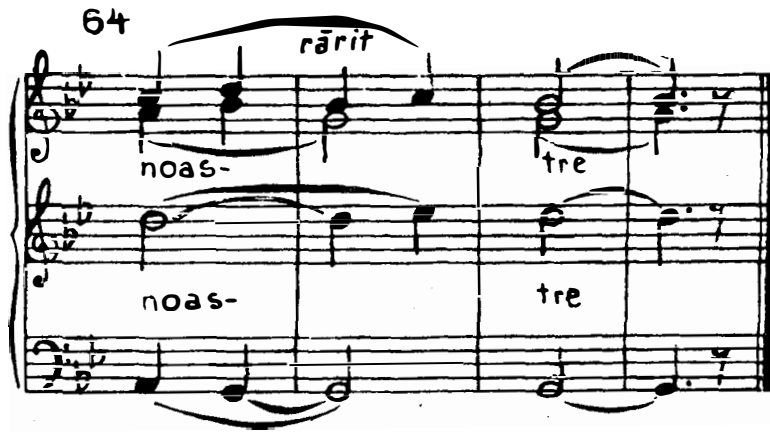
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Today Myra is a sad remnant of the past glorious sea coast community. Archeologists rather than pilgrims are now the most frequent visitors to the area of Lycia in the province of Antalya, Turkey.

The old church where Saint Nicholas was once buried is now itself underground, having been covered by the shifting, spongy soil. A new church stands on top of the site of the original one. The era has visibly changed, the land and church are no longer visible and even the holy relics lie in a different land but Orthodox Christians have the consolation that Saint Nicholas is still united with them through the Church as they sing:

"O chosen vessel and man of God, Heir of the
Kingdom ceaselessly pray to the Lord for our souls."

For it is through the Church that we are united with him and he is united with us.

- An Orthodox Monk -



C H R I S T M A S

This is the great family feast, one of the few which still gathers people, especially families, together. The birth of a child is always a reason for rejoicing, for good wishes and for happy get-togethers.

Yet, if we stop to think of this particular birth, the stark reality of its poverty, the loneliness, warmth engendered only by dumb beasts, what have our gift-filled feasts in common with it? Do we, in the rustle of paper, the good smells issuing from the kitchen, hear the Angel's song of that evening? How many of us remember God became man on that night so that man, as Saint Athanasius says, might become God! How far have we, whose duty it is to teach our children, told them of how great an importance it is to them as individuals, as well as to the world in general that God himself intervened in the history by becoming just like one of us; that by His long suffering, humiliation and death He might change our whole destiny and transfigure all creation.

Do we pause to think that that babe was born to be crucified, that this was His destiny from the first, but not only to be crucified, but above all to vanquish death, our death, lifting us up out of sin and into Holiness.

We must not spoil the tender beauty of the Christmas season which gives such a glowing picture of family joy by too great solemnity, but at the same time, let us not make a pretty legend of it. The rejoicing is not over the birth of one more child, but over the birth of the Saviour of mankind, whose first message was "Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

Why is it that in this realistic age we are sentimental about Christmas and so unrealistic about what its central meaning is: that the creation which fell through man could only be saved by man, but that man must be perfect and above sin, and that only the Son of the living God could be.

Let the warmth and glow of Christmas warm your hearts and minds with joy and courage, and hear the Angelic announcement:

"Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

To all people, the freedom of the Kingdom is given, but how many make use of it? This freedom is the true Christmas gift.

- An Orthodox Nun -



MESSIANIC HOPE - PROPHECIES

(It is with a sincere wish to facilitate the reader's desire to make the Christmas experience a complete one, that I have researched and extracted these passages which speak to us about the Truth of all times.

The coming of Christ, our Lord and Saviour was foretold not once but many times throughout the entire Old Testament. In the New Testament we find the confirmation of the facts written before the birth of Christ.)

- Larisa M. Lucaci -

HEBREWS 11:13 *It was in faith that all these people died. They did not receive the things God had promised, but from a long way off they saw and welcomed them, and admitted openly that they were foreigners and refugees on earth.*

GENESIS 49:10 *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

NUMBERS 24:17 *I shall see him but not now: I shall behold him but not nigh: there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.*

SAMUEL 1:10 *And she was in bitterness of soul and prayed unto the Lord and wept sore.*

SAMUEL 7:12,13 *And when the days be fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.*

ISAIA 9:6,7 *For unto us a child is born unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*

7. Of the increase of his government and peace THERE SHALL BE NO END, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgement and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

ISAIA 11:1-9 *And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse and Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. 3. And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes neither reprove after the hearing of his ears. 4. But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth, and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,*

and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. 5. And the righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. 6. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child will lead them. 7. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie together; and lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8. And the sucking child shall play on the hold of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.

9. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

ISAIA 33:17 Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.

ISAIA 40:3-5 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: 5. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh see it together: for the mouth of the Lord had spoken it.

ISAIA 55:3-5 Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. 4. Behold I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people. 5. Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

ISAIA 62:10-11 Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people. 11. Behold, the Lord hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

JEREMIAH 23:5-6 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper and shall execute judgement and justice in the earth. 6. In his days Judah shall be saved and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

JEREMIAH 33:15-17 In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgement and righteousness in the land. 16. In those days shall Judah be saved and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name wherewith she shall be called the Lord our righteousness. 17. For thus saith the Lord; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel.

DANIEL 2:44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

DANIEL 7:13-14 I saw in the night visions and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.

14. And there was given him dominion, and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

DANIEL 9:24-27 Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophesy, and to anoint the most Holy. 25. Know therefore and understand, THAT from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks and three score and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall even in troublous time.

26. And after three score and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. 27. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate even until consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

MICAH 5:2 But thou Bethlehem Ephratah though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me. That is the ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.

ZECHARIAH 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation lowly, and riding upon as ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

MALACHI 3:1-3 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts. 2. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap: 3. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord and offering in righteousness.

II SAMUEL 7:12-16 And when the days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. 13. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 14. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with stripes of the children of men. 15. But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. 16. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

CHRONICLES 17:11-14 And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. 12. He shall build me an house, and I will establish his throne for ever

13. I will be his father and he shall be my son: and I will not take my mercy away from him as I took it from him that was before thee: 14. But I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom for ever: and his throne shall be established for evermore.

CHRONICLES 22:10 He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever

II CHRONICLES 28:7 Moreover I will establish his kingdom for ever, if he be constant to do my commandment and my judgements, as at this day.

LUKE 1:30-33 And the angels said unto her, Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favour with God. 31. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. 32. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: 33. And he shall reign over the throne of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

LUKE 1:68-79 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people. 69. And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; 70. As he spake by mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: 71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; 72. To perform the mercy PROMISED to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; 73. The oath which he swore to our father Abraham. 74. That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear. 75. In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. 76. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways. 77. To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins. 78. Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, 79. to give light to them that sit in darkness in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace.

LUKE 2:25 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was upon him.

LUKE 2:29-32 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, 31. which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

LUKE 2:36-38 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; and she was of great age and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity. 37. And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

MATTHEW 2:1-12 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the King, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem 2. saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him. 3. When Herod the King heard these things he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4. And when he had gathered all chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where

Christ should be born. 5. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet. 6. And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judaea art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. 7. Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 8. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. 9. When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. 10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy, 11. And when they were come into the house, and saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their country another way.

MATTHEW 11:3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

MATTHEW 26:63 But Jesus held his peace, And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God.

MARK 14:61 But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him and said unto him, Art thou the Christ the Son of the Blessed?

LUKE 24:21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, today is the third day since these things were done.

ST. MARK 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counselor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.

ACTS 26:6, 7 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: 7. Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hopes sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of Jews.

ST. MATTHEW 13:17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

ST. JOHN 8:5, 6 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad.

ACTS 9:22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

I PETER 1:10-12 Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: 11. Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. 12. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

We are used to thinking of psalms as songs of praise and as prayers. Of course, this is true and we are fortunate to be able to find for every need of ours, a psalm that is the answer and a prayer.

The psalms contain also the prophecies that we have found through out the New and Old Testaments:

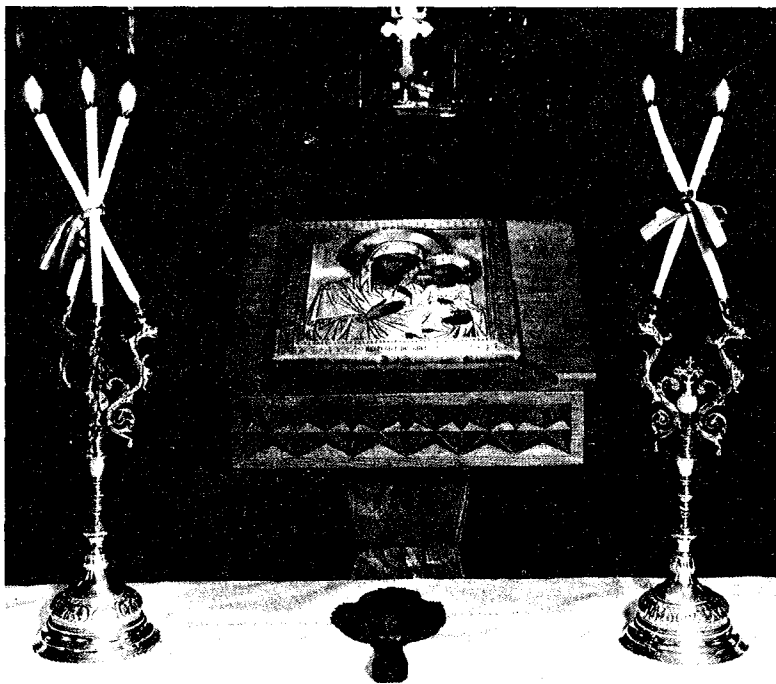
PSALMS 2:10-12 Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth.
11. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 12. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

PSALM 22:28 For the kingdom IS the Lord's: and IS the governor among the nations.

PSALM 72:17 His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed.

I would suggest the reading in full of the Psalms 96, 110, 132, 11, 17, 18. I am sure that the message will stand out better when the particular aspect is read in its entirety.

- Larisa M. Lucaci -



PROPHECIES CONCERNING THE MESSIAH

The First Announcement	Gen. 3:14-15
Salvation Through Shem	Gen. 9:24-27
Abraham and the Blessing of all nations	Gen. 12:1-3
Descendant of Juda	Gen. 49:8-12
The Star out of Jacob	Numb. 24:15-19
A Prophet like the Prophet Moses	Deut. 18:15, 18
David's House will last forever	2 Sam. 7:16
Son of God and World Ruler	Psalms 2
King and Priest	Psalms 110
The Innocent Suffer	Psalms 22
Death Loses It's Hold	Psalms 16:9-11
The Fallen Tent of David	Amos 9:11-15
Blessing under David the King	Osee 1-3
The Son of the Virgin	Isaiah 7:13-14
Emmanuel: God-with-us, the Deliverer	Isaiah 8:8-10
The New-Born King	Isaiah 8:23b-9:6
The Root of Jesse	Isaiah 11:1-5
The Pagan World	Isaiah 2:2-4 Isaiah 11:11-16 Isaiah 19:18-25
Blessings of the Messianic Age	Isaiah 32:1-5, 15-17 Isaiah 35:4-5, 10; 4:2 Isaiah 11:6-9
Bethlehem is his Birthplace	Mich. 5:1-3
Prince of Peace establishes his kingdom	Psalms 72
The Holy Branch	Jer. 23:5-6
The Messianic Kingdom under David's Son	Jer. 31:22 Jer. 31:31-34
Shepherd and His Flock	Ez. 34:23-24; 37:22-25
The Servant of God	Isaiah 40-65 Isaiah 42:1-7 Isaiah 49:1-9a Isaiah 50:4-9 (10-11) Isaiah 52:13-53:12
Prince of Peace Enters the Holy City	Zach. 9:9-10
He is Pierced	Zach. 12:9 - 13:1
Sacrifice in the Messiah's Time	Mal. 1:10-11
The Forerunner	Mal. 3:1, 22-24
Outpouring of the Holy Spirit	Joel 3:1-5
The Son of Man	Dan. 7

- An Orthodox Monk -

SCRIPTURE READINGS DURING CHRISTMASTIDE

SUNDAY BEFORE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

VESPERS: Genesis 14:14-20

Deuter. 1:8-11; 19-21

Deuter. 10:14-18; 19-21

LITURGY: Hebrews 11:9-10; 32 to end

PRE-FAST: 24 DECEMBER

HOURS I: Micha 5:2-4

Hebrews 1:1-12

Matthew 1:18-24

III: Baruch 3:36; 4:4

Gala. 3:23-29

Luke 2:1-20

VI: Isaiah 7:10-15; 8:1-4; 9-10

Hebrews 1:10; 2:3

Matthew 2:1-12

IX: Isaiah 9:6-7

Hebrews 2:11-18

Matthew 2:13-23

VESPERS: Genesis 1:1-13

Numbers 24:1-9; 17-18

Micah 4:6-7; 5:2-4

Isaiah 11:1-10

Jeremiah 3:35; 4:4

Daniel 2:31-36, 44-45

Isaiah 9:6-7

Isaiah 7:10-16; 8:1-4

Hebrews 1:1-12

Luke 2:1-20

LITURGY: Galatians 4:4-7

Matthew 2:1-12

- An Orthodox Monk -

THE CHURCH PREPARES FOR THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FOREFATHERS: December 11 - 17

The theme of this Sunday is of the general preparation for the birth of the Messiah, i.e., The Anointed One (Christos in Greek). The need for a Messiah arose because of the estrangement between God and Adam after Adam's fall from grace.

God created the visible world and set man in it as its caretaker and guardian. Creation was God's kingdom and Adam was his regent. When Adam broke his allegiance to God by his sin, he caused chaos in all of Nature which remained obedient and faithful to its Creator. As men assumed more and more prerogatives, Nature was subjected to greed, pride and abuse of its guardians.

The Messiah was to re-establish the first harmony of creation by re-affirming the absolute authority of God in his kingdom, this world (Genesis 3:14-15).

Thus, special attention is given to the lineage of Christ, starting with Adam and mentioning his sons. Abraham's importance is emphasized. He was a Chaldean, a pagan whose father was an idolater. Abraham was called by God, enlightened with knowledge of the true God and was promised to be the origin of a new and dedicated people. Isaac was born to him in his old age. From him was born Jacob and from Jacob, Juda. Christ is of the tribe of Juda.

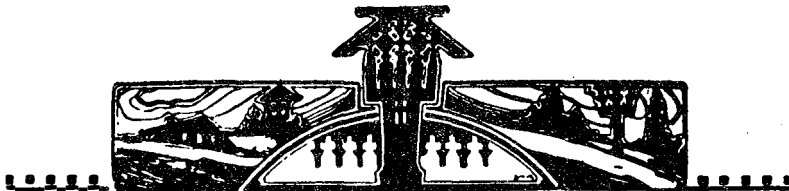
SUNDAY BEFORE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST: December 18 - 24

Today, a call goes out to heaven and earth to prepare for the birth of the Messiah, for they will be re-united through this and Nature will rejoice in the reconciliation.

Emphasis is placed on the great Mystery: the Messiah is not merely a chosen man but is rather God himself who chose to come in person, in the flesh to dwell among men on earth. He is born of a Virgin, (Isaiah 7:13), delivers God's people (Is. 8:8-10), will be king of all and his governing will last forever. (Is. 8:23-9:6).

Nature is called on to rouse herself and call the mountains, hills and forests to prepare to receive their Maker. The cave is told to prepare to give room for the Almighty who is to be born of Mary and the heavens prepare to send down the star's light to bring all nations to seek the Messiah. Bethlehem is to be the home of the God-Man, Immanuel-God-with-us.

Special note and listing is given for the Patriarchs and the Prophets who through the centuries have prophesized about the coming Lord. John the Baptizer and Joseph the Betrothed are mentioned as being the last of the prophets before the birth of Christ.



PRE-FEAST OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST: December 24

The day before the birth! The anticipation of centuries of waiting and longing bursts into joy at the expectancy that now the prophecies are being fulfilled. (Isaiah 7:14, Micah 5:2).

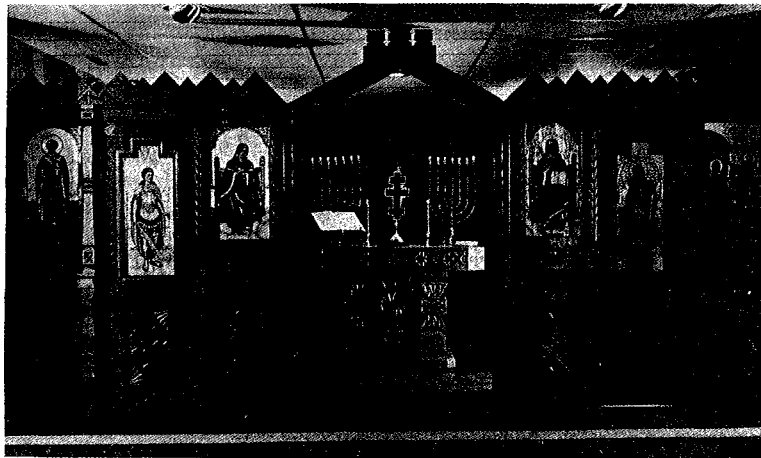
The theme is an invitation for us to go and meet the newborn Christ at Bethlehem. There we shall meet four groups of others who also go to meet him: (1) the heavenly powers, angels come to earth to join their voices with man's in praise of the Creator of all; (2) Adam and all the saints of the Old Testament who are present in spirit and in the fulfillment of their words; (3) the shepherds, wisemen and citizens of Bethlehem moved by the Holy Spirit to seek Immanuel, God-with-us in their midst; (4) all creation which is amazed that God who established the laws by which they are bound, is not himself bound by his nature but comes to live among man and nature.

This is the beginning of the universal and endless procession of all peoples of all generations to worship Jesus Christ, true God and true man. The gift we are told to bring is our hymn of praise and adoration.

Who shall we meet in the manger in the cave? We see Christ who like the first-born, Adam, has a body but Jesus is also God who has no shape. He is held in Mary's arms although he is older than Adam, for he is God and he created Adam long ago! Christ God who in heaven has no form, for God is spirit and invisible, now takes on a visible form...that of us men. He that is invisible and in heaven is also today visible on earth. He that is the master of all has come to live with his servants and to deliver us from sin and death brought on by Adam. The promise of ages is fulfilled!

THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR IN THE FLESH, JESUS CHRIST

The good God, seeing that man subjected himself to the devil, took pity on him. He sent the Archangel, Gabriel, to the Birthgiver Of God to say: 'Rejoice! you that are highly favored! The Lord is with you!' And at this, our Lord Jesus Christ, Word and Son of God was conceived in the pure womb of Mary. Nine months after, a decree from Cezar Augustus was sent to the world to call all people for a tax-census. This is why Joseph, Mary's protector, took her with him to his hometown of Bethlehem. At the same time, Mary's pregnancy was fulfilled and it was time for her to give birth. There were no empty inns, no houses without guests and, therefore, a cave was the only available place vacant in which she could deliver her child. So, in the lowly cave, Mary without loss of her virginity, gave birth to our Lord, Jesus Christ. She wrapped him in bands of cloth, as is still the custom there among the poor and she laid him in the feeding trough, the manger. Thus, in great poverty, the Creator of all was found, he who came to have mercy on us poor men.



COMMEMORATION OF THE BIRTHGIVER OF GOD

DECEMBER 26

We celebrate the fact that Mary, who was virgin before, during and after giving birth to Jesus Christ, is the Mother of God. She is truly a mother for she conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35) and gave birth after nine months pregnancy to Jesus. But Jesus is also the Word and Son of God (Luke 1:36) and he is the second person of the Holy Trinity. By the will of God and Mary's co-operation, God himself took flesh and joined his divine nature with a human nature in a single, but unconfused unity. Therefore, Mary is also the Mother of God, for Jesus is true God and true man who was born before all ages of his heavenly Father and born in latter times of his mother, Mary. This is also based on the words of St. Elizabeth, who under the inspiration of Holy Spirit, said: "Why should I be honored with a visit from the Mother of my Lord?" She said this to the Virgin Mary when she visited her before Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptizer. (Luke 1:43)

We also commemorate the flight into Egypt. After Herod ordered the death of all male children of Bethlehem, the angel of God appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: "Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt." (Matthew 1:13) The Birthgiver of God with the Child and Joseph fled into Egypt for two reasons: 1) to fulfill the prophecy: 'I shall call my son out of Egypt'; and 2) and to refute heretics.

If the birthgiver of God had not fled into Egypt, then her son Jesus Christ our Lord would have been killed with the other male children of Bethlehem and our salvation would not have come about. If she had remained in Palestine, and had escaped from the murdering soldiers of Herod, then many would say that Jesus Christ did not truly have a human body but was only a spirit. For if he had had a body, he would have been killed as the other male children had been. But in escaping, while remaining in Palestine, he must have only been a spirit, the heretics say. Therefore, the flight of Egypt shows that Jesus did have a human body and therefore it was necessary for him to be taken to a country which would not follow the commands of Herod, Egypt.

SUNDAY FOLLOWING THE BIRTH OF CHRIST:

The commemorations made on this Sunday are in honor of the holy prophet, David; the holy Joseph, Betrothed to the Virgin Mary; the holy James, "brother" of the Lord.

The prophet and king, David, is remembered because he is an ancestor of Christ and in Christ, the promise made to him by God that the Messiah would come from his family is fulfilled.

Joseph is remembered because, trusting in God, he protected the Virgin and the Christ and provided for them. He is upheld as a model of charity, trust and dedication for he was privileged to hold in his arms his Creator.

James, "brother" of the **Lord** is the first bishop of Jerusalem. He was probably elected to this position because of his relationship to Christ, that of an older step-brother. Joseph may have been a widower and James and others are referred to as the "brothers and sisters" of Christ. This can be in two understandings: first, as children of Joseph and his deceased spouse and secondly, the terms brother and sister are Semetic terms of endearment to cousins and close relations. James was bishop and died a martyr for the Church. Thus we celebrate the announcer of Christ by his ancestor, David; his protection by Joseph, his Mother's betrothed; and his promotion through preaching and teaching by James, his step-brother.



THE EVER-VIRGIN MARY

During the Christmas season our thoughts turned naturally towards the most beautiful of all stories - - the birth of Jesus Christ.

A young woman heavy with child gets a rough refusal of shelter from an over -busy city. An anxious, kind husband finds shelter from the cold winter blast and the world's disregard, with the beasts of the field, huddled together for warmth around a manger. Thus, the Light of the World was born in a dark grotto in Bethlehem of Jusea. A thousand pictures form in our minds: through 20 centuries of change, in storm, in strife or in peace, the miracle of the Christ-child's birth moves us each year anew.

The central figure at this point, the one upon whom the whole story hinges, is that of the young woman who is the Mother of God. Although the gospel does not describe her other than as a young virgin of the village of Nazareth by the name of Mary, espoused to a man, Joseph, we yet get a remarkable clear picture of her in our minds.

In the gospel, Mary is with Jesus Christ from the start, even to the foot of the cross. The Church has never divided the Mother from the Son. In worshiping Him, it venerates her through whom He received His humanity. The Orthodox Church places Mary above all saints, believing that even the Cherubim and Seraphim pay her homage.

"Thou who art above the Cherubim and the Seraphim --" cries out one of our greatest hymns. Yet, how many of us stop to really think wherein lies the greatness of Mary - the Forthbringer of God. Until the day that the angel Gabriel so astoundingly greeted her, she was a maiden apparently no different from those around her, fetching water from the village well, busy about the house, obedient to her parents and harkening unto the word of God. Because God's will had always been her will, she was sinless and remained untainted by temptation. She was the chaste vessel through which God could fulfill his purpose of reaching mankind. Mary was perfect, therefore, she was also humble - so humble indeed, that when the angel gave her the marvelous message that she of all women had been chosen to bear the Son of the Most High, she showed neither false pride nor false modesty, only obedience and humility. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." (Luke 1:38)

By these words she stood all her life long. Throughout the gospels we get only fleeting glimpses of her. Only at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (John 2) are any words of hers recorded pertaining to our Lord's ministry. But never do we hear from her so much a syllable of complaint, criticism, or even defense when her Son was condemned to the cross. She moves steadily in the background with the greatest spiritual self-control, concentrating not on her child Himself, but on His significance to the world. Mary is blessed, according to Jesus Christ's own words, because of her profound obedience to God's will, rather than because her womb had carried Him: "And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto Him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee."

"O Mother, whom all must humn, O thou who hast brought forth the Word most holy beyond all the holiest, take our present offering, keep all from every hurt, and deliver from all wrath to come those who cry to thee. ALLELUIA. (Akathistos, last verse.)

- An Orthodox Nun -

ANGELS: MESSENGERS FROM GOD AND GUARDIANS OF MEN

We cannot think of the Nativity of Christ and not be reminded of the presence of hosts of angels, praising God and singing: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favor." (Luke 2:13) Who are the angels and what part do they have in God's world and in the plan of salvation?

In the Creed, we say that we believe in one God who created heaven and earth, things visible and invisible. St. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians 1:16 says about Jesus Christ: "IN him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible, Thrones, Dominions, Sovereignities, Powers - - all things

were created through him and for him.” Angels are a part of this invisible creation. We know that this invisible world was created before our visible world. (Job 38:7 ; Genesis 1) God created them out of non-existence and by his goodness and love brought them into existence.

The angels are spirits . . . bodiless powers who have minds, or reason, will power and automation. The angels are immaterial beings. They communicate with each other although they have no need of tongues or ears because they communicate without material expressions. Again St. Paul refers to the angels, this time to the Philippians 2:10 saying: “all beings, in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus.” But this is just a manner of speaking. He means that men and angels must worship God alone and must do so totally, with all their existence and powers. The angels are said to be immaterial in opposite reference to us who are material beings.

The angels are free agents, that is, they are responsible for acting or not acting on something. Their understanding is much greater than ours because they, like us, are rational, but are not encumbered by material bodies and sense perception and its deficiencies. Still, they do not know what is in a man’s heart nor can they predict or know the future. This shows that they are limited beings.

They can show themselves in human form but they cannot be present in two places at the same time. Thus if they are in heaven, they cannot also be on earth and vice versa. Yet, they are not hindered by material reality such as doors, walls and other like obstacles.

Angels are immortal but this immortality is a gift from God the Creator. They are holy as a gift from God and desire to serve God and to enjoy his love. The word angel is from the Greek word for messenger. They are called this because they are sent by God to visit men. This is also the occasion for them to reveal themselves under human form.

The work of the angels, among other things, is to serve men and to assist us in our quest for salvation. We are, after all, brothers to the angels, for God is our Father and theirs, too. Every one has a guardian angel given to him by God (Matthew 18:10). We also have a bad angel who tries to lead us astray and is quite the opposite in every way from our good guardian angel. Some angels, especially archangels are said to protect nations. (Det. 32:8 Dan.10:5)

Not all angels are good! These are commonly called devils. They hate men and seek to lead him away from God and thus to make him share in the eternal damnation which is their end for having rejected God. St. Peter warns us: “Be calm but vigilant, because your enemy, the devil, is prowling round like a roaring lion, looking for some one to eat. Stand up to him, strong in faith and in the knowledge that your brothers all over the world are suffering the same things.

But the devil, the chief of the fallen angels, Lucifer, cannot force any man to do wrong. He can only try to frighten and lead astray. He is allowed to do only what God permits. (Job 1:12; 2:6, Matt. 8:31, 32) The angels who fell from God’s presence fell because they were full of self-love and pride. For we know that God made only good creatures (Gen. 1:31) with free will and they abused this by rejecting the commands of God and refused to obey him.

The Orthodox Church performs an exorcism on every one baptized into her fold. Thus, every one who has or will be a God-parent should be aware of the responsibility of this act of rejecting the devil and his works and deceptions.

The good angels are classified by the Fathers of the Church into nine ranks or choirs according to their existences..

Ranks of the Bodiless Powers

- I. Seraphim: “The seraphim being fiery in appearance, inflame mortals towards divine love.” They are like a red flame, have three pair of wings and carry a red and flaming sword!
- II. Cherubim: “The cherubim, possessors of the pouring forth of wisdom, pour it forth in floods from that source into us.” A single pair of wings, richly robed.
- III. Thrones: “Above all limits are set the high thrones around the Most High.” Two fiery wheels, winged with four wings filled with eyes.
- IV. Dominations: “The dominations direct their will in accordance with the truly supreme power of the absolute master.” Have two wings and carry a seal marked IC XC in their right hand and a staff mounted by a cross in the left.

- V. Powers: "The powers possess invincible courage and put the spheres of heaven in motion."
Have two wings, richly clothed and carry the same things as the above.
- VI. Authorities': "The authority that excels authorities has wholly bowed to the arch authority."
Have two wings, not so richly attired and carry the same things.
- VII. Principalities: "Principalities, many wonder working, figure the essence of Divine Rule."
Like the above except they carry a lily instead of the staff.
- VIII. Archangels: "The archangelic order of archangels combines with the principalities and the angels, being between them." Like soldiers with two wings but without a helmet.
Carry a seal with IC XC and in their right hand a sword pointing upwards.
- IX. Angels: "The work of ministry is the true office of the angels who ascend and descend in the service of man." Two wings and dressed like deacons.

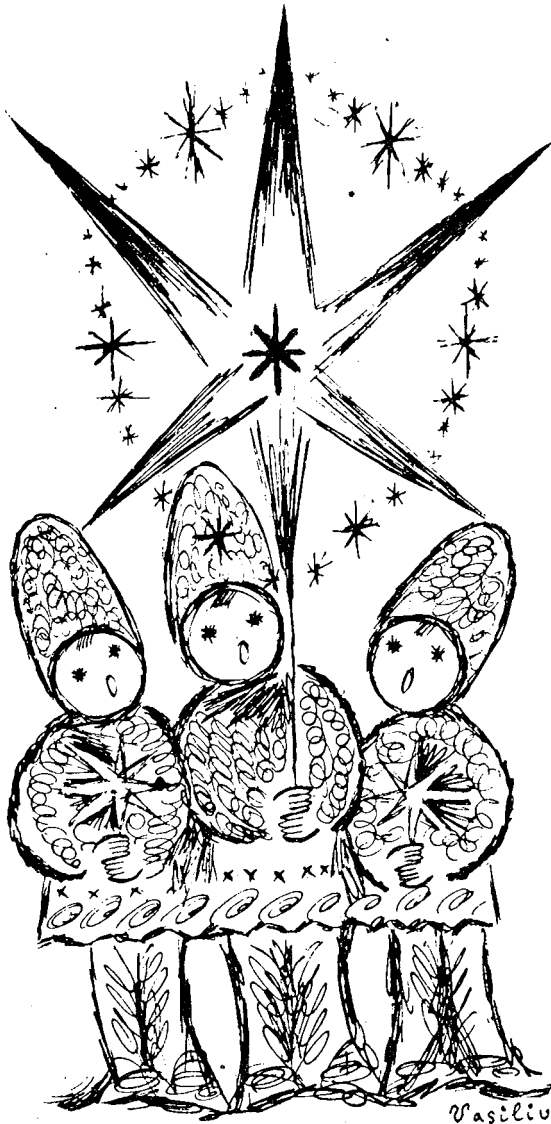
These verses and descriptions are from the Monastery Church of Iviron on Mt. Athos.

- An Orthodox Monk -



Hristos se naște, măriți-l !

THE GIFT OF GIVING



As the feast of Christmas approaches, we are constantly reminded of the urgency of giving gifts to friends and family. Only ten more shopping days until Christmas, free gift wrapping and many similar signs engulf us each day. But we have the chance to convert the traditional gift-giving from a materialistic and commercial social custom to a Christ-loving expression, for the life of a Christian is that of constantly giving. Love is the fulfillment of placing the needs of others above our own. Just as worship is the proper attitude of man, so giving and loving are the proper sentiments of man also. They are the truest expressions of our humanity made divine. We offer prayer, we offer sacrifice, we offer ourselves to each other through giving. Even small children, who are primarily egocentric in their needs, have the inner seed of demonstrating affection and sacrifice to others through giving. How many parents have been deeply touched by a small gift given to them by their child out of money he had carefully put aside for many months.

Although giving of ourselves and concerning ourselves with the welfare and salvation of our brothers is a natural product of a Christian life just as warmth and light are the characteristics of fire, it is even more appropriate that at this time of the church year, we rekindle the spirit of love for our neighbor and show this by giving. Whether the gift is small or large does not matter. Even whether it is material or not, is of little concern. A kindness that comes from a cheerful heart is more meaningful than a gift bought in hurriedness and with the feeling of a debt. At Christmas we have before us the greatest gift of all. The gift of Divinity taking upon itself the nature of a man. The Creator becoming like the created. No longer does God exist in immaterial form, speaking to His creatures through a veiled mystery as in the Old Testament, but now He enters into our own nature. Not as king and mighty ruler, but as a seed that grows from the flesh of the Virgin, who is of our own race. "Our God and Creator has clothed Himself in created flesh, and He who with His strong arm fashioned the creation reveals Himself in the womb of her that He formed." (from the Royal Hours of Christmas)

At Easter, it is true, we also are amazed at God's wonder of salvation by His voluntary death, but at the same time we are overjoyed at our own saving from death. While at Christmas, it is solely for our astonishment to worship God as man, humbled by our weak and poor nature.

A gift of Self that we dare not approach. "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", is sung at Great Vespers of Christmas.

Just as the lenten period that proceeds the feast prepares us for virtue, the glorious Light that is the Feast, overwhelms us with His giving and we, in our humble efforts, strive to imitate the generosity by giving to others. Now we can see what a wonderful gift God has bestowed on us. Not only in giving us His Son in human form, but in enabling us to show our love by the gift of giving ourselves. Just as we have a voice to sing out praise, we have the capacity, indeed the very need, to show love, and the perfect means has been shown to us. Paradoxically, the more freely we give, the greater joy we receive. Yet if we give with the expectation of receiving gratitude that small amount of joy is often cold and fruitless. Therefore, at this season, let our gifts be a new start, a reminder of our great capacity to love, and let us give thanks to God for this ability to draw near His Divinity.

An Orthodox Monk

DECEMBER 25 - NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

In the earliest days of the Church, there was no fixed date on which the Nativity of our Lord was celebrated. The importance of observing the feast outweighed the uniformity of celebration.

In the reign of Diocletian (284-305), while he was keeping court in Nicodemia, he learned that a multitude of Christians were assembled in the city to celebrate the birthday of Jesus. He ordered the church doors to be closed and then had fire set to the building. All the faithful perished in the flames.

Some Christians observed the celebration in May or April or January. If we rationalize along the lines of the weather, we see that the 25th of December would have been during the rainy season, a time during which the shepherds would not most likely have been watching their flocks by night in the plains.

The date of the 25th of December was chosen by the Church in Rome and from there was later adopted by the Church in other places.

The date was picked because it was on this date that the pagans had celebrated a feast to the regeneration of life, of the forces of nature. It was during this time that the sun's winter solstice occurred. Thus by replacing the pagan feast with that of the Birth of Christ, the 'Sun of Righteousness' the Church attempted to eradicate pagan practices and beliefs.

In the Church in other countries, the Theophany or Baptism of Christ was celebrated with more ceremony than the Nativity. This is still true in our Orthodox celebration for the Theophany is the first public revealing of the Holy Trinity and this is stressed above the fact of the Nativity.

Up until the last century, many Protestant denominations rejected the celebration of the Nativity. The business world throughout all lands, non-Christian as well, list the Christmas season on their schedule for heavy selling.

For a more extensive discussion of this, see SOLIA, December 1972, The Star of Bethlehem: Fact or Fancy?

An Orthodox Monk

CHRISTMAS

Christmas! A magic word which fills our minds and hearts with a feeling of great joy and anticipation. Christmas is a word full of meaning in our lives; it is like a ring which holds all the pages of our past, our present and our future. Christmas is essentially a great spiritual family event; it brings back memories of earliest childhood, and carries many of us back to distant lands and times that seem forever past.

Christmas is the great family feast when all gather, old and young, around the candlelit tree and eager hands open parcels packed with such loving care. It is the great feast of love and tenderness; a time when we remember our friends and send greetings to far parts of the world. The shops are glittering with decorations; enticing gifts are on display; carols ring in our ears, losing some of their beauty in being heard over-much. There is bustle and happy confusion.

Alas, this starts all too early; hardly is Thanksgiving over than the shops go out into a great commercial drive—it is a great time for business. Neither the faith of those who sell nor of those who buy seems to be of any importance; it is the moment of spending and raking-in. The quality of gifts is much weighed in the balance: their price, their appropriateness, beauty and usefulness. The incurred expense is often a serious worry and not infrequently tarnishes the joy of giving.

If nearly 2,000 years ago Christmas passed by unnoticed by the world of that time, it most certainly does not do so today! In fact, we start so well ahead of time to make a great to-do about it that the day itself all but falls flat! The sad truth is that the real meaning of Christmas day is overshadowed by the busyness of humanity.

Nonetheless, there is a loveliness and a tenderness about the Christmas story that never fails to touch the hearts and the imagination of all, even of those to whom it is just a pretty legend.

The significance of what happened on that long ago day escaped the perceptions of quite a number of good people who seek sincerely to keep Christmas holy. They go to church, pray, and wholeheartedly sing hymns of praise; they gaze in joy and wonder at the eternally beautiful picture of the child born of a Virgin and laid, for want of a better place, in a humble manger. Yet the true meaning still lies hidden for the majority of us, not for lack of faith or good intentions, but from lack of time to sit down and meditate. There is almost as little room today for the birth of our Saviour in our midst as there was in the overflowing Inns of Judea in the times of Augustus Caesar. Our lives are so full and busy; like Martha we are 'careful and troubled about many things.' (Luke 10:38-42). We have no time to listen to and think about the meaning of these words: Unto you is born this day... a Saviour which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11).

CHRISTMAS (continued)

A Virgin gave miraculous birth to a child who is to be called Saviour and Son of God. Is there no more to it than a miracle that happened long ago? What difference does it make to you and me, aside from the fact that all history is dated as before or after that day. Does Christmas merely celebrate the birth of the greatest teacher of mankind—and nothing more? For many persons I fear that is all that it does stand for, although I am sure this interpretation leaves a lurking unformulated doubt. Easy answers are never really satisfactory, especially since in the depth of our hearts we know there is more than ritual.

Indeed, Christmas is not just a commemoration of the miraculous birth of a manchild who became a great Master, but it is the day when the Word of God became flesh and dwelt amongst us, not to teach only but to save.

God in His infinite mercy started on this day the work of reclaiming His own—a work that He is ever perfecting in our midst. The salvation of those whom He created in His own image and likeness, but who had wilfully strayed so far from Him began on the day of Jesus' birth.

"... The first fact that you must grasp is this: the renewal of creation has been wrought by the self-same Word Who made it in the beginning. There is thus no inconsistency between creation and salvation; for the One Father has employed the same Agent for both works, effecting the salvation of the world through the same Word Who made it in the beginning." (THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD OF GOD, St. Athanasius Pg. 26)

Humanity had lost its understanding of what it meant to have been created in the image of God, so God Himself became man. In this way we could once more gaze upon the true image and be born again. "of water and of spirit" (St. John 3:5) Thus a spiritual rebirth was proffered to all mankind — through having the perfect image ever before our eyes by which to remodel ourselves. So that this should be perfectly understandable for us, Jesus Christ was born of a perfect flawless woman and through her received His manhood. He was born humbly, a poor little baby for whom there was no room at the Inn at Bethlehem. He grew up under the same circumstances as would any other boy of His time, but He did not grow up like them. He grew ever more into the perfect image: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (John 14:9)

God had created mankind in His image, but man in his foolishness transgressed off the path of righteousness, strayed away from God, and so became subject to corruption and death. Having lost his spiritual nature, he retained the mortal only. Repentance alone could not recall man from what had become his nature through sin — it could only stop him from sinning, but could not give him back what he had lost: his immortality. How, or rather, who could save us and bring us back into our true estate? "Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing." (THE INCARNATION OF THE WORD OF GOD, St. Athanasius, Pg. 33)

Unless we realize the "lostness" of man, we cannot grasp the renewing force of Christmas. Christmas is the day upon which we celebrate the birth of our Saviour: the Lord and King of all, Who chose the way of humble birth, poverty, and shameful death, to lead us back to the Father and to become our eternal mediator. God chose this way so as to delve deep into the depth of human pain and reach the most miserable of us. Thus, Christmas is one of the greatest and the most joyful and at the same time the most intimate of all our Christian feasts.

The Church does not prepare for the celebration of Christ's Nativity by shopping and spending and generally having a grand time, as so many of us do. The Church bids us to quiet, to meditation in preparation for the great day. She bids us fast, not feast. She bids us be worthy of receiving by, first, learning to give. What have we of our very own to give? Hardly anything but just ourselves — for everything else is acquired by the grace of God; it is our very souls which we offer up to Christ as gifts upon His birthday. The Church bids us to look upon Mary, the Mother of God, as our example as to how we should await and prepare ourselves to receive our Lord and Saviour. Mary accepted this great event with humility: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy Word." (Luke 1:38) Mary stands for all mankind's receptivity to the Word and the Holy Spirit.

Could we but imitate at least a particle of Mary's humility, her acceptance and undivided devotion to the most High, then would Christmas be to us what it was to her and we could cry in unison with her: "My soul doth magnify the Lord...and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." (Luke 1:46-47)

In my own home on Christmas Eve, my family, children and friends gather around our big spruce Christmas tree after we have all had a part in decorating it, in white and silver, with real candles on its branches. At the foot of our pure white tree we place an old family icon of the Mother and Child, and before it an unlit candle. While we all stand reverently around the tree, one of us reads the story of the Nativity aloud. Then, I say a short prayer that a light may burn forever in the hearts of all those behind the Iron Curtain and all peoples who are on this night deprived of Christmas joy; for them, I light the candle in front of the Madonna. This we follow with a few moments of silence and a Christmas Carol.

Somehow this custom, which has become a tradition for us, brings into our hearts once more the presence of Jesus Christ and His great love.

The warmest Christmas wishes to you all, and may Christmas joy abide in your hearts.

La multi ani.

An Orthodox Nun

THY NATIVITY, O CHRIST

Beginning with Christmas Lent on November 15 and right up to the Glorious day of his Nativity, the Orthodox Church teaches us how to prepare for this Holy Day in the hymns which are sung each day at the Orthros Service. One hymn that is particularly significant is as follows: "Christ is born, glorify Him; Christ in Heaven, greet Him; Christ on earth, lift up your hearts."

Christ must be born within our hearts; we must accept Him in the stable of our souls; He must be the pillar and foundation of our life.

The theme of this holy season as sung by the hosts of angels on that wintry night nearly 2000 years ago is: "Peace on earth, Good will toward men." Peace and good will come upon earth only when there is peace and good will in the hearts of men. This peace comes from the lofty teachings of Christ. If everyone, by some miracle, starts this moral transformation within himself, peace will come immediately. Let us not expect it from the next fellow -- but start with ourselves.

St. Paul tells us how we can be a herald of peace: "I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4, 1-3)

Then, and only then, can we truly call ourselves the children of God and be worthy of the great love God has shown to us by sending His Only Begotten Son to be with us. But the reward will be great -- true happiness on this earth and salvation of our souls in the life to come. This is the true meaning of Christmas for an Orthodox Christian. All the other appendices are man-made -- and unfortunately many are void of any spiritual meaning, but only for material benefits.

Let us all try to celebrate Christmas in its true perspective -- and not as the business man of today would have us to do. We can thus prove that we are true Christians and worthy of the fact that Christ was born for us.

Rev. Fr. Vasile Hategan

CHRISTMAS

The joy of Christmas is universal. Each country the world over has its own particular way of observing it and their traditional customs.

In the Philippines people greet each other with offerings of flowers early Christmas morning. They look upon Christmas as a great religious festival. All of their popular Christmas customs are of religious character and consist mostly of little plays or dramas founded upon the life of Christ. Bands of people go from village to village performing these plays.

In Alaska the popular Christmas custom is "going around with the star" among natives who belong to the Orthodox Church. A large figure of a star, brightly colored, is carried around at night by large processions of adults and children. They call at the homes of the wealthy where they are invited in for refreshments. Afterwards they take up the star and continue from home to home singing carols, these processions taking place each night during Christmas week.

In Puerto Rico children don't hang stockings but place little handmade boxes on roofs and in courtyards and Santa drops in gifts as he flies around at night with his bag like a bird. Here, Christmas is also a church festival of much importance with religious ceremonies commemorating the principal events in the life of the Saviour.

Believing that on the anniversary of the birth of Christ, the bees hum a Christmas carol, the English place a sprig of holly on the hives to wish them a merry Christmas.

An ancient Swiss legend has it that all you have to do on Christmas Eve to predict the general weather for the next year is cut an onion in half, peel off 12 layers and fill the same with salt. Each layer represents a month and those which are still salty the next morning predict rain during that month.

The old time Swedish Christmas Eve, called Jul-aften, had many traditions. The horses were given a drink of ale to make them lively for the drive to church the following morning. Cattle were closely watched for omens of the coming harvest. If they were lying down the crops would be abundant; if they were standing, crop would be scanty. At the Christmas Eve supper, all the family coins, silver cups and spoons were placed on the table so that the light of the Jul-fire would reflect on them and cause them to increase and be lucky.

The Swedish people have an interesting way of decorating their Christmas tree. On top, they fasten their national flag, and on the other branches they place small flags of all nations as a symbol of the Christmas message, "Peace on earth, good will to men."

Rev. Fr. Vasile Hategan

THE NATIVITY IKON

Once more the joyous season of Christmas is upon us! Commercially it has been here a long time, street decorations, gaily decked out shops and carol tunes wafted in the air. How unlike the first Christmas! Or maybe not quite so unlike; there was no room for Jesus then except in a stable, and where is there room for Him today, in all this bustle and hustle, noise and frantic spending? The best we seem to be able to do is to set up creches which are of doubtful artistic value, and hardly very inspiring religiously.

Very differently from all this paraphernalia does the Orthodox Church treat this season - with sobriety. It is ushered in by a six week lent, the purpose of which is to prepare the body and soul to worthily partake in the great feasts of the birth and Baptism of the Lord Christ. Until the 4th Century, in fact, the Church only celebrated Epiphany or "Boboteaza" (the Baptism) on January 6th. (It is still held by the Church as the more important date because it marks the beginning of Christ's ministry.) But gradually the family feast of Jesus's birth gained in importance among the faithful, until the Church fixed the date for December 25th, three days after the shortest day of the year, during which all lies dormant. Then, light begins to gain over darkness and the day lengthens.

Let us try to forget all the noise and fuss outside, and take up the Gospel according to St. Luke, and read the lovely story again, taking in the words as if we had never heard them before. The great event is so soberly put forth, there are no exaggerations, no superlatives, the event itself is too great; God becomes incarnate in a little helpless Babe for Whom no other shelter was found, but a stone manger in a stable among the lowly beasts of the fields. This fact is so stupendous that there are no words wherewith to glorify it adequately; simple language and humble joy alone are pure enough.

Our Orthodox icons are remarkably consistent with the Gospel story. It is both pictorially correct and also profoundly symbolic. Surrounded as we are by the Western interpretations set forth by secularized art, which sometimes is not art at all, but a sentimentalization of an overpowering event, our icons seem strange, naive and unrealistic. Yet they are far closer to the truth than are many a lovely painting of sculpture that catch and please the eye.

Let us take a look and try to read the correct meaning of the typical icon of the birth of Christ. We find in the center of the painting a very dark cave, in which, in a stone manger, the Christ Child lies wrapped in swaddling clothes. The cave is dark, for it symbolizes the coming of light into the very heart of darkness and of the material world. The stylized drawing is very probably a true picture of the real grotto of Bethlehem. In the 5th and 6th centuries, pilgrims would bring back from the Holy Land Ampullae (small globular flasks or bottles with two handles for holding consecrated oil) filled with oil taken from the lamps burning in sacred places. These vessels were engraved with the Gospel events which had taken place in the locality where they had been made. Those divided in Bethlehem showed the cave such as it was when discovered in the days of St. Constantine who had a church built over it, the oldest still standing church in the world. It is from such vessel engravings that the model for the icons was taken.

Further on we find an ox and an ass standing close by the Holy Child. These are not mentioned in the story according to St. Luke; they are taken from the prophecy of Isaiah: "The ox knows his owner and the ass his master's crib; but Israel does not know me and the people has not regarded me (Is. 1:3). The Old and the New Testaments are always in the background of Orthodox thinking and the icons are always scriptural.

Outside the cave we see the Mother of God resting upon a sleeping mat, such as the easterners carry on their journeys. She is lovingly and carefully wrapped up in her dark red cloak. She is looking tenderly at St. Joseph, who sits aside in a dejected pose, clearly worried over his immense responsibility as the protector of Mother and Child. The Virgin, though, gazes lovingly and understandingly upon him as she does upon the whole world of men, for she has given birth to a new order for the salvation of all mankind.

This icon is the picture of "recreation, the renewal of all born on earth." We see the angels singing their song of praise: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards men." A shepherd is adding his little flute song of joy to theirs. He and his companions have found that the tidings of great joy which the angels had brought were true, for they had found the sign, a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. We see also the three wise kings from the East approaching with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (Matt. 2:1-11) The shepherds represent the first of the sons of Israel to worship the Christ and the wise men from distant lands stand for the coming of the heathen nations into the Christian Church.

There is another significance, too, to these two groups of people. Often the humble and simple hearted will quickly and easily comprehend the glory and mercy of God, while the wise and mighty may have a long way to go before they reach the truth.

Sometimes we find in another corner of the icon two women giving the Baby His first bath. This scene is taken from the Apocryphal Gospels, but is permitted because it underlines that the Child is like any other new born babe subject to the requirements of human nature. Even as the star hanging out of the dom of heaven bears witness to His divine provenance.

In this icon we have the true image (for icon literally means image) of the Birth of Christ, which touches the entire created world which brings to Him its several gifts, as the Christmas Stihion (a brief liturgical hymn sung at Vespers) puts it so beautifully and simply: "What shall we bring Thee, O Christ, when thou art born on earth as Man for our sake; for each of the creatures, who have their being from Thee, brings thanks to Thee: Angels, their songs, the heavens a star, the wise men gifts, the shepherds wonder, the earth a cave, the wilderness a manger, but we - the Virgin Mother."

To these the animal and vegetable worlds add their gifts through the icon. But how heartwarming for us poor sinners to realize that one of us human creatures reached such perfection that she could become the chosen vessel of the Incarnation! Mary in her self-emulation is the gift of all men to God so that God could become Man and live among us!

Blessed indeed is she who gave birth to the Saviour of our souls!

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

The Spirit of Christmas is the Spirit which entered the world on a quiet night in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, nineteen-hundred and sixty-one years ago. It is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of peace and love, and of every thing which nourishes, strengthens and ennobles man's soul, that it may attain to that supreme unity in God, begun here on earth by the glorious Incarnation of His Son of the Holy Ghost and the Virgin Mary, and consummated in the eternal bliss of His celestial Kingdom.

The Spirit of Christmas is that state to which we all instinctively aspire, that peace we all seek for our souls, and which we can achieve only through the purity of Jesus Christ. To the Orthodox Christian, it is written on the prayer of a simple Russian peasant, "Gospodi pomilui, Gospodi pomilui, Gospodi pomilui," or on the serene countenance of an Athonite monk; or in the quiet chambers of a parish church; or in the splendid yet peaceful majesty of the Holy Liturgy.

The Spirit of Christmas permeates man's inner being, enlightens his heart, and gladdens his soul. It whispers to him, "Fear not, for Jesus is come. Hope on Him, and follow His ways, and you will have eternal life."

Truly, the Spirit of Christmas is something more than the customary gift-giving and receiving. It is the gift of God to men, the gift of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ which we, the entire world, and the saints and sinners of all the ages, together, can never hope to repay.

Let us not worry so much whether we have snow for Christmas, but rather that we have Christ. For where there is Christ, there is love, and where there is love, there is undoubtedly peace.

- Brother Sergius -

GIVE AN ORTHODOX CHRISTMAS GIFT!

In a country of affluence such as ours, it is always a problem to buy a Christmas gift for someone who has everything. We Orthodox have the same problem but have an advantage that there is an increasing number of Orthodox items on the market which make thoughtful and appreciated gifts to your Orthodox friends. As we search through the stores and catalogues, most of us are unaware of this relatively untapped source of gift suggestions. There are stores dealing in Orthodox and ethnic items. Some of the parishes have bookstores featuring them. The Orthodox and nationality press advertise such items. All you need is a little bit of ingenuity. There is a whole line of Orthodox religious jewelry, such as crosses, medals, charms, bracelets, tie clasps and such. Imitation antique laminated and framed ikons are abundant. There are many recordings of Orthodox religious music, including carols. The Bible in almost all the prevailing Orthodox languages can be had at a very reasonable price. Then there is the peasant folk arts with so many sentimental articles to remind one of his or her ancestry. Most nationality groups have put out cookbooks with mouth-watering recipes. The number of Orthodox greeting cards is growing steadily and are more and more professional. The list can go on -- but this is just to remind you that they are available, if you have enough interest and take out the time to purchase them. You will not only make some Orthodox happy, but probably will be helping some worthy Orthodox cause.

- Rev. Fr. Vasile Hategan -

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR

The Nativity of our Lord is beautifully told in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke. The birth of Christ is commemorated as one of the most joyful feast days of our church. In importance, it is surpassed only by Easter.

THE HOLY LITURGY (Selection from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians 4:4-7)

"Ye brethren: But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law. That He might redeem them who were under the law: that we might receive the adoption of sons.

And because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father. Therefore, now he is not a servant, but a son. And if a son, an heir also through God."

(The Gospel from St. Matthew 2:1-12)

"When Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, there came Wise Men from the east to Jerusalem. Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east and are come to adore him.

And king Herod hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: In Bethlehem of Judaea. For so it is written by the prophet:

And thou Bethlehem in the land of Judaea art not the least among the princes of Judaea: for out of thee shall come forth the captain that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them.

And sending them into Bethlehem said: Go and diligently inquire after the child, and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore him.

NATIVITY (continued)

Who having heard the king, went their way and behold the star which they had seen in the East, went before them, until it came and stood over where the child was.

And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary, his Mother, and falling down they adored him: and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh.

And having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their country.

FROM THE ORTHODOX CHRISTMAS SERVICE

CHRISTMAS CANON (First Canticle)

Christ is born, extol him!
Christ from heaven: go to meet him!
Christ on earth: be he lifted up.

Sing unto the Lord, all the whole earth,
And praise Him in song with joy, O ye people:
For He hath glorified Himself!

THE IKOS (Sixth Canticle)

Bethlehem hath opened Eden:
O, come, let us gaze!
We have found nourishment in a secret place.
O come, let us receive the things of Paradise within the cavern!

There hath appeared the Root Upwatered,
Which buddeth forth remission.
There hath been found the Well Undug,
From which David of old longed that he may drink.

There a Virgin hath brought forth a Child;
And straightway the thirst of Adam and of David hath been assuaged.
Wherefore let us go unto Him where He is born a little Child,
Yet is God before Ages. Amen.

HYMN TO THE VIRGIN ON CHRISTMAS (9th Canticle)

Magnify, O my soul, the Virgin,
The All-pure Birthgiver of God,
More honorable and more glorious
Than the hosts on high.

A mystery strange and most glorious I behold;
The cavern, Heaven, the Cherubic Throne, the Virgin;
The Manger, the receptacle wherein lieth Christ our God,
Whom nothing may contain.
Him, therefore, do we magnify, praising Him in song.

MAGNIFY O MY SOUL (9th Canticle)

Magnify, O my soul, God born in the flesh of a Virgin.
Magnify, O my soul, the King born in a cavern.
Magnify, O my soul, God who was worshipped by the Magi.
Magnify, O my soul, Him who was announced unto the Wise Men by a Star.
Magnify, O my soul, the pure Virgin and only Birthgiver of God, who gave birth unto Christ the King.

CHRISTMAS TROPARION

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God,
Hath risen upon the world as the light of wisdom.
For at it, they who worshipped the stars were,
By a Star taught to adore Thee, the Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to thee.

KONDAKION

Today a Virgin bringeth the Super-substantial,
And earth offereth a cavern to the Unapproachable;
Angels together with the Shepherds sing praises;
The Wise Men journey on with the Star.
For, for our sakes, God, who is before all the ages, is born a little Child.

SECOND ANTIPHON

Blessed is the Man that feareth the Lord,
That had great delight in His Commandments.
O, Son of God, Who was born of a Virgin,
Save us who sing unto Thee: Alleluia.

His seed shall be might upon earth,
The generation of the faithful shall be blessed.
O, Son of God, Who was born of a Virgin,
Save us who sing unto Thee: Alleluia.

Riches and plentousness shall be in his house,
And his righteousness endureth forever.
O, Son of God, Who was born of a Virgin,
Save us who sing unto Thee: Alleluia.

Unto the godly there ariseth up light in the darkness;
He is merciful, loving and righteous.
O, Son of God, Who was born of a Virgin,
Save us who sing unto Thee: Alleluia.

-From the Christmas Liturgy



STICHIRA

Let heaven and earth together prophetically exult,
And let Angels and men spiritually rejoice;
For God hath revealed himself in the flesh
Unto those who were in darkness and sat in the shadow,
And hath been born of a Virgin.

The Cavern and the manger received Him;
Shepherds proclaim the marvel,
And Magi from the Orient bring gifts
Unto Bethlehem,

And we, also, with lips unworthy,
Do bring unto Him praise in Angelic wise;
Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace.

For the hope of the nations is come,
And having come hath saved us from
Bondage of the enemy.

-Stichira of the LITIA, tone 1



NATIVITY HYMNS

Come, o believers, let us see where Christ was born. Let us follow the star where it goes with the Magi, Kings of the east; for there angels praise Him ceaselessly, and shepherds raise their voices in a worthy song of praise, saying, Glory in the highest to the one born today in a cave from the Virgin Theotokos, in Bethlehem of Judea.

Way dost thou wonder, O Mary; and why art thou astonished in thy inner self? and she responds: Because I have given birth in time to a Son unbound by time; nor do I understand the manner in which He is born. I have known no man; how then do I bear a Son? For who has yet seen a birth without seed? But since God wills the order of nature is overcome, as it has been written, Christ has been born of the virgin in Bethlehem of Judea.

He that all contains not how was He contained in the womb? And He that is in the bosom of the Father, how shall He be carried in the arms of His Mother? Truly, all this has been fulfilled as He Himself knew and willed and was pleased to do; for He that is not carnal has become incarnate by His own choice; and He that is, has turned for our sakes to that which He was not, sharing our creation, yet inseparable from His essence. Truly, Christ has been born with two natures, desiring to perfect the heavenly world.

From the Matins of the
Nativity of Christ

PRAYER TO CHRIST AT CHRISTMAS

Way do we celebrate your birth but not your life?
Way do we call ourselves after your name but refuse to follow your life?

I see your face, Jesus, in the face of a Negro woman in Mississippi whose life is made a hell by white "Christians."

I see your face Jesus, in the face of a lonely man in a crowded city.

I see your face, Jesus, as loved and unloved in the face of people who hate and persons who love

Christmas is a great mystery to me. (The way we practice it, is it a mystery to you, too?)

Through the sham and simplicity the cruelty and joy the exploitation and adoration of it, I see your face.

Bless us, us, us, your brothers and sisters, your disciples, the humanity you died on the cross to redeem.

Thank you, Christ, on the occasion of Christmas and always, for giving us life in the midst of death, life, life, with you.

Malcolm Boyd

GLORY TO GOD ON HIGH

St John of Damascus (780 A'D')

Bethlehem rejoices,
Hark the voices clear
Singing in the starlight
Nearer and more near,
Unto God be glory,
Peace to men be given
This His will who dwelleth
In the heights of heaven.

Heaven cannot contain Him,
Nor the bounds of earth,
Yet, O glorious mystery!
Virgin gives Him birth.
Unto God be glory,
Peace to men be given,
This His will who dwelleth
In the heights of heaven.

Now the light ariseth,
In the darkened skies,
Now the proud are humbled
And the lowly rise.
Unto God be glory,
Peace to men be given
This His will who dwelleth
In the heights of heaven.

THE STAR RISES UPON HIGH

The star rises upon high
As a great mystery in the sky,
The star is brightly gleaming,

To the whole world proclaiming:
That today the Pure One
And Most Innocent One,
The Virgin Mary has delivered
Christ the Messiah as promised.

The Magi as they sighted
The star, immediately started,
Guided by the star at night,
The Christ Child to hight.

And with their journey behind,
At once Him they did find,
Unto Him they did come near,
Offering prayers for all to hear.

Many gifts they did bring
Unto the Christ Child offering;
Each one experiencing great
pleasure
Upon presenting the Christ
his treasure.

May the pleasures of that day
Prevail here among us today,
To be enjoyed by the very
youngest
And be relived even by the
oldest.

ADAUS

Tropare

Troparul Nașterii Domnului (După melodia bis. din Ardeal)

T. Popovici

Moderat <>

S. A. T. B.

A- min Naș- te- rea ta, Hris- toa- se Dum- ne- ze- ul nos- tru, ră- să- ri- ta lu- ze- ul nos- tru ră- să- ri- ta lu- mii lu- mi- na cu- noș- tin- mii lu- mi- na cu- noș- tin- ței, că în- tru dăn- sa, cei ce slu- jiau ței, că în- tru dăn- sa, cei ce slu- jiau

ste-le-lor, de-la stea

ste-le-lor, de-la stea

s'au în-vă-țat să sen-chi-ne-ți-

s'au în-vă-țat să sen-chi-ne-ți-

e, soa-re-lui drep-ță-ții și să

e, soa-re-lui drep-ță-ții și să

te cu-noas-că pe ti-ne, ră-să-ri-tul

te cu-noas-că pe ti-ne, ră-să-ri-tul

cel de sus. Doam-ne, mă-ri-re-ți-e.

cel de sus. Doam-ne, mă-ri-re-ți-e

TOO LATE?

The time marches on inexorably. We fail to do one thing and are caught in the next one. There is such a thing as "too late", simply because of the inexorability of the time. But when it comes to imparting values, information, impressions, feelings, all of cultural nature, it is not too late to do it for our children.

I happen to think that in order to share some of the heritage that we are aware of, practicing it, is better than talking about it.

If you told your children or your school children about the custom of carrying THE STAR while caroling, a beautiful STAR made and decorated at home, it is just like putting a paper at the bottom of a drawer. Instead, MAKE that star with your children. Take it along while caroling. Make sure that every group going caroling carries that star proudly. Are you ashamed of being Romanian, or Orthodox? Of course not. Are you ashamed to point to the beautiful church that is yours? Of course not. Then you shouldn't have any problem carrying THE STAR while caroling. You will only revive a beautiful custom that is almost lost.

New Year's Day? That marvelous New Year that we hope will be good to us is neglected by Romanians. Bring to life a simple custom called SORCOVA. What in fact is Sorcova? It is a little branch of a tree decorated with artificial flowers. When you've finished to embellish it according to your own imagination you're ready to go from house to house to impart good wishes to friends and relatives. As you enter the house, begin to recite while tapping your host lightly with the decorated branch, with the Sorcova, the good wishes for a long life, much health and prosperity.

Why not learn a few lines in Romanian?

SORCOVA

Sorcova
Vesela
Sa traiti
Sa 'mbatraniti
Ca un mar
Ca un par
Ca un fir de trandafir
Cate pietricele
Atatea mielusele
Cati bolovani
Atatia carlani
Cate cuie sunt pe casa
Atatia galbeni pe masa

Suggestions for making a star: Choose the convenient size for you, considering if it is to be carried by adults or young children. If you are handy with the wood fine if not, you may use chicken wire or any similar pliable material. It can have as many corners as you wish. The center of the star must have a round space where a bulb with the battery can be installed. In the center must be placed a traditional Nativity scene. You may buy a post card at any Orthodox meeting. Each corner of the star is decorated with a picture of an angel except the top corner which should have the picture of Adam and Eve. The star itself can be covered with gold in any form you may find attractive; it could be gold foil, gold contact paper, or any other material you may be familiar with.

There is nothing more refreshing, more inspiring and pure than the clear voices of "colindatori" approaching your door carrying these words: Cine primeste

Steaua frumoasa
Si luminoasa
Cu colturi multe
Si marunte
De la Nasterea lui Christos
Daruite.

Mrs. Peter Lucaci

ROMANIAN FOLK TALES OF CHRISTMASTIDE

When Christ was born long ago in a cave, the stable for animals, his Mother had no blankets to put over him. So, she took some hay and lay it gentle over the sleeping babe, thus warming his little body as well as was possible. In the stable, an ox and a horse watched and Mary asked them to be quiet. The ox obeyed, and he even came to stand near the child and breathed on Him to warm Him. Mary blessed the ox that he should always be a quiet and obedient, content animal. But the horse did not listen to the Virgin Mother! He stamped on the ground, neighed and nibbled from the hay covering the sleeping Jesus, exposing Him to the cool air. Mary was very unhappy with the horse, and as a result, the horse to this very day is unable to stand still, find rest or satisfaction.

+ + +

When Joseph was taking the Virgin Mary to Bethlehem, he had to follow a rocky and hard road. Mary was soon tired, for she was still carrying Jesus in her womb. They looked for a pleasant place to rest, but there was none. They went on and on until, at last, they saw a poplar tree. Mary lay down in its shade, hoping to close her eyes and rest. The tree however, wouldn't stop shaking and rustling its leaves. Schh, schh, schh, it went and poor Mary was not able to close her eyes and rest because of the noise. So, she and Joseph arose and leaving the poplar tree, Mary said: "From now on, you will never stop trembling, shaking and rustling but will always and ever make noise in fair weather and in foul." On and on they traveled toward Bethlehem until they spied an evergreen. Mary listened and heard nothing, she looked and saw the branches of the tree swaying quietly, noiselessly and she went under its spreading branches and there found her needed rest. This is why the fir tree is quiet and peaceful . . . because it once gave shelter under its branches to the Mother of God.

An Orthodox Monk

ROMANIAN CHRISTMAS

Christmas is a religious holy day. On this day, all Christians commemorate the Nativity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Each country has many beautiful customs in connection with Christmas. Being that man is made up of emotions and is sentimental by nature, Christmas brings back various memories to each and everyone, based on our family contact, our surroundings and our own feelings.

Americans of Romanian descent, as so many other Americans of different national origins, have a greater and richer recollection of Christmas. They have the customs of their country of origin, plus those of this country.

In many ways, Christmas has lost its true meaning in this country. It has been commercialized too much. Christ, in many instances, has been forced out by the glitter, gifts, frivolity, purely secular songs and other pagan customs. Santa Claus is no more the Saint Nicholas of Christian legend. Our greeting cards avoid scriptural texts and purely Christian sentiments, but are worldly and profane.

All well-meaning and right-thinking Christians are fearful of this trend, and a strong movement is in force to put Christ back into Christmas and to stress the purely religious and spiritual nature of the holiday.

If you are an American of Romanian descent, and are proud of your heritage, you will understand the true significance of Christmas. All the traditions and customs in connection with Christmas speak of the true nature of Christmas.

For weeks before Christmas, Romanian children learn the traditional carols, which all sing of Christ and the meaning of His Nativity. There are no "Rudolphs," no "Christmas tree," no "sleighbells," etc. On the eve before Christmas, carolers visit the homes of all the faithful to bring the "good tidings." They enact the whole Nativity story in the "Irozi" (Herods).

On Christmas Day everyone goes to church. How useless it is, if you do not go to church to sing His praises, to worship Him and to do His Will.

Yes, there is food and merry-making, as at all births—for a child was born. There are "sarmale, colac and all other goodies." But no one is forgotten on Christmas. Christmas is sharing. No one is poor on Christmas. It is only when we give from our bounty to others that we translate our faith into actions. And that is not only giving gifts to your loved ones. It is giving to the poor. It is that kind act. It is that encouraging word. All this, but without fanfare, without publicity—so your "right hand doesn't know what your left hand does." For the sake of Christ! He has given you all you have. It is not yours for keeps, but just to administer!



Above all, we must bring gifts to the One whose birthday we celebrate. We must be like the wise men and "go unto Bethlehem." He does not want "incense, myrrh or gold." He is the Creator and Owner of all riches. He wants you to do His Will—to love Him, to love your neighbor. It costs nothing—just a firm desire and a strong will!

That is so little in exchange of the greatest gift in the world that God has given us: His onlybegotten Son, who died on the Cross for us and assured us Salvation! This is what counts.

So ~~we~~ Americans of Romanian origin, can preserve our customs, can imbue them with what is good and beautiful of the customs that surround us, but never, never forget the true meaning of Christmas, which is the same in America, as it is in Romania or any other country of the world!

Then, surely our Christmas will be happy and enriching. And so be it!

Rev. Fr. Vasile Hategan

PROJECTS FOR WEE FOLKS

SPICE APPLE: A nice project for little folks is a "spice aple." It's made by taking a fresh apple and pushing whole cloves into it! Once it is completely covered it is rolled in a mixture of equal parts of powdered cinnamon and clove or ginger and a few drops of some essence like orange or rose. Wrap it in tissue or foil to dry and give it as a gift! It can be associated with our first Mother Eve who bit the bitter fruit and lost paradise, but who, through the birth of Christ through the Virgin is brought back to the sweetness of heaven through Gods of reconciliation with man!.

PAPER STARS: The Romanian custom of visiting homes and caroling may not be possible for all the little ones, but they can have the enjoyment of making a little star to hand at home. The center of the five-pointed star is an icon and folded paper sides, following the pattern of a star and glued in place conclude it. The imagination can go wild in the decoration of these little bits of heaven!

NATIVITY

SCENE: The Orthodox icon of the Birth of Christ is rich in figures and stories. A nice project is to have a true icon (not the western manger scene) and let the children make cut-outs which fit into slots on a background of cave skies and so on! It's a good teaching devise to take the little ones into the church and study the icon on the iconostas . . . even if they are too wee to see it well. Just knowing it is there is the best aid we can have.

WINDOW

CANDLE: A custom that needs Mom's approval and supervision (it's what we want isn't it) is this project of placing a lighted candle, real or electric in the window as a sign to the traveling Joseph and Mary that they will find welcome in this Orthodox Christian home!

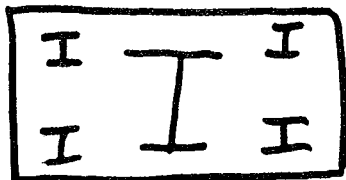
THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT: After reading the Gospel according to the Evangelists and pointing out the flight into Egypt in Matthew 2:13-19 make a "relief call" to the little ones. This would be a good project for teens, too! Ask them what gifts they would give, one per child, to the fleeing family if they had been their neighbors in Bethlehem. Ask them to make a little colored drawing of it and place it on a paper drawing of the flight into Egypt. It could also be a point of discussion . . . what would you grab if you were fleeing the country to save your life and had one choice!

CHRISTMAS PANELS: Class makes a series of Christmas panels to show the Christmas story in sequence. Two or three children may work on panel.

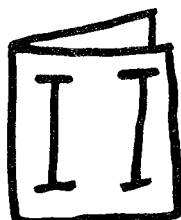
SHELF PAPER CHRISTMAS MURAL: Each child makes an individual mural on a long length of shelf paper. Probable themes: 1. What Christmas means to me.
2. My best Christmas memories.

I + II

- 40 -



(a) Front-Central panel

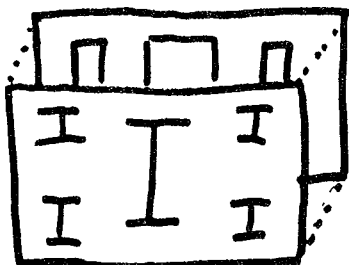


(b) Front of left-panel



(b) Back of right-panel

III

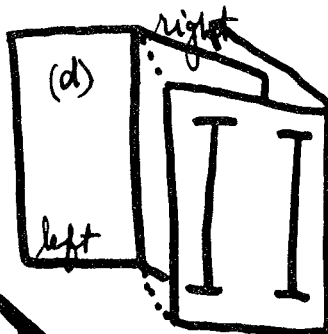


(a) Front-central panel

(c)

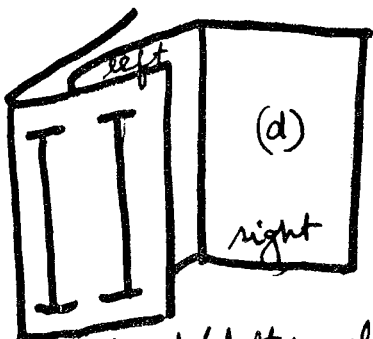
Back-center

IV



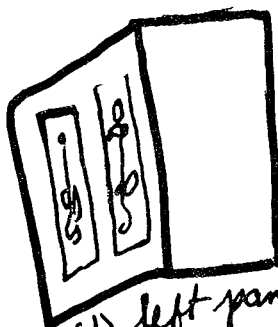
(b) Back of right panel

V

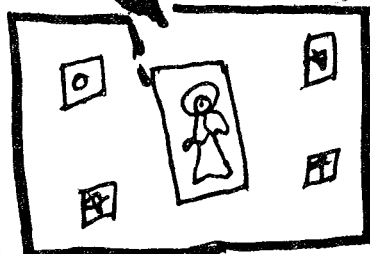


(b) Front of left panel

VI



(d) left panel

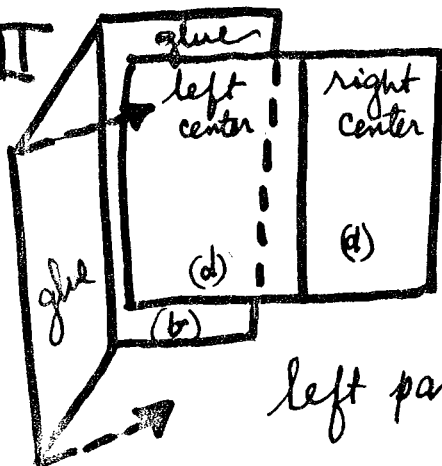


(c)

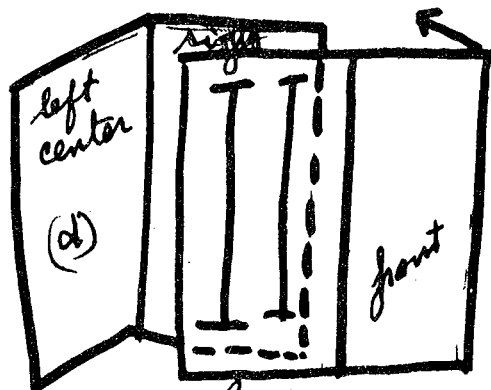


(d) right panel

VII



left panel



Back right panel

PROJECTS FOR WEE FOLKS (continued)

3. Christmas in my Orthodox Church

4. Christmas in my home

Composition of the mural could be developed through crayon, magazine cut-outs, family photographs, chalk or any other art material. This idea is adaptable to any religious holiday.

There are many other nice projects and instructions available in magazines. It's up to the Church School teacher to help the child associate these with the reality of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. Teens seem to be very partial to this feast and it is a good time to bring in the aspects of Orthodox parent-hood, future responsibilities and home-making! Do it before its too late!!!

A PREPARATION CARD

A church school project based on the Bible

Some may be familiar with the "Advent Card". It is a decorated card-like folder having numerous shuttered-windows which open to reveal a scene behind the shutter. Each window has its own little drawing.

A project for children could be to make up such a card, a "Preparation Card" for the coming Nativity of Christ. Instead of sweets or flowers behind the shutter, the following can be drawn:

- a) the saint of the day for the 40 days of preparation
- b) forefathers of Christ, the patriarchs of the O. T., prophets
- c) larger windows for the two feasts of the Mother of God the Presentation: Nov. 21, Conceiving of St. Anna Dec. 9
- d) a larger window of the Birth of Christ should be in the center
- e) a window like (c) for St. Nicholas

The combination is endless. The central theme should be of the Nativity of Christ! This project can be of wide or narrow dimension depending on the interest of teacher and pupils and time. The gamut ranges from Old to New Testament, saints, prophets, and feasts!

Materials

Scissors (or if possible, a single-edge razor blade)

Glue

Colored pencils, papers, paints, glitter. Your imagination is boss!

Six pieces of 9x12 paper heavy but not cardboard nor tag.

Instructions

Carefully prepare 1 piece (a) 9x12 list it front and back

2 pieces (b) 9x12 fold to 9x6 and list front, left-center, right-center, back

1 piece (c) 9x12 list it front and back

2 Pieces (d) 9x12 fold to 9x6 and list front, left-center, right-center, back

The shape of the card is 9" high, 12" center with 2 panels on the sides, 6" each:

- I. Lightly draw the windows desired on pieces (a) front and (b) front-left/back-right panels (only 6"!)
- II. Cut the windows but leave the shutters unfolded, thus:
- III. Lay piece (a) over (c) front and draw the outline of the windows of (a) front onto (c) front
- IV. Lay Piece (b) back right over (d) center-right and draw the outline of the window of (b) back-right onto (d) center-right
- V. Lay piece (b) front left over (d) center left and draw the outline of the window of (b) front left over (d) center left
- VI. Color in the scene! Paint, color or what you will!

A PREPARATION CARD (continued)

VII. Glue!!! Your efforts are taking shape!

Glue (b) left panel center left and right over (d) front and left-center.

Glue (b) right panel center left and right over (d) center right back.

Glue (c) onto (d) [left-panel]center right and (d) [right panel]center left.

Glue (a) onto and over (c) ASA!!!!!!!

There you have it! A work of loving care and spiritual and artistic effort to last for years to come! Don't let the instructions confuse you. They are step-by-step for your convenience!

CREATIVE CHRISTMAS IDEAS FOR THE FAMILY

There is no more important part of the Church, Christian education program than the home itself.

Share these ideas for a creative Christmas with parents of children in your church school.

These tips, plus many more are found in this issue, designed to give specific help for building strengthening the Christian home.

GIANT BIRTHDAY CARD FOR JESUS

Get an 11 X 17 - inch piece of bright construction paper (yellow, red green). Fold it into a booklet (8½x11) and work together as a family to design a giant birthday card for Jesus. Decide what you want the card to say. For example, your message could read: WE NEVER FORGET YOUR BIRTHDAY THANKS FOR HAVING ONE FOR US'

When finished, have each member of the family sign the card, then display it in a prominent spot near your front door. Near the card place a pen and small sign that reads: "You're invited to sign this birthday card for Jesus." When friends and relatives comment on the card, share with them that you feel it is a good way to remember what Christmas is all about and that your family will be presenting" the card to Jesus Christ on Christmas Eve with the prayer of thanksgiving.

"CHRISTMAS IS..." COLLAGE

A collage (French for "stick-on" picture) is an excellent total family activity to express the joy and beauty of Christmas.

To create a collage you will need large sheets of poster board (22x28 inches or 30x40 inches) or butcher paper, glue or rubber cement, scissors, old magazines and Christmas cards, bits of bright yarn, velvet beads, glittery material—in fact, anything you want to use, especially your imagination.

Your Christmas collage will have greater meaning if you choose a theme to focus on. A good all-around theme could be "Christmas Is..." Get everyone thinking about what "Christmas Is..." for them and then start cutting and "sticking on." Be sure everyone takes part. Moms and dads can find good pictures and other items while younger family members do the designing and constructing of the collage.

When finished, hang your collage in a conspicuous place where it can be admired and talked about.

"JESUS PRESENT" BOX

Cover a large shoe box with bright Christmas paper. Cut a slot in the top. Encourage any member of the family who does a loving deed for someone else in Jesus' name during December to write a brief description of the deed on a card or slip of paper. Then without telling anyone, put it in the box as a "gift for Jesus."

On Christmas Day, open the box and read the loving deeds that were done as gifts to the Saviour. At this time talk together about Jesus being God's loving gift to all the world. Thank God for Jesus and pray for opportunities to share God's love with others.

BAKE HIM A CAKE!

Bake a birthday cake for Jesus. Children especially understand that because Christmas is Jesus' birthday there should be a cake! Sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus and plan together what your family can give Him for a gift of love.



A CHRISTMAS PLAY FOR CHILDREN

Children possess charming abilities to enact an event they are told about. The Birth of Jesus lends itself well to being acted out by children. Hopefully, with little guidance, children can play the parts of the personages of the nativity, making up their own little speeches directed to the audience.

The child should be encouraged to write out his own understanding of the part he plays. There is no need for dialogue, but each speech can be independent of the others, i.e., an expression of the one he plays.

Characters can also include nature: the cave, the star, the manger, the hay, the hills, etc. and the animals: cow, donkey, horse, or whatever. Thus, these plus the actual people involved can be of a great or lesser number, depending on the class(es) participating.

Staging can be quite simple: either all wearing light and dark, or in costume. One can also use illustrations made by the child and held up by him during the speech.

The background music for such a staging might well be a soft orchestration played over the record-player. Familiar carols might too readily distract from the speaker. A finale for the program might be the Hymn to the Birthgiver of God from the Liturgy or the tropar of Christmas.

A LITURGICAL PLAYLETTE

The Liturgy provides us with much rich material for pageants for the feast. The first three antiphons are adaptable for this. It is never too much to hear them again. If done slowly and with precision, these antiphons will produce a spiritual uplifting and will also convey the message of joy and the understanding of the meaning of the feast. The third antiphon is to be preferred, if a choice must be made, for it repeats the tropar several times.

A strong voice or a group singing the verse is answered by a larger group singing the refrain. But, emphasize that it should be slow and clear and loud.

THREE ANTIPHONS FROM THE LITURGY OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

First Antiphon (Ps. 111)

Verse: I give thanks to the Lord with all my heart where the virtuous meet and the people assemble.
Refrain: Through the intercessions of the Birthgiver of God, O Savior, save us.
Verse: The works of the Lord are sublime.
Refrain: Through the intercessions.
Verse: Those who delight in them are right to fix their eyes on them.
Refrain: Through the intercessions.
Verse: Every work that he does is full of glory and majesty, and his righteousness can never change.
Refrain: Through the intercessions.
Verse: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
Refrain: Through the intercessions.
Verse: Now and ever and unto ages of ages, amen.
Refrain: Through the intercessions.

Second Antiphon (Ps. 112)

Verse: Happy the man who fears the Lord by joyfully keeping his commandments!
Refrain: O Son of God born of the Virgin, save us who sing to you: Alleluia!
Verse: Children of such a man will be powers on earth, descendants of the upright will always be blessed.
Refrain: O Son of God.
Verse: There will be riches and wealth for his family, and his righteousness will never change.
Refrain: O Son of God.
Verse: For the upright he shines like a lamp in the dark, he is merciful, tenderhearted, virtuous.
Refrain: O Son of God.
Verse: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
Refrain: O Son of God.
Verse: Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.
Refrain: O Son of God.

Third Antiphon (Ps. 110)

Verse: The Lord's oracle to you, my Lord: "Sit at my right hand!"
Refrain: Your nativity, O Christ our God, has dawned to the world the light of understanding! For by it,
(Tropar) those who worshipped the stars, were taught by a star to adore you, the Son of Righteousness and to know you the dawn from above, O Lord, glory to you!
Verse: I will make your enemies a footstool for you.
Refrain: Your nativity.
Verse: The Lord will force all your enemies under the sway of your sceptre.
Refrain: Your nativity.
Verse: Royal dignity was yours from the day you were born, on the holy mountair.
Refrain: Your nativity.
Verse: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
Refrain: Your nativity.
Verse: Now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.
Refrain: Your nativity.

In the case of each of the antiphons, the verse of "Glory" and "Now" may be sung as one verse concluded with the refrain.

An Orthodox Monk



IROZII (THE CHRISTMAS MASKERS)

IROZII, is a Christmas play. It was not written by an inspired writer. It is a folkplay. It is the result of people's imagination, and only what was accepted by all, has survived until our days. Basically the following translation which is already an abbreviation of the Romanian version, is the same throughout the country with variations in each province, that is, in each part of the country there are additional new personages.

This folk drama has nothing in common with the "mistères" religious plays of the Middle Ages, first of all because our Orthodox Church does not conceive as proper the representation of the Virgin Mary, or Jesus on the stage, nor it has anything in common with the religious plays of Constantinople.

Being an integral part of our folklore, the folk drama "Irozii" is played by the young boys in the country, on Christmas day, when they are going from house to house just as the carolers do with their carol and star songs. The costumes vary according to the means and imagination, but always precisely indicative for each role.

It was adapted by the professional actors, by the schools and made available in printed form.

SCENE I

HEROD	From the East somewhere they ride;
Captain!	Learned men and kings they be,
CAPTAIN	Robed in finery these three.
Herod's wish is my command.	By a star they've been beguiled
HEROD	To find Nazareth's new child
What tidings good or bad	Called the Christ — a lowly name —
Do you bring to me, my lad?	The Messiah they proclaim.
CAPTAIN	HEROD
In the streets along the way	I would better informed be;
Three strange men we caught today.	Quickly bring these men to me.
HEROD	(The Captain leaves and returns with the three Magi).
Who might they be? Do you know	THE MAGI
Where they come from, where they go?	(Together)
CAPTAIN	Abuse is an ugly trait,
On horses they came astride,	Unfit for a head of state.
	Has the power of the throne
	Turned Herod's vain heart to



stone?

GASPAR
(To Herod)

We are honored, Potentate,
To come before one so great.

HEROD

You dolts with your visionings,
Robed in all your bright trap-
pings!
Tell me, what seek you as
kings?

GASPAR

Noble Herod, we wish you
Happiness in all you do.

HEROD

Empty words! A stratagem
To invade Jerusalem.

GASPAR

We have come from lands afar,
Guided by a brilliant star;
Our journey is ended here
For the star did disappear.
We went through the market-
place

Asking for the populace:
"Can you tell us where to find
The new king of all mankind?"
But your soldiers soon appeared,
With our quest they interfered;
We were placed under arrest
And brought before you in jest.

HEROD

I would thank you brotherly
If each one of you would be
More explicit of your quest —
In this I have interest
Greater than you might sus-
pect —

(To Melchior)

What king are you in effect?

MELCHIOR

Melchior, great one, is my
name.

I have heard prophets proclaim
A new king's impending birth,
One Who comes to rule the
earth.

Now I seek this new-born King
To bow down to Him and bring
All my kingdom cheerfully,
For His servant I would be.

HEROD

(Aside)

Foolish one, you'll bow no
head;

I will cut it off instead.

(To Balthazar)

What great king might you be,
sir,
That you cause me such a stir?

BALTHAZAR

Balthazar, an Eastern shah,
Come to find the Messiah,
To pay Him the homage due
To a God holy and true.

HEROD

(Aside)

You'll pay homage to no one
After with you I am done!

(To Gaspar)

And you, of the evil eyes,
Let me hear you say your say.

GASPAR

Does god Herod wish to know
What prompts me to travel so?

HEROD

But of course I want to know.



HEROD

I will not stand in your way;
Let me hear you say your say.

GASPAR

Jeremiah prophesied
(Scriptures cannot be denied)
That one day a child will come,
A new King — a Holy One.
We have been led by His star,
Travelling from places far
To prove that the Christ is
here,
And tell of Him far and near.

HEROD

Scriptures are but heresies!
Where find you these prophe-
sies?

GASPAR

In the words of ancient seers,
Recorded for many years.

HEROD

And what do they say will be?

GASPAR

What is told in prophesy:
That one of the Israelites
Will destroy the Antichrists.

HEROD

But which one would dare to
try?

GASPAR

Look well! Truth is in my eye.
He of whom I speak these
things,
Lord of lords and King of
kings,
Comes with great and holy
power
All heretics to devour.

Could it be by some chance
slight
That you are an Edomite?

HEROD

That is my heredity.
And what great king might
you be?

GASPAR

In Arabia the land
Where I rule with gentle hand
I am known as Gaspar, "he
Who his tribes rules right-
eously"

GASPAR

Now that you have heard our
lies,
Will you favor us likewise?

HEROD (Drawing his sword)

You barbarians from the East!
Would you make me out a
beast?

When my name is called out
loud

Every bird hides in a cloud.
When I choose to stamp my
foot

Every tree shakes to the root.
(Flashing the sword)

Here's your new king, sharp
and smoothe,

Eager any throat to soothe!

MELCHIOR

Balthazar, astronomer,
With the stars above confer.
Let fire and brimstone rain
Down upon this tyrant vain
Until he from wrong will part,
And take Christ into his heart.



BALTHAZAR

Don't you fear the wrongs you
do
Will some day befall you, too?

HEROD

Evil men of ill intent,
Do not hold me in contempt!
But one word spoken by me
And reduced to slaves you'll be!

GASPAR

Herod is more than depraved
If he would have us enslaved.

HEROD

Captain!

CAPTAIN

Herod's wish is my command.

HEROD

Take these babblings fools
away
To prison without delay!
Put them in the swamps to
work,
There perhaps they will not
smirk.
Let them dig until they die
If Herod they dare defy.

GASPAR

(Kneeling and praying)

God on high, Divinity,
Hear me in my fervent plea:
On this hateful monarch send
Plagues for eight long years on
end;

Let fire rain down from the
sky
To destroy his castle high;
Show him by your thundering
That Christ is the new-born
King.

(Claps of thunder)

HEROD

(Shaken and humbled)

Friends, my harsh words
please forget;
I was terrible upset.
My thoughts are much clearer
now,
Your mouths spoke the truth,
I vow.
Go in freedom, seek this King,
When you find Him, to me
bring
Word of where He now is kept.
(My behavior was inept).
I, too, want to worship Him
As a God, with prayer and
hymn.

GASPAR

O, great Herod, can it be
That the truth at last you see?
We dared not hope to impart
To you such a change of heart.

(Aside)

Do not think you can deceive
Three Wise Men with this
reprieve.

(The Magi Exit)

(End of Scene I)



SCENE II

HEROD

Captain!

CAPTAIN

Herod's wish is my command.

HEROD

Go into the city now,
Find a child of tender brow
One unlearned, yet not un-
couth,
One whose lips speak only
truth.

CAPTAIN

I depart, O noble king,
Such a one to quickly bring.
(The Carolers begin to sing as
the Captain goes. After they
have finished, the Captain re-
turns with the Child, who
kneels before Herod and cros-
ses its hands over its breast).

CAPTAIN

Master, I have brought a child
Of few years and temper mild.

HEROD

Young one, full of innocence,
Who have never known pre-
tence,
Can you tell me anything
Of a Christ, a new-born King?

CHILD

Of Christ I know everything,
My good, king and noble king.

HEROD

Out of whose issue is He?

CHILD

Out of the Virgin Mary.

HEROD

How long will He be on earth?

CHILD

Thirty-three years from His
birth.
When at thirty He arrives,
John the Baptist will baptize
Him, the world of sin to
cleanse —
Thus Adam's transgression
ends.

HEROD

Will there be anyone who
Speaks as knowingly as you?

CHILD

Four Evangelists, my lord,
His holy life will record.

HEROD

Can you name, my cherubim,
The four who will write of
Him?

CHILD

Matthew, Mark, Luke and
John mild.
Will by men Crist be reviled?



CHILD

There will be many who hate.

HEROD

Be specific, child, relate
The names of His enemies.

CHILD

Long before the Sadducees,
The Scribes and Pharisees, too,
First and foremost, there is
— YOU!

HEROD

(Taken aback)

So! I am only the first
Who after His blood will thirst.
Tell me, will the haters harm
This Messiah of evil charm?

CHILD

Before Pilate He'll be haled,
And upon a cross be nailed.

HEROD

Will He rot there in disgrace?

CHILD

No. In a tomb they will place
His frail body. A stone great
They will set to seal His fate.
Watched by soldiers He will be,
Sent there by authority.

HEROD

And how long will He remain
In this tomb that you explain?

CHILD

On the third day He will rise
From His temporal demise,
And the throne He will ascend
Of a Kingdom without end.

HEROD

Little one, you tell a lie
When you say Christ will not
die.

CHILD

Without end His reign will be.

HEROD

Do you dare to question me?

CHILD

Herod, "without end" I say!

HEROD

(Drawing his sword)

Trusty sword, this demon, slay!
(He runs, his sword into the
Child. The Child dies).

THE CAROLERS

(Singing)

Abuse is an ugly trait,
Unfit for a head of state.
Has the power of the throne
Turned Herod's vain heart to
stone?

HEROD

(Placing one foot on the body
of the Child, he holds his
sword before him with both
hands and raises his eyes to
the heavens as he speaks).

O gods of antiquity,
Rulers over land and sea,
From this child that I have
slain

The blood flows to wash the
stain

Of the blasphemies of three
Shameful kings who came to
me.



With their evil tongues they	(He lowers the sword and
lied,	holds it as though ready to do
And my godlike patience tried.	battle)
Fourteen thousand babies more	O gods, put strength in my
I will slay to you before	hand,
I have finished my attempt	To my weapon give command:
To extirpate their contempt.	That from the Hebraic seed
With my sword steeped in	No Messiah shall proceed!
young blood	
I will cleanse you of their mud.	(End of Scene II)

COLINDELE (CAROL SONGS)

Before I say anything at all concerning the "Colinde", I must point out that the Romanian Christmas is primarily the Joy of Nativity, the awareness that 1974 years ago our Saviour was born, the gratitude for having been given the Son of God come for our salvation.

On the children's part it is the joy to fulfill all the customs, the joy to sing carols in the severe winter days by the frozen windows outside the house. The expectation of these holy days in order to express in a multitude of verses the great event, its various phases, is a real joy. The Romanian children do not expect gifts. The Christmas tree even though is being accepted more and more widely, originally is not a Romanian custom, and where is no Christmas tree, nobody misses it.

There are too many other joys of giving instead of receiving. And this giving is to bring joy to every house in the village or town, by entering their house and sing the carol songs. There is nothing more elevating than the sound of silvery voices heard somewhere far on a frosty Christmas day. The bunches of children bundled heavily, with red, red cheeks are looking forward to this day. Their reward is not the material one, because they do not expect anything at all in some instances, and what they get is candy, walnuts, apples and home made goodies.

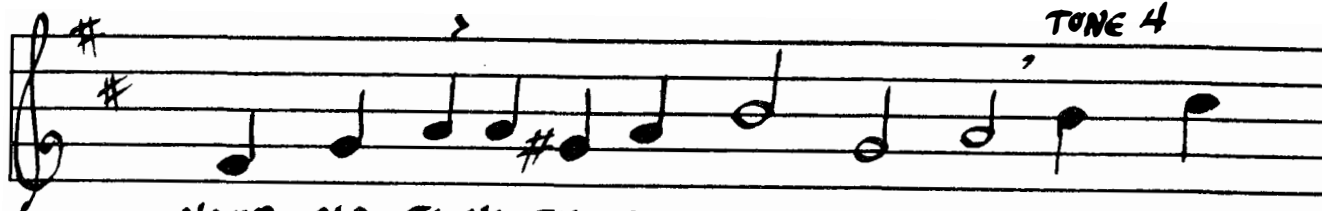
It is December 24 when the first children's groups start filling the village with the most awaited sounds of familiar tunes. And let us not overlook the too little ones to join the group whose greatest fun is receiving the carolers.

The groups of adults start singing their good tidings late afternoon and evening.



TROPAR OF THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

TONE 4



YOUR NA-TI-VI-TY O CHRIST OUR GOD HAS DAWNED



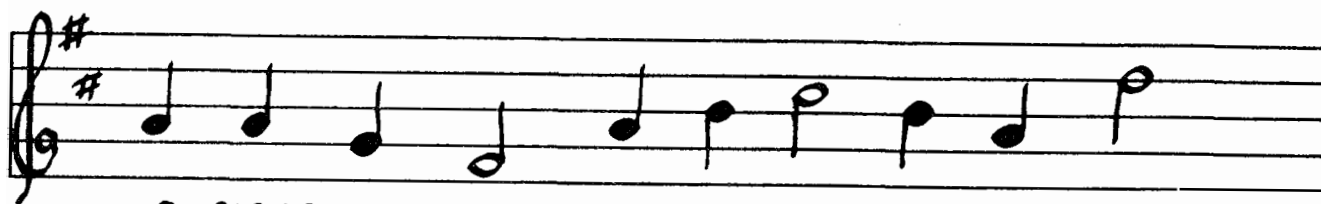
TO THE WORLD THE LIGHT OF UN-DER-STAND-ING,



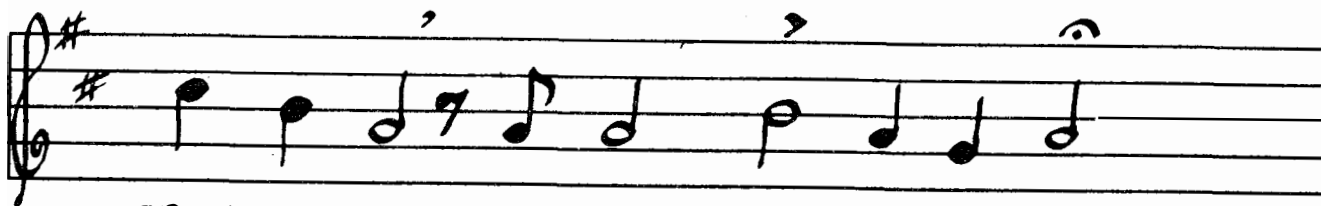
FOR BY IT THOSE WHO WOR-SHIPPED THE STARS



WERE TAUGHT BY A STAR TO A-DORE YOU THE SUN



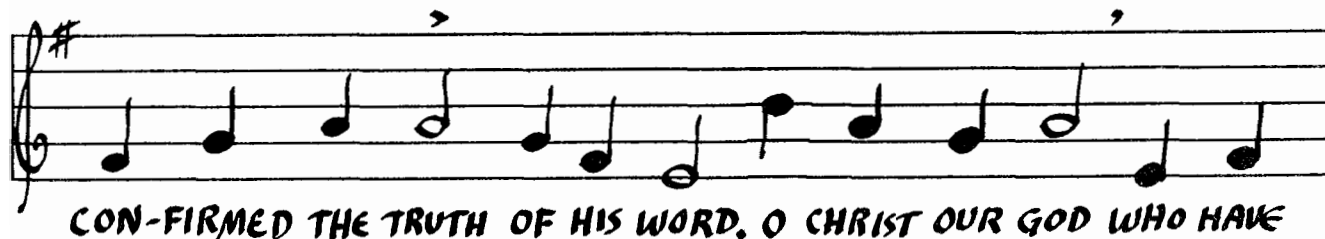
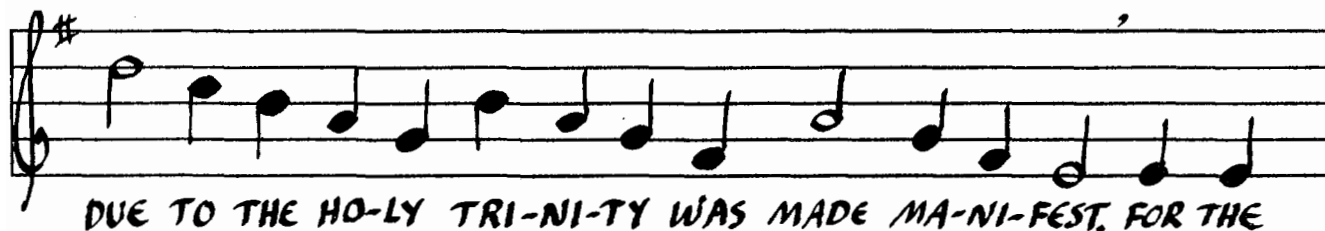
OF RIGHT-EOUS-NESS AND TO KNOW YOU THE DAWN



FROM A-BOVE O LORD, GLO-RY TO YOU.

TROPAR OF THE THEOPHANY

TONE 1



1ST ANTIPHON

TONE 2



THROUGH THE IN-TER-CES-SIONS OF THE BIRTH-GIV-ER OF GOD



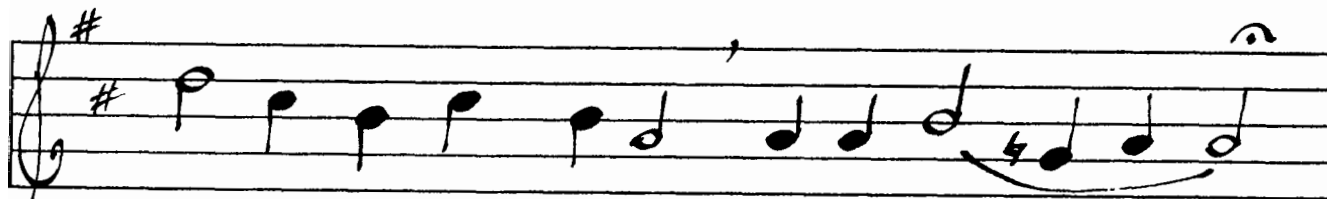
O SAV-IOR SAVE- US.

2ND ANTIPHON

TONE 2

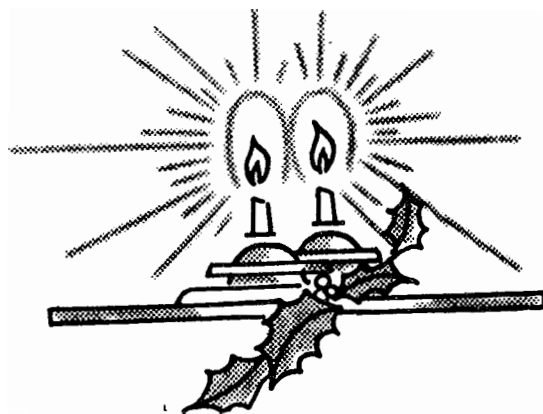
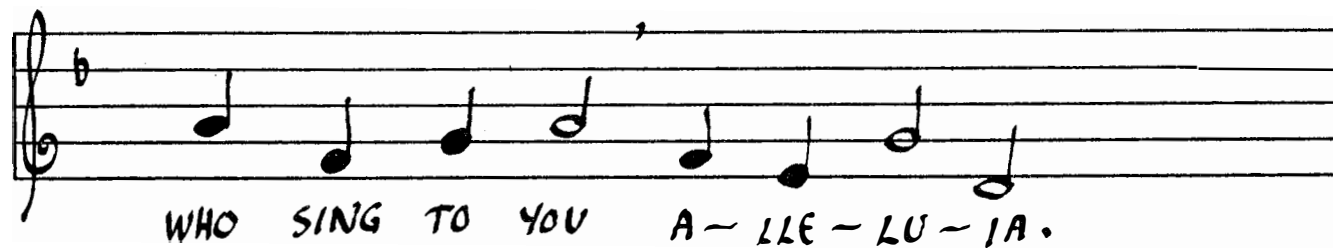
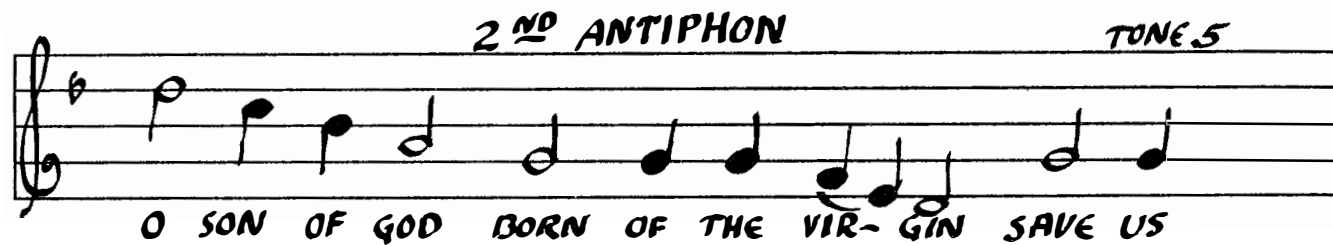


O SON OF GOD BORN OF THE VIR-GIN



SAVE US WHO SING TO YOU A-LLE-LU - - - IA.





ROMANIAN CHRISTMAS CAROL PROGRAM WITH BIBLICAL TEXTS

There are many beautiful Romanian Christmas carols, all of which are based upon texts in the Bible. The Church school children, the choir or some other parish organization can very well make up a program of Christmas carols interspersed with appropriate biblical texts and ending with community singing of the most familiar Romanian Christmas carols. Herewith we are including an outline of a program presented in Cleveland, including some of the music. It can be adapted or varied to meet your own needs.

We are also presenting a program of English carols with appropriate biblical texts. This, too, can be adapted and varied.

To enhance the program, you may also use appropriate Christmas slides. The carols and biblical texts can be a background to these scenes.

Mrs. Vasile Hategan

Choir: Sculati Boieri
Choir: Astazi Proorocirile

Narrator: "Si iata ca un inger al Domnului s'a infatisat inaintea lor, si slava Domnului a stralucit imprejurul lor. Ei s'au infricosat foarte tare. Dar ingerul le-a zis: Nu va temeti: caci va aduc o veste buna, care va fi o mare bucurie pentru tot norodul: astazi in cetatea lui David, vi s'a nascut un Mintuitor, care este Hristos, Domnul. Iata semnul, dupa care-L veti cunoaste: veti gasi un prunc infasat in scutece si culcat intru'o iesle." Si deodata, impreuna cu ingerul s'a unit o multime de oaste cereasca, laudand pe Dumnezeu, si zicand: "Slava lui Dumnezeu in locurile prea inalte, si pace pe pamant intre oamenii placuti Lui." (Luca 2:9-14)

Choir: Intru Cei De Sus, Marire

Narrator: "Dupa ce S'a nascut Isus in Betleemul din Iudea, in zilele imparatului Irod, iata ca au venit niste magi din Rasarit la Ierusalim, si au intrebat: "Unde este Imparatul de curand nascut al Iudeilor? Fiindca l-am vazut steaua in Rasarit, si am venit sa ne inchinam Lui." (Matei 2:1-2)

Choir: Trei Crai Dela Rasarit

Narrator: "Dupa ce au plecat ingerii de la ei, ca sa se intoarca in cer, pastorii au zis unii catre altii: "Haidem sa mergem pana la Betleem, si sa vedem ce ni s'a spus si ce ne-a facut cunoscut Domnul. S'au dus in graba, si au gasit pe Maria, pe Iosif, si pruncul culcat in iesle. Dupa ce L-au vazut, au istorisit ce li se spusese despre Prunc. (Luca 2:15-17)

Choir: Veniti Astazi Credinciosii

Choir: Nunta Din Cana

Choir: Verses 1,2

Narrator: Verses 3, 4, 5

Choir: Verses 6, 7, 8

Narrator: Verses 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

Choir: Verse 16

Narrator: "Acest inceput al semnelor Lui l-a facut Isus in Cana din Galilea. El Si-a aratat slava Sa, si ucenicii Lui au crezut in El." (Ioan 2:11)

Congregational singing - O Ce Veste
Trei Pastori
Steaua Sas Rasare
Any other carols of your choice

Adapted by Mrs. Vasile Hategan

5. Sculați boieri nu dormiți

Moderat

mf

Scu-lați beieri nu dor-miți Domnul Ii-sus Hristos.

Vă scu-lați și vă ru-gați Domnul Ii-sus Hri-stos

Vă scu-lați și slu-gi-le s'a-prin-dă lu-mi-ni-le

să mă-tu-re curți-le. Domnul Ii-sus Hristos.

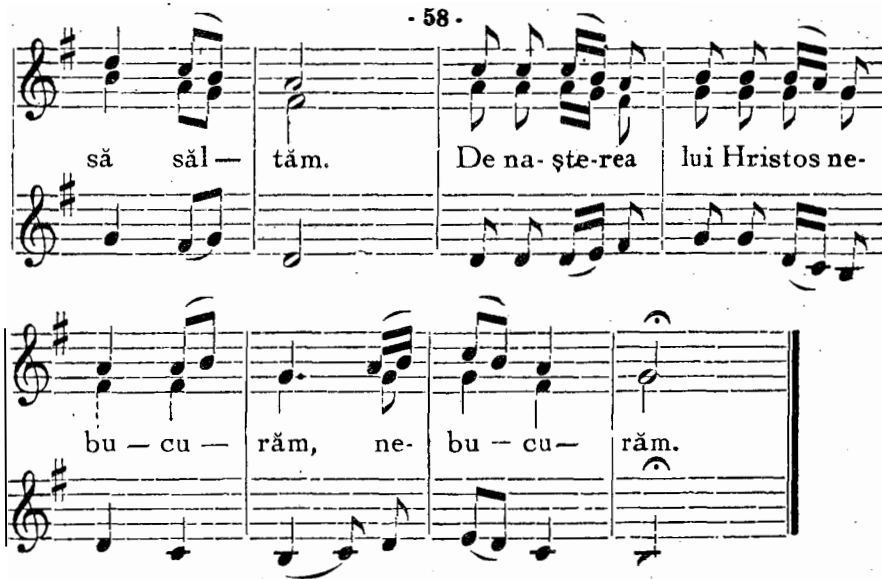
2. Mărire lui Dumnezeu, Domnul Iisus Hristos
C'a trimis pe Fiul Său, Domnul Iisus Hristos
Mielușel nevinovat, Dumnezeu adevărat,
In scutece înfășat, Domnul Iisus Hristos.

3. Moisi piatra a lovit, Domnul Iisus Hristos
Și apă a izvorât Domnul Iisus Hristos
Munților și văilor, Să serbați și voi cu noi,
Că ni s'a născut Hristos, tuturor de folos.

12. Veniți astăzi credincioșii...

Vioiu

1. Ve-niți astăzi credin-cio-șii să săl-tăm,



2. Că El astăzi în Vifleem s'a născut,
Precum l-au vestit proorocii de demult.
3. Din Maria Preacurata s'a născut,
Mântuire astăzi nouă s'a făcut.
4. În iesle dobitocească s'a culcat,
Ca un prunc mic în scutece înfășat.
5. Ingerii din cer cântare au adus,
Lui Dumnezeu mărire 'ntru cei de sus.
6. Păstorii cu fluerile îl măresc,
Pentru Dânsul lui Dumnezeu mulțumesc.
7. Cei trei crai dela răsărit se ivesc,
Aur smirna și tămâie-i dăruiesc.
8. Veniți dar toți credincioșii să săltăm,
Pe Hristos cu umilință să-l laudăm.

14. Astăzi proorociile



- | | |
|--|--|
| 2. Căci Mesia cel dorit,
Astăzi în lume-a sosit.
În lume-a venit Domnul,
Să mântuie tot omul. | 4. Cu care sfințenie
A covârșit cetele
Cetele cele de sus
Fiind Maica lui Iisus. |
| 3. Din Fecioara Preacinstită
De Dumnezeu dăruită
Cărea din veci e sfințită
Și de îngeri preamărită. | 5. Lui Iisus cel luminat,
Mielușel nevinovat.
Pe care Irod cerca,
Să-l taie cu sabia. |
| 6. Și măcar că a' ncercat
Pe Iisus nu l-a tăiat
Căci Tatăl l-a apărat
De Irod cel blăstămat. | |

15. Trei crai dela răsărit

Moderat

1. Trei crai de la ră-să-rit cu stea-
ua-u că-lă-to-rit. Și pe ca-le cum mer-
geau, stea-ua 'na-in-te-o ve-deau.

2. Și cum stau și s'odihneau
Steaua iar li s'arăță.
La Irod când au ajuns,
Steaua iar li s'a ascuns.
3. Magii dacă au plecat,
Steaua iar s'a arătat.
S'au mers până ce-au văzut,
Unde Hristos s'a născut.
4. Magii-atunci s'au bucurat,
Și-n peșteră au intrat,
Domnului s'au închinat,
Ca și unui Împărat.

16. Intru cei de sus mărire

Moderat

1. In-tru cei de sus mă - ri - re,
pre pă-mânt bu - na vo-i - re.

The musical score is for a song in 2/4 time, key of D major. It features a piano accompaniment and a vocal line. The tempo is marked 'Moderat' and the dynamics are 'mf'. The lyrics are in Romanian. The first system shows the vocal line starting with '1. In-tru cei de sus mă - ri - re,' and the piano accompaniment. The second system continues with 'pre pă-mânt bu - na vo-i - re.' and ends with a double bar line.

2. Căci s'a născut mult cinstită,
Sămânța cea răsărită.

4. Din brazda cea nearată,
Din Feciara Preacurată.

3. Din a Duhului Sfânt rouă,
Cea folositoare nouă.

20. Nunta din Cana

Vioiu

1. La nun - ta ce sa n - tâm - plat în
Ca - na Ga - li - le - ii,
fo - st-a și li - sus che - mat în

The musical score is for a song in 2/4 time, key of D major. It features a piano accompaniment and a vocal line. The tempo is marked 'Vioiu' and the dynamics are 'mf'. The lyrics are in Romanian. The first system shows the vocal line starting with '1. La nun - ta ce sa n - tâm - plat în' and the piano accompaniment. The second system continues with 'Ca - na Ga - li - le - ii,' and the third system continues with 'fo - st-a și li - sus che - mat în'.

Ca - na Ga - li le - ii,

fo - st-a și Ii - sus che - mat în

Ca - na Ga - li le - cii

2. Și vrând triști a nu-i lăsa, a venit cu Maică-Sa.
3. Iar șezând la masă bând, băutura ne-ajungând,
4. Toți cei câți la masă stau, în tăcere se uitau,
5. Necutezând a'ntreba, de mai este vin sau ba.
6. Iară mama lui Iisus, văzând că nu-i vin de-ajuns,
7. Zise: Fiul meu iubit, vinul li s'a ispăvit.
8. Iară Iisus s'a sculat, și slugile a chemat,
9. Șase vase de-apă-a pus, și le-a umplut până sus.
10. Hristos cruce a făcut, apa'n vin s'a prefăcut.
11. Și-a zis să dea'ntâi la nun, să guste vinul de-i bun
12. Iar nunul dac'a gustat, cu glas mare a strigat:
13. Ceia ce fac mese mari, dau întâiu vinuri mai tari,
14. Iar dacă se veselesc și de cel prost mai primesc;
15. Iar noi cel prost l-am băut, și pe cel bun l-au ținut.
16. Atunci toți au cunoscut, minunea ce s'a făcut.

DECORATING THE TREE WITH A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

The Christmas Tree has been adopted by the Orthodox Church in America and is one of the most universal decorations during the Yuletide season. The decorating of the tree can be a church school or community project in connection with a meaningful program outlined herewith. There is a Christian significance not only in the tree itself, but also in the ornaments which are placed upon the boughs.

As each child places a different ornament upon the tree, a narrator can read the appropriate scriptural text (and you may have another narrator give the explanation.)

Carols to convey the significance of the ornament can be sung as a background. The decorating of the tree can end with community singing of Romanian or English carols, some of which are contained herein. Others can be easily obtained.

The following program was successfully presented at St. Mary's Church in Cleveland, with carols sung by the mothers of the children. It was adapted and revised by Mrs. Vasile Hategan and Miss Mary Ghetia.

-
- Narrator: The Christmas tree is more than a holiday decoration. There is Christian significance in the evergreen tree and the variety of ornaments placed upon its boughs.
- Choir: O, Tannenbaum
- Narrator: The Evergreen trees are symbolic of everlasting life.
- Scripture: John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."
- Choir: As Lately We Watched
- Narrator: The Star represents the star the Wise Men followed. It was an unusual star heralding an unusual event - the coming of the Son of God - without sin, but One who would suffer for our sins.
- Scripture: Matthew 2:2 - Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship Him.
- Choir: Angels From the Realm of Glory
- Narrator: Ball Ornaments are reminders of our world created by God. We are to go into the world and preach the Gospel - Also an emblem of the eternity circle.
- Scripture: Matthew 28:19 & 20 - "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.
- Narrator: Assorted colors of the Christmas Ball-Ornaments denote that the Gospel is for all the different nations and races upon the earth.
- Scripture: Acts 17:26 - God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.
- Narrator: Angels are mentioned three times - in the scriptures, Annunciation to Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, and the Angel Choir.
- Scripture: Luke 2:13 & 14 - And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.
- Choir: Angels We Have Heard on High
- Narrator: Candles and lights denote that Christ came as the Light of the World.

Scripture: John 8:12 - Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, "I am the light of the world : he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Narrator: Bells were on the hem of the garments of the high priest in the temple. When the people heard the tinkling of the bells they knew that God had accepted the offering. Jesus offered himself in sacrifice for our sins. The bell has a tongue. We, too, have a tongue. We are to go preach the Gospel to all nations.

Scripture: Mark 16: 15 & 16 - And he said unto them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Choir: Come All Ye Shepherds

Narrator: Reference is made in the Bible about Sheep and the Lamb of God.

Scripture: John 1:29 - "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."

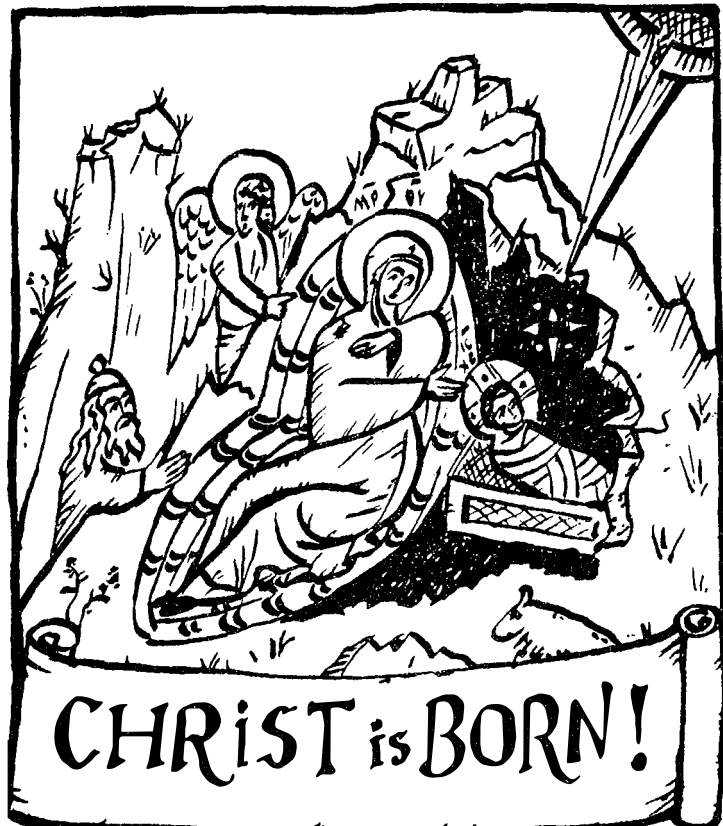
Narrator: Candy Canes are replicas of the shepherds crook that are used to bring sheep back into the field. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who brings us back to God.

Choir: My Sheep Were Grazing on a Plain

Narrator: The 23rd Psalm - The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Choir: Let Our Gladness Know No End

Group Singing: Come All Ye Faithful
Silent Night
Joy to the World
O Ce Veste
Trei Pastori
Ia Sculati



O Christmas Tree

Traditional German Tune

Arranged by Norman Lloyd

Sweetly F C7 F Gm D Gm C7 F

1. O Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, Your branch-es green de - light us. O
2. O Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, You give us so much pleas-ure! O

The first system of the musical score for 'O Christmas Tree'. It features a treble and bass staff in 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is in the treble staff, and the bass staff provides a simple accompaniment. The lyrics are written below the staff, with two verses. The first verse is '1. O Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, Your branch-es green de - light us. O' and the second verse is '2. O Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, You give us so much pleas-ure! O'. The system ends with a double bar line.

C7 F Gm D Gm C7 F

Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, Your branch-es green de - light us. They're
Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, You give us so much pleas-ure! How

The second system of the musical score. It continues the melody and accompaniment from the first system. The lyrics are 'Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, Your branch-es green de - light us. They're' and 'Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, You give us so much pleas-ure! How'. The system ends with a double bar line.

Bb F Gm C7 F C7

green when sum - mer days are bright; They're green when win - ter snow is white. O
oft at Christ - mas - tide the sight, O green fir tree, gives us de-light! O

The third system of the musical score. It continues the melody and accompaniment. The lyrics are 'green when sum - mer days are bright; They're green when win - ter snow is white. O' and 'oft at Christ - mas - tide the sight, O green fir tree, gives us de-light! O'. The system ends with a double bar line.

F C7 F F D Gm D Gm C7 F

Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, Your branch-es green de - light us.
Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, You give us so much pleas-ure!

The fourth system of the musical score. It continues the melody and accompaniment. The lyrics are 'Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, Your branch-es green de - light us.' and 'Christ-mas Tree, O Christ-mas Tree, You give us so much pleas-ure!'. The system ends with a double bar line.

Angels

From the Realms of Glory

James Montgomery

Henry Smart

mf ^C

1. An - gels, from the realms of glo - ry, Wing your flight o'er
 2. Shep - herds in the field a - bid - ing, Watch - ing o'er your
 3. Sa - ges, leave your con - tem - pla - tions, Bright - er vis - ions

mf

^{G7} ^C ^{G7} ^{Am} ^{E7}

all the earth; Ye, who sang cre - a - tion's sto - ry,
 flocks by night; God with man is now re - sid - ing,
 beam a - far; Seek the great De - sire of na - tions,

^{Am} ^{E7} ^{Am} ^G ^{D7} ^G ^{G7}

cresc. *f*

Now pro - claim Mes - si - ah's birth: } Come and wor - ship,
 Yon - der shines the in - fant light: }
 Ye have seen His na - tal star: }

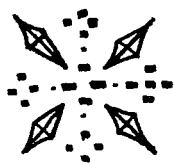
cresc. *f*

^C ^{C7} ^F ^C ^{G7} ^{Am} ^{G7} ^C

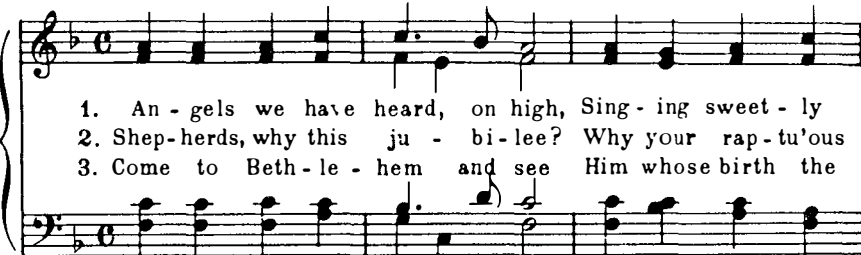
ff

Come and wor - ship, Wor - ship Christ, the new - born King.

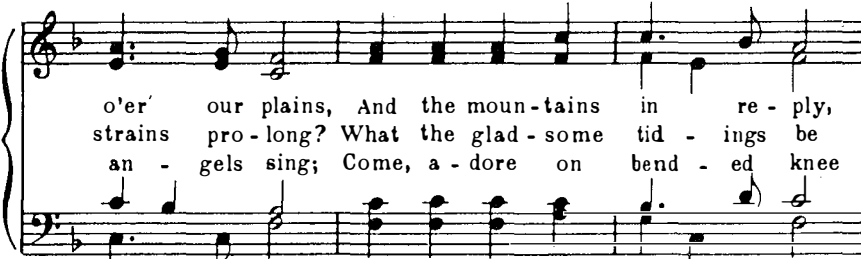
ff



Angels We Have Heard On High

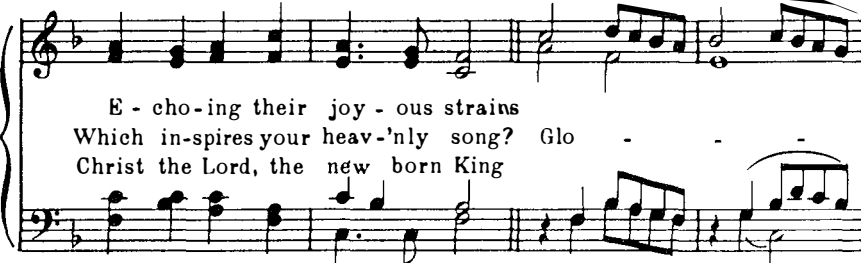


1. An - gels we have heard, on high, Sing - ing sweet - ly
2. Shep - herds, why this ju - bi - lee? Why your rap - tu'ous
3. Come to Beth - le - hem and see Him whose birth the



o'er' our plains, And the moun - tains in re - ply,
strains pro - long? What the glad - some tid - ings be
an - gels sing; Come, a - dore on bend - ed knee

Refrain



E - cho - ing their joy - ous strains
Which in - spires your heav - 'nly song? Glo - - -
Christ the Lord, the new born King



- - - ri - a • in ex - cel - sis De - o.

This is a traditional French carol which is usually identified by its extended *Gloria* after each verse of the hymn.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR

It is the time when we will all be receiving greetings for the New Year -- and giving them. We, too, want to greet our readers with a true Romanian New Year wish. In Romania, men go from house to house with a real plow or a "buhai", a sort of drum with strands of a horse's tail, which when pulled back and forth, make the sound of a bull (whence the name). The younger children tap you lightly on a shoulder with a branch decorated with flowers and tinsel and throw wheat in the house, as they recite this New Years Greeting:

May your health be strong
And your life long:
As an apple tree
As a pear stately
As a rose-bush fair
Blossoming beyond compare:
Strong as a granite rock
Quick as an arrow's shock
Hard as an iron bar
Tougher than steel by far.
May your health be great
Vast herds at your gate;
May sheep in your fold
Multiply untold:
As nails in your gable
So gold on your table
A New Year with happiness
And in everything success.

(This translation done so well by Mr. Eli Popa and published in the 1958 "America" Calendar appropriately expresses our sentiments.)

NEW YEAR LESSONS

~~The~~ past is gone - gone forever -
Hereafter to return never,
Today's sorrow, coming after
On the morrow may be laughter
And hate and scorn, born of today,
On the morrow may pass ~~away~~.
Sorrow and grief bear many tears
Which pass away with coming years
Looking backward, ever we see,
Fair times that still we wish to be
But in the past was toil and pain
We wish not to return again.
On through the past time we had led;
We cannot turn, the past is dead.
And there is hope of greater things
Than looking back now ever brings
Therefore in time that is before,
Strive on and on - look back no more,
Achieve above things that will last;
Let NOW excel the fading past.

- A. O. Goldfinch, Jr.

THE NEW YEAR

The old year has run its course – we stand on the brink of the new. We look back on the old year from a general as well as personal point of view with a kind of regret, as if parting from an old friend. We feel at least that we are cognizant of what is past; we know both the good and the bad which it held. We may have our satisfactions, we may have our regrets – but they are done with. What is done is done. There is a finality about the past which, in the insecurity of the present, is almost comforting. We can rustle over the pages of the last year and read its story and draw our conclusions. "We spend our years as a tale that is told." (Psalms 90:9)

In contrast, the new year lies ahead a still unwritten book. What will those virgin pages hold? In how much joy or in how much blood and human suffering will the narrative be written? Will the writing on the pages of the coming year tell of peace or war, of slavery or freedom, or life or death?

Seldom has a New Year started with so much uncertainty; and apprehension stalks us like a horrid ghost. Like children we yearn to put out our hand and grasp that of a true and dependable friend. We want to be assured that we are not alone – that ultimately we shall be safe and that no destruction will come to our homes nor any harm to those who are dear to us. We would like to be convinced that the god "security" whom we have so carefully built up, has no feet of clay.

How do we as Christians look upon the New Year? What does the New Year symbolize to us? It tells us for one thing that it is one thousand nine hundred and seventy four years since the Word became incarnate and dwelt with us; nearly two thousand years in time in which again and again we have failed to be worthy of God's love. We have failed because we have ever and again tried to work things out in our way – instead of following God's way. We have run around in circles, fought wars to end war and built defenses that have crumbled before new weapons.

But let us not paint too dark a picture of our past misdeeds. Our failures can be seen also as a sign that we have tried, and that we are aware that we can do better – and strive to do so. We are increasingly conscious of the leaven implanted by Jesus in our midst. We no longer cry with the prophet in despair, "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity," but welling up out of man's knowledge that he needs a better world, come His prayer: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In their days of sorrow, Isaiah call the Israelites to turn to God for help rather to the armed forces of the world: "For the Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose: therefore have I cried concerning this. Their strength is to sit still . . . in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." (Isaiah 30:7, 15) Then there is the strength that comes from stillness, from hearing that still small voice that guides us aright: " . . . though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction . . . thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it" . . . (Isaiah 30:20, 21).

We have steadily disregarded the Word, for how many of us follow Jesus' recommendation: "Take no thought, saying What shall we eat, or What shall we drink, or, where withal shall we be clothed? . . . your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself" . . . (Matt. 6:31-34)

As Christians we should not stand shivering on the brink of a new year anymore than we stand in fear of each new day. Time in itself is of little importance; it is how we spend it that matters. We need not fear our incapacity to carry out our good resolutions "for a whole long year." We need to do so only for one day, or even one minute at a time – minute by minute, day by day, one at a time until the year is passed and the next starts, and so on until we step into eternity.

Would we but apply Christ's teaching to all our problems, we would see that there are great challenges for us to meet and that God has a purpose in every situation. Jesus shows us how to face our difficulties fearlessly; while God solves them.

The way of Jesus Christ is not always the easy way out. Christ demands of us patience, courage, and the power of sacrifice. These qualities are intimately related to the precept of love: "Love ye one another, as I have loved you." (John 15:12) As Jesus loved us! That love cost him the ultimate sacrifice. For us to love each other means the same readiness to give our lives for our friends. Jesus never said that His would be the easy way, but it would be full of blessings, "Blessed are ye when man shall revile you, and persecute you, falsely, for my sake." (Matthew 5:11) Jesus warned us that we would suffer persecution, and even that the persecutors would think they

were serving God. Meekness and mildness were not the only precepts He preached. He indicated that there were times when we would have to fight for our belief – that is to say, for HIM. He promised us peace – His peace, but not such as the world gives – (See St. John 14:27) His peace, which stands as a rock unmoved in a sea of trouble, is that of the spirit and mind. For the world itself he had other words: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword . . . he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. . . He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. 10:34, 38-39)

Jesus Christ did not promise us an easy time, nor even a harmonious one. But He promised us a joy that no man could ever take from us: He promised us ultimate victory and a sure place in His Kingdom. He promised us His companionship: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:20) That His companionship is worth more than all else, those who have experienced it know for a fact – it is the pearl without price for the possession of which a man might well sell all that he has.

As we stand on the brink of this new year which seems to be filled with foreboding, let us face up whatever it may bring in a truly Christian frame of mind. That is to say, with quietude and confidence, because we trust God with all our joys and sorrows. Putting His will first, we know we have nothing to fear even if we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. (Psalms 23); for if the Lord is with us, whom shall we fear? (Psalms 21:1 and Heb. 13:6)

The Church celebrates on the First of January the Circumcision of our Lord, and it is for this commemoration that the Liturgy is offered up then – not because the calendar call it the "New Year" It is customary to celebrate this day also with a Te Deum for the civic New Year – as is done for other civic holidays. From a religious point of view, the Church's life evolves around events in our Lord's life here on earth, and there is no more importance in a new year than is in a new day. It is, however, to a good Orthodox, our obligation to go to Church on January First, because of the Commemoration of the Circumcision and because the Church does bless all new beginnings, and we leave its doors with renewed confidence.

Let us start the new year with a cry of joy, praise and thanksgiving: "Praise God in His sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power . . . Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord." (Psalms 150:1-6)

We are going forward without fear. We shall partake gladly in what lies ahead for we are Christian soldiers and we follow where Christ leads, His words of assurance and triumph upon our banner, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:3)

Not going to overcome - - but have overcome !!

- An Orthodox Nun -

THE FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION: JANUARY 1

Readings from Vespers: Genesis 17:1-7; 9-14, Proverbs 8:22-30, Wisdom 10:31-32; 11:1-10

Liturgy: Epistle Colossians 2:8-12
Gospel Luke 2:20-21; 40 to end.

Christ came to fulfill the Old Law and did not hold back from fulfilling any of its demands. Eight days after his birth he was taken by his parents to be offered to God in the Temple in Jerusalem. This is still remembered in the Orthodox custom of naming a child on the 8th day after birth.

Circumcision was an external sign of being a member of the chosen People of God. After the Resurrection, the external forms of the Old Law gave way to the new signs of admission into the Chosen People: Holy Baptism. This feast generally teaches us about the humility of God in fulfilling laws he established and which he could fulfill and thus erase for us who are born anew in Christ! God chose Abraham to be the father of the Chosen People and to honor him, he made a covenant, that is, a kind of contract: God assumed obligations with respect to man and man assumed obligations in respect to God. God said that he was their God and they were his people. A note of selectivity rings out. But, covenants make demands and this is the prime note of the feast. Christ now made a new covenant not based on external signs but on interior conversion which shows through our lives. The action of God toward us in the Person of Jesus Christ was that God Himself died on the cross for our sins and in return, we must kill the sinfulness that tries to control us. This is the new covenant through baptism.

All the prayers of the Blessing of Waters refers to this as a feast of Illumination. It is thought to be a fulfillment of the Jewish feast of Chanukah. This falls between December and early January. It is called the Feast of Lights.

Blessing of water is a holy action meant to sanctify the water and those things which come in contact with it, both objects and people.

Water is usually blessed on the 1st day of each month and at Baptism. On the Theophany, the blessing of the waters is said to be the "Great Blessin" because it is on the same day on which Christ was baptised and because the service includes readings and many prayers. The "Lesser Blessing" still refers to the Baptism of Christ and the Theophany and thus every little blessing of water is like a "little Theophany feast".

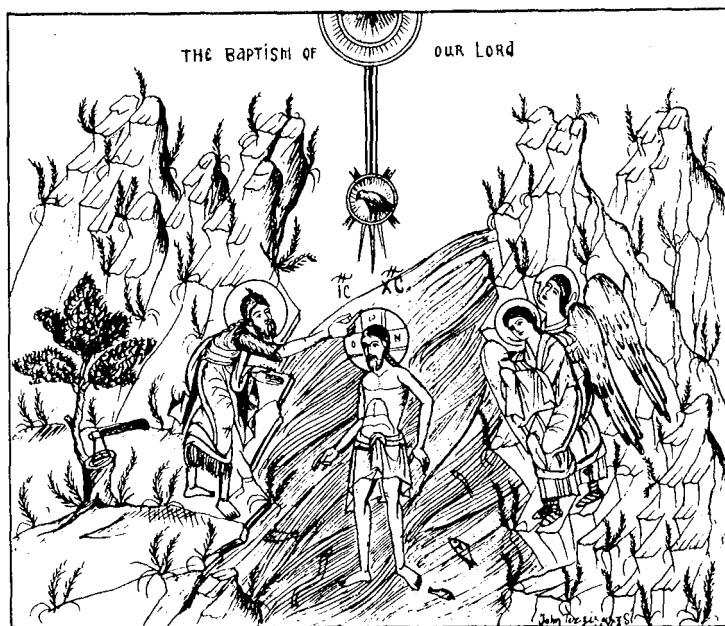
Most people know of the house blessings that take place at this time of the year. A house, auto, and all possessions should be blessed with holy water. This is a sanctifying, a rededicating to God of the things he has created and thus we recognize God as their Creator and bountiful giver.

The faithful should keep the Holy Water from this day, also called "Jordan Water" in honor of the Jordan River in which Christ was baptised at home and drink of it through the year. It is holier than the blessed bread given after the Divine Liturgy and should be taken before this if it is the custom to take the bread to someone at home.

Church School teachers should take the time to read the prayers of the Blessing of Water which is found in many English as well as Romanian liturgical books among which are: Haggood and also Nassar.

It is still the custom to bless fountains, rivers and any flowing water on the Theophany. It is understandable why the Holy Fathers say that because of Christ's baptism in the Jordan He sanctified that river and all the waters of the earth through it. This blessing is still done throughout the United States whenever weather permits or in a shorter form at the waters and the longer form in a sheltered place.

- an Orthodox Monk



Troparul Botezului Domnului

(După melodia bis. din Bănat)

Se poate cânta cu $\frac{1}{2}$
treaptă mai sus.

T. Popovici

moderat

S. A. T. B.

In Ior-dan bo-te-zân-du-te tu, Doam-ne,

In Ior-dan bo-te-zân-du-te tu, Doam-ne,

în-chi-na-rea Tre-i-mei s'a a-ră-tat,

în-chi-na-rea Tre-i-mei s'a a-ră-tat,

mf

că gla-sul Pă-rin-te-lui a măr-tu-ri-

că gla-sul Pă-rin-te-lui a măr-tu-ri-

sit fi-e, fiu iu-bit pe ti-ne nu-

sit fi-e, fiu iu-bit pe ti-ne nu-

min- du- te și Du- hul în- chip de po-
min- du- te și Du- hul în- chip de po-

rumb a a- de- ve- rit în- tă- ri- rea cu-
rumb a a- de- ve- rit în- tă- ri- rea cu-

vân- tu- lui cel ce te- ai a- ră- tat, Hris-
vân- tu- lui cel ce te- ai a- ră- tat, Hris-

toa- se Dum- ne- ze- u- le și lu- mea ai
toa- se Dum- ne- ze- u- le și lu- mea ai

lu- mi- nat, mă- ri- re ți- e.
lu- mi- nat, mă- ri- re ți- e.

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD AND GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST
THEOPHANY: EPIPHANY January 6

This is one of the most ancient feast of the Church. It is older than the feast of the Nativity of Christ. In fact, at one time, this feast included the Birth, Circumcision, Presentation and Baptism. Only later were these commemorations separated.

There are two names associated with this feast: Theophany and Epiphany. Theophany precisely means the "manifestation of God" to men; Epiphany means "a showing forth" or revelation.

It was at his baptism in the Jordan River by John that our Lord was witnessed to by the Father in heaven. After rising from the water, a voice from heaven was heard saying: You are my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on you (Luke 3:21). And the Holy Spirit which has no form or shape, to indicate the third Person of the Holy Trinity to men, descended upon the head of Jesus at those words and was seen in the form of a dove.

Like the previous holyday, this one too has a prefeast. The general preparation for it is for all nature, the River, wilderness, mountains and all the earth to get ready to receive God who is coming into the Jordan River to cleanse all the world, animate and inanimate. Because nature suffered because of the fall of her caretaker, man, so it too benefits from all actions of God towards the good of man. The wonder is: How can nature receive into its midst the very one who created it? This is all seen as the humility of God who so loved the world that He came to live among men and Himself lead them back to heaven.

In the icon of the feast, across the river from St. John who is baptizing, we see angels holding towels in their hands as though they are prepared to wipe off their Lord and Master and God for they are ever present wherever God himself is. The angels witness to the divinity of Christ and are amazed at this demonstration of God's humility and love to be baptized at the hand of one of his own creatures, John.

SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR THE THEOPHANY

HOURS Isaiah 35:1-10
Acts 13:25-33
Matthew 3:1-6

III Isaiah 1:16-20
Acts 19:1-8
Mark 1:1-8

VI Isaiah 12:3-6
Romans 6:3-11

IX Isaiah 49:8-15
Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7
Luke 3:1-18

VESPERS Genesis 1:1-13
Exodus 14:15-18, 21-23, 27-29
Exodus 15:22-16:1
Joshua 3:7-8, 15-17
4 Kings (2Ks) 2:6-14
" 5:9-14
Isaiah 1:16-20
Genesis 32:1-10
Exodus 2:5-10
Judges 6:36-40
3 Kings (1 Ks) 18:30-39
4 Kings (2 Ks) 2:19-22
Isaiah 49:8-15

LITURGY Corinthians 9:19-27
Luke 3:1-18

THE GREAT BLESSING OF THE WATERS

Isaiah 35:1-10
Isaiah 55:1-13
Isaiah 12:3-6
11 Cor. 10:1-4
Mark 1:9-11

The feast of the Baptism is also a feast of illumination or lights, for it is by the opening of heaven, the voice, the dove and the Person of Christ that our minds have been illumined to know that there is one God but Three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christ is called the Light of Light, who came into the world to enlighten it and to give us the Holy Spirit to open our understanding.

RECEIVING THE PRIEST AT EPIPHANY

In most Orthodox parishes, right after the New Year, it is the custom for the priest to personally visit all his parishioners to bless them and their homes with the occasion of Epiphany.

On Epiphany, which commemorates the Baptism of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Blessing of Water takes place at the church service. Christians take home this blessed water – and use it throughout the year to bless their homes. The priest uses the water to bless the people and their homes. Since the homes cannot be brought to church, the church (through the priest and cantor) go to the homes. There the service of blessing which is begun in church is finished with the sprinkling of the home with this holy water.

The priest usually announces when he shall call on his parishioners. Because of weather and other circumstances, it is difficult to fix the exact hour. Since it is only once a year, the parishioners must be ready - and be patient.

Unfortunately, some of our faithful still do not know how to accept the Church in their home on this occasion. This is a very solemn service and we should prepare accordingly. First of all, we must have our homes spic and span, as if Christ Himself were coming. Then we must be dressed appropriately and be in a reverent mood.

It is customary to have a small bowl with some water in it, a candle holder and an icon if you have one. The priest (or cantor) will add holy water to yours, and with this, during the singing of the Epiphany hymn, "In Jordan. . . ." he will first bless the man of the house then the lady and finally the children. Afterwards, he will go from room to room to bless them. The bathrooms, storerooms, cellar and attic are not blessed, because no one ordinarily lives in them. It is only common sense to have the lights on, so the priest won't trip. You know, he is not acquainted with the layout of your house.

There are many practical aspects which we must bear in mind when the priest calls on us during Epiphany. The roads are usually bad. It is good that you clean the walk to your front porch – and have the light on the front porch on, so he won't stumble and can detect your house from a distance. It is a great help.

usually the priest doesn't bother to take his coat off, since he will remain only a few moments. If it is snowing, it is good to have an old rug on which he and the cantors can stand.

If you are having non-Orthodox guests, to avoid any embarrassment, explain to them exactly what is going to happen and the significance of the Service. If they are Roman Catholics (or even Protestants) ask them if they wish to be blessed. At the proper time, tell the priest that they wish to be blessed also. On the whole, it is better not to have friends over on this particular day.

When the priest arrives, everyone should stand up (even the guest), the TV or radio turned off (it is best not to have it on in the first place), and no smoking, drinking or any other such worldly pursuits. Be reverent and give the Service the reverence it deserves.

After the blessing of the home, it is not necessary to offer the priest any refreshments. If you do, and he declines, do not feel offended. You must remember that he has many homes to visit and if he just takes a snack every place, it would play havoc on his stomach. Likewise, with liquid refreshments! You'll be the first to find fault, if he indulges too much.

Do not delay the priest, except if he cares to stay. Other people are waiting for him. It is good to phone ahead to your parishioner-friends that the priest has just left, so that they can judge time accordingly. If you have any long matters to discuss with the priest, this is not the time. Make an appointment to see him at some other time.

You can make this an elevating experience for yourself - and a satisfactory one for the priest - by complying some of these suggestions, but above all accepting it with the true Christian spirit. If you are reverent and sincere, common sense will tell you what to do. If in doubt, don't hesitate to call the priest.

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