



“Joy of All Who Sorrow”

No. 109 December 2017



The Nativity Fast

A Journey to Meet Christ

Our Mother the Church, dear reader, has the custom of preparing her children, well in advance of the actual holy day, for extraordinary events which are central to both earthly and eternal existence. Beyond a doubt, the feast of Nativity of Christ, the appearance of God in the flesh, belongs to this very category. Adam and Eve, the continuation of history through their descendants, the history of peoples and kingdoms (especially the history of ancient Israel)... all led up to and arrived at Bethlehem, to the mysterious cave, where Christ the Saviour of the world manifested His wondrous infant countenance to us. It is no surprise that even two thousand years later, we, the children of Christ's Church, do not suddenly or immediately celebrate the Lord's Nativity, but rather embark upon a forty-day fast (as the holy fathers have ordained of old), so that we might be gradually illuminated by the wondrous light of the Nativity night.

This period of fasting begins directly after the commemoration of the Holy Apostle Philip, on the 15th December (new style, December 28) according to the Church calendar, and concludes with the Feast itself, on Christmas night, December 25/January 7. The rubrics of this labour of fasting are not so strict as those of Great Lent or the Dormition fast: fish can be eaten on every Saturday and Sunday, as well as on festal days of the Church calendar that do not fall on Wednesday or Friday. The fast becomes stricter with the onset of the Forefeast of the Nativity on December 20/January 2 (on which day we also commemorate the Holy Martyr Ignatius the God-bearer), when fish is completely excluded from the table of those who strive to observe the Church rubrics in all strictness.

Let us place our attention, dear reader, upon the essential aspect of fasting; or, as they used to say in olden times, *govenie*, that is, the “preparation” for receiving the Holy Mysteries of Christ (and not only once) during the course of the Nativity fast. What thoughts and feelings shall we encounter if we open our minds and hearts (if only they might obey the desire of our spirit), enlightened by grace? We shall not forget that a sincere confession of sins, and Communion “with fear and trembling” of the Most Pure Body and Blood of Christ, united with an earnest attempt to correct our lives, marks a Christian’s entire life with Divine power. Grace makes possible the impossible, and changes a dark-minded, hard-hearted sinner into a bright and meek child of God. New thoughts and feelings enter into the mind and heart, and a new world opens up before the true, sincere disciple of Christ...

Here before you are the wise men of the East, who have left their homes, family, and native lands—to follow the mysterious star which shone upon them *from Jacob*... How many dangers did they overcome, what courage they revealed, such firmness of purpose, until they reached the cherished aim of their wandering and finally placed the wondrous gift of gold, frankincense, and myrrh before the Divine Christ Child, Who created the stars they once worshipped! Are you ready, are we ready to reject all service to those deceitful idols which destroy us—our own passions of pride, lust, and love of money—in order to leave nothing in our souls other than golden faith in the Redeemer, fragrant with the hope in His care for us and His love, strong *as death*, conquering death itself? Will we be found to be as strong as Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior, so that we might not fear the punishments of Herod—the world which lies in evil—and depart from him *by another way* to “our own country,” to the country of holy silence and heartfelt prayer, which is the greatest adornment of a soul that loves God?

And now turn your gaze, gracious reader, towards the place well-known to any modern pilgrim of the Holy Land called the “shepherds’ field.” There they are: the humble and guileless shepherds; pure in heart like children, heartily and vigilantly watching the cold, winter night... To them, to them, and not to the envying Pharisees or the self-righteous Scribes, hardened in their cold academia that gave nothing to the minds or heart of the people of Israel, did the Angel of God appear with the words, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger* (Luke 2:10–12). Can you or I boast of such purity of heart and clearness of mind as did allow the Bethlehem shepherds not only to receive the revelation, but even to fulfil the Angel’s bidding straightway, not hesitating a moment? Can we find in ourselves the shepherds’ saving self-denial, which did not allow them to fall into the deep and heavy sleep enveloping the entire city—the city which neither knew nor heeded the *time of its visitation*? Learn, O reader, from the example of the shepherds, how important for the soul’s salvation it is to “attend to yourself,” that is, to always direct your spiritual gaze at the field of your heart, never allowing wolves (vicious and evil thoughts) into the sheepfold. Meek sheep are the peace and quiet of the heart, balanced emotional powers, which the enemy of our salvation, the soul-destroying devil, unceasingly seeks to disrupt.

If you have the strength and fortitude, behold the horrifying scene of the murder of the innocent Bethlehem children, the first martyrs for Christ, who spilled their infant blood because of Herod’s truly satanic guile... Killed without having ever sinned; they finished their earthly life that had not even begun! Believe with the

whole Church in the mysterious, providential, prophetic meaning of these sufferings which cannot be rationally understood... And we shall say with the nineteenth century poet:

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

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

The closer we come to the end of the fast, the brighter the wondrous Bethlehem star is enkindled above our heads, proclaiming to the Magi the time of the Infant's birth, and the place where He lay... The rays of this rational star (according to the holy fathers, this star was actually an angelic power, and not a dead astronomical body) illumine with their incorruptible, unfading light the twilight in the cave. The rays of this star bring the soul, which has but scarcely touched it, to inexplicable trembling and heavenly joy, the likes of which we shall not find here in this sinful world with its sensuous, quickly passing pleasures, disappearing like smoke. Illumined by the unwaning light of the Nativity star, let us pass under the canopy of the very cave in Bethlehem... and let us stop, that we might not overstep the bounds laid for us sinners, and be scorched by that radiance from the Divine Child, Who rests in the oxen manger...

There He is, the Angel of Great Counsel, the King of the world, the Father of the age to come, as the "Old Testament Evangelist," the holy Prophet Isaiah, exclaimed in prophetic, sober inebriation. There He is, the Yearning of the nations, the Expectation of all peoples, the Great Light that has come into the world to enlighten those sitting in darkness!



Notes & Jottings

FOUNDER'S DAY

On Founder's Day (Wednesday 15 December) it was a comfort and a joy to see many old friends who had come to remember and pray for the Foundress. Even the weather was kind to us, enabling us to say prayers at the tomb after the Liturgy. Archpriest Paul Elliott (Wallasey), Archpriest Philip Steer (Walsingham), Fr Liviu Barbu (Gillingham) and Fr Alexander Haig (Colchester) all joined us in the altar.

CALENDARS AND CARDS

The St Herman Calendars for 2018 are in stock. These retail at £9 each. We also have some copies of the wall calendar published by the Russian Orthodox Church's Fund for Assistance. These are in the form of a poster showing the entire year - £5 each. There is a leaflet giving details of the Christmas cards and other items that are in stock. In addition, there are two further Christmas card subjects. These are the Nativity ikon and the Donskoy Ikon of the Mother of God. All our Christmas cards retail at 20p each.

BOOK NEWS

If you have not received the second edition of the On-line Book Fair list, please ask for a copy. These books, all competitively priced, are offered for sale as part of our fundraising for the development of the Common Room project. Your help in this project will be appreciated. Regarding book news in general, please remember that Olland Bookshop now sells on-line through Abebooks and not through Amazon.

The plan for the renovation of the library has been agreed. The existing inadequate shelving will be ripped out and replaced by floor-to-ceiling purposed-built shelving, together with additional double-sided shelving. The room will be redecorated at this time. An estimate for this work has been requested from the builder. It is hoped that we can complete this project before Easter.

DINING ROOM

For several years we have struggled with the old Dragon stove in the dining room which often managed to fill the room with smoke. This has now been removed and the fireplace restored to its original state. This will be a great asset during the winter months.

PUPPET SHOW

Thanks to the efforts of our friends from North London, Elena, Victor and Timothy Levine, at 3pm on Sunday 31 December the College will host a Nativity Puppet Show. All are Welcome!

NAMEDAYS

To all who are celebrating a nameday at this time, we send congratulations and wish you:

MANY YEARS!

7 Dec – **Great Martyr Catherine of Alexandria** – Catherine Meyer

10 Dec – **Great Martyr James the Persian** – James Bones

13 Dec - **Apostle Andrew the First Called** – Deacon Andrew Bond, Andrei Bosisas

19 Dec – **St Nicholas of Myra** – Subdeacon Nicolas Mabin, Nicholas Meade,
Nicholas Morgan

28 Dec – **St Anthea, mother of St Eleutherius** – Anthea Barry

28 Dec – **St Stephen of Sourozh** – Archpriest Stephen Platt.



COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF THE MOTHER OF GOD
JOY OF ALL WHO SORROW

DECEMBER 2017

Saturday 2 December

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 3 December

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (St Edmund, King & Martyr)

Saturday 9 December

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 10 December

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Great-Martyr James the Persian)

Saturday 16 December

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 17 December

10.10am ~ Hours and Requiem Liturgy (Great-Martyr Barbara)

Saturday 23 December

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 24 December

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Sunday of the Holy Forefathers)

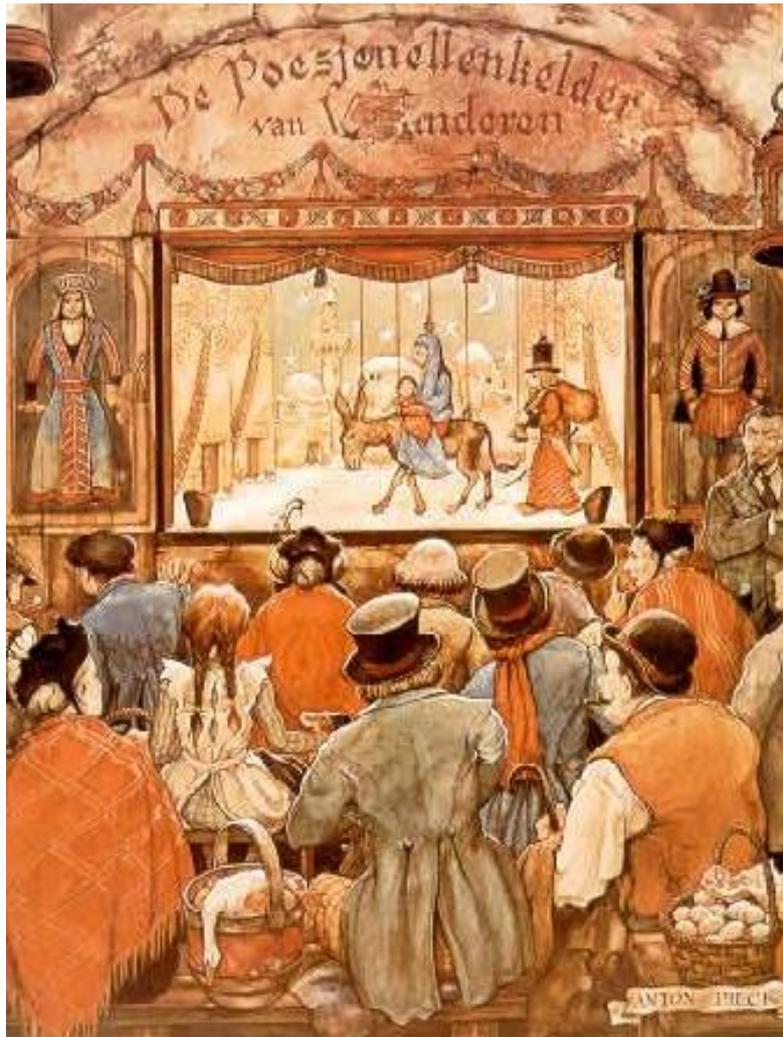
Saturday 30 December

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 31 December

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Sunday of the Holy Fathers)

3pm ~ Nativity Puppet Show in the College



*Nativity Puppet Show
Sunday 31 December at 3pm*

All are Welcome!

*For more information:
College OLM, The White House, Low Road, Mettingham, Suffolk, NR35 1TP
Tel: (01986) 895176*



Our religion is founded on spiritual experience, seen and heard as sure as any physical fact in this world. Not theory, not philosophy, not human emotions, but experience.

St Nikolai Velimirovich.

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