

ST. INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



O Christ, what shall we offer You for Your coming on earth as a Man for our sake? Every creature that has its being from You give thanks to You: the angels offer hymns of praise, the heavens give a star: wise men present their gifts, and the shepherds, their wonder; the earth provides a cave and the desert a manger. As for us, we offer You a Mother, a Virgin Mother. O God who are from all eternity, have mercy on us!

—from the service of Great Vespers

Let's Celebrate The 12 Days of Christmas! *By Melissa Tsongranis*

The presents have been opened, the food has been eaten, and the Christmas tree is really starting to shed – yes, your house is showing the effects of Christmas Day. Now you begin to focus on putting your house and life back together from the hectic pace you have likely kept since Thanksgiving. But while the “holiday season” may be winding down – for Christians the Christmas season is just getting started. You’ve heard of the 12 days of Christmas, right? This is when they begin! The 12 days of Christmas

refer to the period between Christmas and the Eve of Theophany/Epiphany (January 5). This is a time of celebration – rejoicing in the birth of our Lord and Savior! As the angels proclaimed to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

HOLIDAYS & SAINTS DAYS

December 5

Ven. Sabbas The Sanctified

December 6

St. Nicholas
The Wonderworker
Abp. of Myra in Lycia

December 13

Ven. Herman of Alaska
Wonderworker of
All America

December 25

NATIVITY OF
CHRIST

The 40 day fasting period before Christmas is meant to be a preparation for the coming of Jesus! The messages on television and in magazines tell us generally to “rejoice” and “be merry” (which they usually equate with material gifts) but as Orthodox Christians we must remember the reason for the rejoicing and the merriment comes from the birth of God the Word—Jesus. Once the Christ child enters this world, then, we have something to celebrate! So, how do we celebrate the 12 days of Christmas in our homes? We strive each and every day to remember the joyous gift we received on Christmas. As we read in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

In recognition of the Feast, the Church has designated no fasting during these days except for January 5th, the eve of Theophany, which is a strict fast day. Here are a

few things you can do with your family to keep the celebration going for the full 12 days of Christmas.

Nativity Greetings

At Pascha, we all know that we greet one another by saying “Christ is risen!” and responding “Truly He is risen!” for 40 days. Did you know that there is a similar greeting for Christmas? We should greet everyone after the Divine Liturgy on the Nativity by proclaiming “Christ is born!” The response is “Glorify Him!” Continue using this greeting the entire 12 days of Christmas.

Add the beautiful Katavasia of the Nativity, which this greeting comes from, to your family prayer during this period:

Christ is born! Glorify Him! Christ comes from heaven; meet Him. Christ is on earth exalt Him. O you earth, sing to the Lord. O your nations, praise Him in joy for He has been glorified.

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*Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos,
who of the Holy Spirit has
borne Life to the world for the
deliverance of all*

-From the church hymn

Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia



Image of St. Nicholas from Ukrainian Folk Tales

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich

This glorious saint, celebrated even today throughout the entire world, was the only son of his eminent and wealthy parents, Theophanes and Nona, citizens of the city of Patara in Lycia. Since he was the only son bestowed on them by God, the parents returned the gift to God by dedicating their son to Him.

St. Nicholas learned of the spiritual life from his uncle Nicholas, Bishop of Patara, and was tonsured a monk in the Monastery of New Zion founded by his uncle. Following the death of his parents, Nicholas distributed all his

Continued on page 5



Pray, Eat, Sing Carols: How Russia Celebrates Christmas *by Natalya Mikhailova*

While Christmas is typically celebrated according to the Gregorian calendar, on December 25, the Eastern Orthodox Church observes the holiday using the old Julian calendar, on January 7.

The majority of those celebrating Eastern Orthodox Christmas on January 7 live in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

During the Nativity season, Russians decorate a Christmas tree and give each other gifts. Christmas tree branches are adorned with various sweets, ornaments and glowing lights. Russians fast on Christmas Eve, until the first star has appeared in the sky. People then eat 'sochivo' or 'kutia' a porridge made from wheat or rice served with honey, poppy seeds, fruit (especially berries and dried fruit like raisins), chopped walnuts or sometimes even fruit jellies!

Kutia is sometimes eaten from one common bowl to symbolizes unity. The Russian word for Christmas Eve 'sochelnik', comes from the word 'sochivo'.

After the church service on Christmas day, people break the fast with all kinds of meat and fish dishes, as well as a jellied or roasted goose with apples. Roasted poultry is a symbol of the Christmas table. Chicken is served cold, while goose or duck are served hot. Cold chicken is

garnished with pickles, tomatoes and herbs, while hot poultry is served with roast potatoes.

In every home, there are pies and cakes made of unleavened rye dough with various fillings: minced meat, fish, mushrooms, jams, hard-boiled eggs, or cheese.

In Russia, ancient traditions and Orthodoxy are combined. Christmastide lasts till Epiphany, January 19. These days are filled with ancient rites. And one of the main traditions is guising.

Guisers, usually young people, dress up in bright clothes and animal costumes, and walk from house to house singing Christmas carols in the hosts' honor and asking for a treat. Hosts show generosity and hospitality to their unexpected guests and give them many eatable gifts.

Carol singers perform a song wishing their patrons a good harvest, newborn livestock, and a good life at home. Then they leave for another house.

Christmastide is also known for the fortune-telling tradition. Eastern Slavs consider Christmas and Epiphany eves to be the best time for fortune telling. The tradition was so widespread that the Church finally put up with the young girls questioning their mirrors at midnight about future love, husbands and family life.

Source: www.pravmir.ru

12 Days Of Christmas (Continued)

Giving Thanks

Take time to give thanks for all of your blessings in life. Each night when you say prayers as a family, have each member share one thing they are thankful for that happened during the day. Discuss ways that you can show gratitude to God for all of His blessings. Consider making thanksgiving ornaments using leftover wrapping paper, ribbon, and markers. Write the different things you are thankful for in life on the wrapping paper, cut them out in different shapes, and use the ribbon to hang them on your tree. Also, this would be a good time to write those Christmas thank you notes to relatives and friends who have honored you with gifts—both material and otherwise throughout this past year.

Be Mindful

Remember the reason for the season by keeping your mind focused on Christ and His Church. One way of doing this is to keep aware of the different saints celebrated each day and as well as the daily scripture readings. You can find much of this information at www.onlinechapel.goarch.org.

The lessons you and your children learn from the lives of the saints and Scripture will be precious gifts from God. Here are a few of dates to look out for during the 12 days of Christmas: December 27th (St. Stephen Archdeacon and First Martyr) – You can read about St. Stephen in the Epistle reading for the day Acts 6:8-7:5, 47-60 (perhaps shorten the reading and adapt it for young children). Notice his extreme faith as he was being martyred. Discuss how we can look to him as an example of faith and love. January 1st (St. Basil the Great) – St. Basil is a wonderful saint from which learn about wisdom and charity. We can honor him by attending the Divine Liturgy on his feast day, reading about

him, participating in the tradition of the Vasilopita, and giving to those in need. Get the entire family involved in making the Vasilopita. Begin with a prayer and read about the tradition and the life of St. Basil. If you have never made this sweet bread, consider asking an older family member or member of your community to come and teach you how to make it. Discuss ways you as a family can be charitable like St. Basil. To learn more about Saint Basil and the tradition of the Vasilopita, visit the website of St. Basil Academy at www.stbasil.goarch.org. January 4th (The Synaxis of the 70 Holy Apostles) – Did you know that the Lord did not just appoint 12 disciples? As we read in the Gospel, “...the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Luke 10:1-2). Discuss how we can add to the “laborers” by living as apostles spreading the Gospel of Christ.

Capture the Memories

Create a Faith Capsule during the 12 days of Christmas. Use some sort of container and place an item in each day that will remind you of this year’s celebration of the birth of our Lord (i.e. a clipping from your tree, a piece of wrapping paper, a paper icon, pictures, quotes, etc.). Have each person in the family create a thank-you note or drawing to God for giving us the gift of His Son. After you share with one another, place these in the time capsule, and store it where it will not be disturbed until next year. Decide which day you will open it next year and write it on your calendar.

Wrap it up with a Splash!

Vespers of Theophany as a family.



If work and school permits, attend the Divine Liturgy with the Great Blessing of the Water the next day as well. For more information on celebrating Theophany, read *Diving in: Living Theophany in the Orthodox Christian Home* by Nichola Krause which can be found at: www.family.goarch.org/art-feastdays.asp.

Don’t forget to schedule a time for your priest to come and bless your home. These are just a few suggestions on ways you can celebrate the 12 days of Christmas. Be creative and come up with your own family traditions for this period as well. Remember that this celebration shouldn’t run you ragged. Keep it simple and enjoy the time together as a family. But more importantly enjoy the time you spend glorifying our Lord and rejoicing in His birth. Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

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St. Nicholas (Continued)

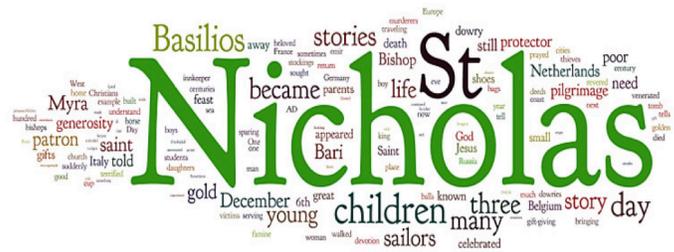
inherited goods to the poor, not keeping anything for himself.

As a priest in Patara, he was known for his charity, even though he carefully concealed his charitable works, fulfilling the words of the Lord: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matthew 6:3).

When he gave himself over to solitude and silence, thinking to live that way until his death, a voice from on high came to him: "Nicholas, for your ascetic labor, work among the people, if thou desirest to be crowned by Me." Immediately after that, by God's wondrous providence, he was chosen archbishop of the city of Myra in Lycia.

A defender of God's truth, this wonderful saint was ever bold as a defender of justice among the people. On two occasions, he saved three men from an undeserved sentence of death. Merciful, truthful, and a lover of justice, he walked among the people as an angel of God. Even during his lifetime, the people considered him a saint and invoked his aid in difficulties and in distress. He appeared both in dreams and in person to those who called upon him, and he helped them easily and speedily, whether close at hand or far away. A light shone from his face as it did from the face of Moses, and he, by his presence alone, brought comfort, peace and good will among men.

In old age he became ill for a short time and entered into the rest of the Lord, after a life full of labor and very fruitful toil, to rejoice eternally in the Kingdom of Heaven, continuing to help the faithful on earth by his miracles and to glorify his God. He entered into rest on December 6, 343.

**HYMN OF PRAISE:****Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker,
Archbishop of Myra in Lycia**

Holy Father Nicholas,
The four corners of the world glorify you
As a knight of the powerful Faith,
The Faith of God, the true Faith.

From the cradle he was devoted to God,
From the cradle until the end;
And God glorified him-
His faithful Nicholas.

Famous was he throughout his life,
And even more renowned after death;
Mighty on earth was he,
And even more mighty is he in heaven.

Glowing spirit, pure heart,
He was a temple of the Living God;
For this the people glorify him
As a wondrous saint.

Nicholas, rich in glory,
Loves those who honor him as their "Krsna
Slava";
Before the throne of the eternal God,
He prays for their good.

O Nicholas, bless us,
Bless your people
Who, before God and before you,
Humbly stand in prayer.

The Veneration of St. Nicholas in Russia

The name of the great saint of God, the hierarch and wonderworker Nicholas, a speedy helper and suppliant for all hastening to him, is famed in every corner of the earth, in many lands and among many peoples. In Russia there are a multitude of cathedrals, monasteries and churches consecrated in his name. There is, perhaps, not a single city without a church dedicated to him.

The first Russian Christian prince Askold (+ 882) was baptized in 866 by Patriarch Photius (February 6) with the name Nicholas. Over the grave of Askold, St Olga (July 11) built the first temple of St Nicholas in the Russian Church at Kiev. Primary cathedrals were dedicated to St Nicholas at Izborsk, Ostrov, Mozhaïsk, and Zaraïsk. At Novgorod the Great, one of the main churches of the city, the Nikolo-Dvorischensk church, later became a cathedral.

Famed and venerable churches and monasteries dedicated to St Nicholas are found at Kiev, Smolensk, Pskov, Toropetsa, Galich, Archangelsk, Great Ustiug, Tobolsk. Moscow had dozens of churches named for the saint, and also three monasteries in the Moscow diocese: the Nikolo-Greek (Staryi) in the Chinese-quarter, the Nikolo-Perervinsk and the Nikolo-Ugreshsk. One of the chief towers of the Kremlin was named the Nikolsk.

Many of the churches devoted to the saint were those established at market squares by Russian merchants, sea-farers and those who traveled by land, venerating the wonderworker Nicholas as a protector of all those journeying on dry land and sea. They sometimes received the name among the people of "Nicholas the Soaked."

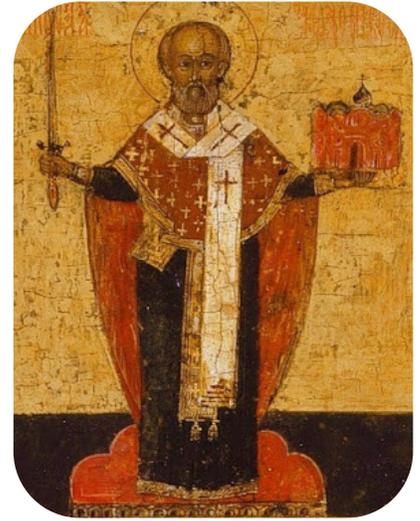
Many village churches in Russia were dedicated to the wonderworker Nicholas, venerated by peasants as a

merciful intercessor before the Lord for all the people in their work. And in the Russian land St Nicholas did not cease his intercession. Ancient Kiev preserves the memory about the miraculous rescue of a drowning infant by the saint. The great wonderworker, hearing the grief-filled prayers of the parents for the loss of their only child, took the infant from the waters, revived him and placed him in the choir-loft of the church of Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) before his wonderworking icon. In the morning the infant was found safe by his thrilled parents, praising St Nicholas the Wonderworker.

Many wonderworking icons of St Nicholas appeared in Russia and came also from other lands. There is the ancient Byzantine embordered image of the saint, brought to Moscow from Novgorod, and the large icon painted in the thirteenth century by a Novgorod master.

Two depictions of the wonderworker are especially numerous in the Russian Church: St Nicholas of Zaraïsk, portrayed in full-length, with his right hand raised in blessing and with a Gospel (this image was brought to Ryazan in 1225 by the Byzantine Princess Eupraxia, the future wife of Prince Theodore. She perished in 1237 with her husband and infant son during the incursion of mongols); and St Nicholas of Mozhaïsk, also in full stature, with a sword in his right hand and a city in his left. This recalls the miraculous rescue of the city of Mozhaïsk from an invasion of enemies, through the prayers of the saint. It is impossible to list all the grace-filled icons of St Nicholas, or to enumerate all his miracles. St Nicholas is commemorated on December 6, May 9 (the transfer of his relics) and on July 29 (his nativity).

Russian people honor St. Nicholas



with special fervor and all often turn to him with prayers. He is the defender from all trouble and sorrow and nearly every person has his image. Russians declare their most naive desires and hopes before him. They say: "For us there is no better advocate than Nikola". "Ask Nikola and he will say I shall save". The name Nicholas is one of the most common. Such reverence of St. Nicholas could have influenced placing him weekly in the service for Thursday and the brightness of the description in the *Menaion (Chetji-Mineiakh)* of the personal character and sincere quality of one pleasing to God.

His protection of oppressed innocence, resolute protection for the unjustly condemned and persecuted, his speedy help in every possible trouble and his advocating all calling on him, his zealotness in faith and meekness - all this is especially close to the open, courageous, good and soft Russian nature. In particular, St. Nicholas is esteemed as a protector on the waters and the Holy Church magnifies him in its chanting "the traveling companion and the real helmsman on the sea".



Sochivo

(Russian Christmas Eve Porridge)

- 1 cup of wheat grains or white rice
- 3 oz. of poppy seeds
- 3 oz. of walnuts
- 3 tbsp. of honey
- 1/2 cup of dried fruit mix
- 2 quarts of water

Wash and drain wheat grains or rice and boil it in 2 quarts of water over a low heat for about an hour. When grains will be soft, drain the water and set the kasha aside. Using mortar and pestle, grind poppy seeds until they turn to milk, add honey, and mix until smooth. Add the poppy & honey milk to the grains. Before serving, add dried fruits and nuts.

Serve sochivo warm. This kasha should be juicy, so you can add some hot water to get the right consistence.

Goose or Duck with Apples

Ingredients:

- 1 goose (or 1 duck),
- 2 to 3 lb. Granny Smith apples,
- 2 tbsp. melted butter,
- Salt to taste.

Pluck the bird's trunk, wash it thoroughly, rub in a little salt and stuff with apples cleared of the cores and sliced. Sew the opening up with a thread. Place the goose (duck) with its back down on a frying pan, add half glass water and put it in an oven to roast. Bake at 385 - 400 F. While the bird is roasting, pour it with its melted fat and juice from time to time. Roasting will take 1.5 to 2 hours. When the goose is ready, remove the thread and apples, put the fowl on a dish and decorate with the sliced lemon, baked apples and greens. Can be served with sauerkraut and cranberry as a garnish.



Vasilopita

(Greek Lucky New Year's Cake)

Ingredients:

- 4 cups flour
- 2 tablespoons baking powder
- 1 ¾ cup sugar
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 ½ cup orange juice
- 1 tablespoon orange zest
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 3 eggs Powdered Sugar

Instructions: 1. Preheat the oven at about 350 degrees Fahrenheit (175 degrees Celsius).

2. Line the base of a 9-10 inch springform pan with wax paper and grease the sides. (You can use an even wider pan for a thinner cake- it will take less time to bake)
3. In a bowl, cream the sugar and butter.
4. Add the orange juice, vanilla and orange zest- mix with a mixer about 2 minutes.
5. Whip the eggs in a small bowl and add to the butter mixture and mix for another 2 minutes.
6. In another bowl mix the flour and baking powder and add to the wet ingredients and mix for 2 minutes at low speed- do not over mix. If you are adding the coin in the batter, add it now.
7. Pour batter (it will be thick) in the pan, smoothing the top with a spatula.
8. Bake for about 45-60 minutes. Check with a thin sharp knife in the center, it should come out clean.
9. Remove from oven and let cool.
10. Release the pan and turn cake upside-down on another plate. If putting the coin in now, wrap in foil and push it through the cake. Turn cake back on top and sprinkle with powdered sugar, you can also even out the top of the cake slicing with a long knife. You can make a design using paper cut outs or using almonds or raisins or you can ice the cake with a simple icing made with powdered sugar and water. Make sure you have a lucky charm for the person who will get the coin in their piece.



Making a Family Orthodox Advent Calendar

by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div.

Want to help your family focus on "the reason for the season"? Want a great craft idea that can be used from year to year? The **Orthodox Advent Calendar** is just the project, but you'll have to start soon in order to have it ready for November 15/28! We can make each day of Advent exciting by reading the text, then taking out the corresponding item or icon from that day's pocket and attaching it to the tree. When Christmas comes our tree will be filled with reminders of the meaning of the feast. The "Orthodox Advent Calendar" was originally created by the St. Makrina Study Group of SS. Constantine & Helen Orthodox Cathedral, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. The following is an adaptation by Phyllis Meshel Onest and Lydia Lekas.

Needed Materials

Red felt: 18" x 30"; green felt: 18" x 30"; gold puffy paint; 24" of 1/4" dowel rod; 30" cord; sewing machine, green and red thread, 10" length of self-sticking velcro or a package of velcro squares that will be cut into small strips and attached to the back of the icons and pieces. *Optional:* approximately 48" of gold ribbon and gold thread for the garland; 8" of ribbon to attach the calendar text to the felt banner; hot glue gun.

16 miniature icons: SS. Andrew, Anastasia, Barbara, Herman, Ignatius, Katherine, Matthew, Nicholas, Romanos, Savas, Spyridon, Stylianos, Archangel Gabriel, Nativity of our Lord, Presentation of the Theotokos, Prophet Daniel.

Miniature Nativity set from a craft store: Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, Three Wise Men, Angels, Shepherd, sheep, donkey, camel. (If you cannot find all these pieces in a set, purchase/make the missing ones separately.)

The following small items can be wooden or resin or felt, purchased or hand-made: anchor, bell, candle, candy cane, church, cross, dove, fish, gift box, green wreath, heart, moon, poinsettia, reindeer with a red nose, star, turkey, and the word, "Joy". (I used wooden items purchased from the craft store.)

Directions

Make a casing for the dowel rod by folding over 1" red felt and stitch the edge of the casing.

Cut five 2"x18" strips off the end of the green felt for the pockets.

Beginning 1/2" up from the bottom of the red felt piece, position and pin the 5 strips, allowing 1/4" between each strip. Mark off 2" squares with pins. Before sewing, please note which "calendar" you use. If it's *Gregorian/New Calendar*, Nov. and Dec. will take up 2 squares. If it's *Julian/Old Calendar*, assign 2 squares for

Making a Family Orthodox Advent Calendar
 by *Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div.*

Nov., but only 1 square each for Dec. and Jan. Before stitching the pockets as shown in the drawing, be sure that there is enough space for the tree. See #4.

Add the months and dates using the gold puffy paint.

Make a pattern for the tree from newspaper or large construction paper. Cut out the tree from the remaining green felt. Lay tree 1 1/2" from the top of the red felt banner so that the star can be placed at the very top of the tree. Pin in position and stitch. (*Suggestion:* Quilt the tree to the red backing and/or drape and sew a garland of gold or silver ribbon so that the tree does not sag with repeated use.)

Attach the decorative cord to each end of the dowel rod with a knot and a spot of hot glue.

Cut 1/4" strips of the rough sided velcro and attach one strip to the back of each item and icon. Trim to fit. Place each item or icon in its corresponding pocket.

Laminate the following calendar text pages, punch a hole in the top left corner, and attach them to the rod with a ribbon. **For texts for Orthodox Advent Calendar see:**

<http://www.theologic.com/oflweb/xmas/advcal.htm>

O, Who Loves Nicholas the Saintly? (Ukrainian Folk Hymn)

O, who loves Nicholas the saintly,
 O, who serves Nicholas the saintly,

Him will Nicholas receive,
 And give help in time of need:
 Holy Father Nicholas!*

He who dwells in God's holy mansions,
 Is our help on the land and oceans,

He will guard us from all ills,
 Keep us pure and free from sins
 Holy Father Nicholas!*

Holy Saint, hearken to our prayer,
 Let not life drive us to despair,

All our efforts shall not wane,
 Singing praises to your name:
 Holy Father Nicholas!*

O, kto kto Nikolaja l'ubit,
 O, kto kto Nikolaju sluzit,

Tomu svjatyj Nikolaj,
 Na vsjakj cas pomahaj:
 Nikolaj, Nikolaj!*



**Repeat the three lines of the refrain*