

THE TRISAGION

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

Christmas: Joy or Letdown? by Dn. Mark Oleynik

Many years ago, I had a conversation with a friend the day after Christmas and he said something which surprised me. He sadly said, “There is nothing more *done* than Christmas.” This was surprising because he was the most joyful and outgoing person you would ever want to meet—and a real ambassador of Christ. I learned much later that it was at that precise time he was going through a personal tragedy and that year Christmas was quite difficult for him. Fortunately, in time his pain eased and he was back to his old self. But I never forgot his words and what they meant to him that day.

In preparing for the Nativity of our Lord, most parents try to teach their children to be joyful givers. But we all know a child’s focus on Christmas is on “getting the gifts” and it’s probably likewise true for many adults. Most assuredly, parents do their best to provide at least some of items from their child’s wish list not to mention gifts for their spouse, parents, and friends. But when the presents are all unwrapped, the Christmas meal is over, and the house is probably turned upside down from the children and all the guests—do you feel kind of let-down? Do you feel Christmas is done?

In just the few short weeks preceding Christmas emotions are built up to a fever pitch: the shopping and baking, the plans to be made, and the endless commercials for the latest-and-greatest, all mixed in between the innumerable Christmas movies. To top it off, research shows that for many Christmas is one of the saddest times of the year. Not only sad

(continued—see last page)

The 12 Days of Christmas... They’re When?

Believe it or not, December 25 is the first day of Christmas. You’d never know it, especially if you happen to be shopping anytime after Halloween...

There is a song we all know called “The Twelve Days of Christmas” that describes gift giving over a period of time—twelve days. St. Ephraim the Syrian first mentioned the period of the “twelve days,” according to one source, sometime before the year 400. The Council of Tours made it official in 597. This period of time begins at Christmas and ends at Epiphany...

The song was supposedly used to teach children the tenets of the faith during this period, when law forbade practicing Catholicism. As such, the song’s gifts and other images have the following religious representations (compiled from various sources):

GIFT	MEANING
True Love	God.
Me	every baptized person.
Partridge	Jesus Christ (who, like a bird, will protect God’s defenseless children).
Pear Tree	the Cross (which was made from a tree).
2 Turtle Doves	the Old and New Testaments; also two turtle doves were sacrificed when Jesus was first brought to the temple.
3 French Hens	faith, hope, and charity (sacrificial giving); also, gold, frankincense, and myrrh from the Wise Men.
4 Calling Birds	the four Gospels and/or the four Evangelists

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Schedules

	Coffee Hour	Greeters	Tellers	Servers**
December 1	Russian Ladies*	M. Leathers and D. Swisher	B. Haupt and M. Fedkin	Team B
December 8	E. George and M. Stevens*	B. Roberts and E. Miranda	G. Cattell and R. Patel	Team A
December 15	A. Cramer and P. Doty*	L. Radomsky and M. Radomsky	L. Rush and S. Stevens	Team B
December 22	L. Rush and J. Miranda*	M. Thompson and M. Fedkin	M. Fedkin and G. Cattell	Team A
December 29	J. Cadman and M. Leathers	M. Leathers and D. Swisher	S. Stevens and G. Cattell	Team B
January 5	TBD	B. Roberts and E. Miranda	TBD	Team A

* Denotes Fast
 ** Team A: M. Doty, A. Miranda, N. Pelikan, S. Oleynik, D. Stickles, Jo. Stickles, J. Torbic, and J. Swisher
 Team B: J. Cadman, P. Doty, N. McFarland, B. Oleynik, S. Patel, L. Torbic, and Je. Stickles.

■ ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

Preparing for God to Come by Fr. Basil Biberdorf

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” This is from God’s condemnation of the serpent at the Fall (Genesis 3:15), and is commonly known as the *protoevangelium*, the “first Gospel.”

Thus, from the beginning, the coming of Christ is anticipated. A descendant of the fallen man and woman would be the undoing of the one who tempted them. (And, oddly, the woman thinks she has birthed this savior herself—“*I have acquired a man from the Lord*”—although this child turns out to be not the savior, but rather the first murderer.) This One who would bruise the serpent’s heel

would be awaited by all of God’s people (*Gen. 4:1*). It is this sense of anticipation that characterizes the entirety of the Nativity Fast. We think on the expectant people of God, characterized so well by the mournful Western hymn, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” We think on the Virgin who bears the Creator of all in her very womb, and the One who will finally appear to us in the flesh.

We can consider the mystery of how a young woman, a “girl” in our own time, betrothed to an old man, who is great with child, trusting without faltering, as she and her husband make their way to their ancestral city. We can marvel that the Creator of all is born, not into luxury, comfort, and power,

Giving More Than We Can Spare

At its Annual Meeting last month, parishioners from Holy Trinity and the Chapel of the Holy Spirit in faith adopted a growth budget for 2014. C.S. Lewis—whose 50th anniversary of his repose was eclipsed by J.F.K.’s on November 22—has advice for all of us as we look to serve God this Nativity Season and into the New Year:

In the passage where the New Testament says that every one must work, it gives as a reason “in order that he may have something to give to those in need.”

Charity—giving to the poor—is an essential part of Christian morality: in the frightening parable of the sheep and the goats it seems to be the point on which everything turns.

Some people nowadays say that charity ought to be unnecessary and that instead of giving to the poor we ought to be producing a society in which there were no poor to give to.

They may be quite right in saying that we ought to produce this kind of society. But if anyone thinks that, as a consequence, you can stop giving in the meantime, then he has parted company with all Christian morality.

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small.

There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charities expenditure excludes them. I am speaking now of “charities” in the common way. Particular cases of distress among your own relatives, friends, neighbors or employees, which God, as it were, forces upon your notice, may demand much more: even to the crippling and endangering of your own position.

For many of us the great obstacle to charity lies not in our luxurious living or desire for more money, but in our fear—fear of insecurity. This must often be recognized as a temptation.

Sometimes our pride also hinders our charity; we are tempted to spend more than we ought on the showy forms of generosity (tipping, hospitality) and less than we ought on those who really need our help.

■ CHURCH SCHOOL SCOOP

Christmas: Joy or Letdown? (from page 1)

memories of those who are no longer with them - but often the tragedies witnessed both in their families and in the world at large provide stark contrast to joy of the season. So, given the combination of too much emotion, too much excitement, too much to eat and to drink, and just the general chaos of the season...is it any wonder you might feel a slight letdown?

Certainly you and your family will receive wished-for presents, but will you receive the real gift at Christmas—the gift of Christ Himself? His peace, and joy, and presence in whom we find the only lasting source of Life. The true gift giver on this and every day is Christ, but you must include Him on your Christmas list—invite Him to be the most important part of your life and your family’s life. Amidst all of the worship and singing of our grace and our customs, plan to take personal and family time and ask the Savior, “Lord, come and dwell with my family and me this day. Be by our side so that we may know and walk with you throughout all our days.”

If you have eyes to see it, the world is flooded with His joy. If you have the heart to receive it, your life will be touched by His. And if you have faith to live

Be filled with Joy this Nativity

- Holy Trinity’s annual **St. Nicholas Gift Tree** to assist struggling families in our area will be displayed in the Narthex beginning December 1.
- Celebrate St. Nicholas’ love for Christ with **Vespers and Liturgy** on December 5 and 6 (with a special surprise for the children).
- **Daily Evening Worship with Confessions** begin on December 20 to prepare for the Feast (see calendar for start times).

Extra “Scoops”

IT’S CHRISTMAS TIME IN THE BOROUGH!

On Friday, December 20 beginning at 5:30 p.m., our students and teachers will be spreading the news of Christ’s birth by Christmas caroling in the Holmes-Foster neighborhood. Our singers will depart from the church after having dinner and will return to decorate cookies in preparation for the Feast.

ANGELS APPEARING THIS MONTH

Plan to stay after the liturgy on Sunday, December 22 for the annual retelling of the story of Christ’s birth by our Church School. Our students will once again present a living icon based on the Nativity scriptures, complete with angels, shepherds, wise men, and assorted animals. You will not want to miss it!

it, He will be with you all your days, and all your hours. For behold, truly we all have been given good news of great joy - for unto us, if we will receive Him, is born into our hearts Christ the Savior. And if we will receive this gift for Christmas, all our days will be blessed.

So what do you really want to receive this Christmas? What will you allow God to give you this Christmas? Will it really be the gift of Himself—or in all the busyness of the season will you not take the time and really ask Him.

It’s up to you. At the end of it all, Christmas can just be “done” ... or it can be done rightly. ■

- Women will **exchange cookies and fellowship** over a Lenten meal on December 20 at 11:30 a.m.
- The Altar Society will **decorate Holy Trinity** on December 21 at 10 a.m. All are welcome.
- A traditional **Holy Supper** for all will precede the Nativity Eve Vigil. The meal begins at 4:30 p.m.
- The **Synaxis Liturgy** (December 26 at 10 a.m.) will continue our celebration of Christ’s birth.
- The Oleyniks (125 Wildernest, Port Matilda) will **host an open house** on Dec. 29 from 2-5 p.m.

Penn State OCF Members to Attend College Conference

Several Penn State Orthodox Christian Fellowship members will spend a portion of Christmas Break attending the annual OCF College Conference at Antiochian Village. The four-day retreat packed with speakers, prayer, and activities for students begins on December 28 and will be headlined by Bishop Gregory of Nyssa of the Carpatho-Russian Diocese. Scholarships for the \$250 registration fee are available. Email orthodox@psu.edu for details.

Check Out the Lending Library Advent Display in the Parish Hall

The lending library will have a selection of books available during Coffee Hour for all to browse through and check out for spiritual edification during Advent. The library's full catalog can also be perused online at holyltrinity-oca.org/lending-library.

Christmas Cookie Exchange!

The women of Holy Trinity will host a Christmas Cookie Exchange on Friday, December 20 at 11:30. To participate, bring a minimum of three dozen homemade holiday cookies and the recipe. A light Lenten lunch will be provided and a portion of the baked goods will be donated to Housing Transitions. See the sign up sheet in the Hall to participate.

For the Record

DEATHS

- **Lucy N. Rusinko**, 84, of State College, wife of the late **Frank Rusinko** (+2003), reposed in the Lord on November 2. Memory eternal!
- **Mary Laris**, 96, of State College, mother of **Goldie Kroger**, reposed in the Lord on November 16. Memory eternal!

ELECTION

- **Fr. Basil Biberdorf** and **Dn. Alexander Cadman** were elected to three-year terms to the Archdiocesan Council at the Archdiocesan Assembly in New Kensington on November 2.

NEWS AND NOTES Extraordinary Assembly Called to Discuss Property

CRANBERRY TWP., PA – Bishop Melchisedek has called for an Extraordinary Archdiocesan Assembly to take place on December 14, 2013 in Canonsburg. The sole item on this meeting's agenda will be to consider a buyer's unsolicited proposal for the Archdiocesan Chancery and surrounding property in Cranberry Township. Parishioners with input on the proposed sale are invited to attend the Parish Council Meeting on December 11 at 7 p.m. at which Holy Trinity's delegation will be formally elected.

HELP AN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN PAKISTAN
SARGODHA, PAKISTAN – St. Sergius Orthodox Church in Pakistan is in need of assistance. The ministry receives no outside funding and is currently serving liturgy in tents while trying to help the needy people of the area. They have also gotten the attention of the secret police who were investigating them for "proselytization." The immediate need is for prayer and some funds to set up an administrative office. To learn how you can help, please contact Fr. Cyril Amer at fr.cyril@rocpak.org.

INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED AUTHOR TO SPEAK AT LANCASTER ADVENT RETREAT
LANCASTER – Kyriakos C. Markides, author of several books including *Mountain of Silence*, *Gifts of the Desert*, and *Inner River* will speak at Annunciation Orthodox Church here on Saturday, December 7. The topic of his presentation is "Rediscovering Spirituality in the Modern World." Registration at the door is \$15 per person and includes lunch.

INQUIRER'S VIDEO SERIES DEBUTS ONLINE
Launched last month, *Discovering Orthodox Christianity* is a video series of talks, shows, and presentations designed to introduce and explain the basic teaching of Orthodox Christianity. The series covers a wide range of topics and can be found at goarch.org/ourfaith/discovering/.

but into poverty and lowliness. The Son of God himself deigns not only to be carried in the womb of one of his creatures, but he consents to being born in a way, and into circumstances, none of us would desire for our own children. Yet this is the God we wait for. The difficulty in our time is that we want to skip the anticipation. We like instant gratification, not "good things come to those who wait." We would rather live in the celebration right now—feasting and rejoicing—instead of making ready, and watching expectantly.

This is where the Nativity Fast comes in. Unlike the Great Fast, this fast doesn't place the emphasis on repentance: our need to recognize our true state before God and desire that it be otherwise. Rather, the emphasis is squarely on anticipation. We eat less, and omit certain foods, so as to build the hunger in ourselves for the One who is truly

needful. We focus our prayers on the arrival of that Christ who comes to save us from our sins. We recall the burning bush (*Ex. 3*), and Moses taking off his sandals because he was on holy ground, then marvel at the Virgin who touches and contains God. We recall Isaiah who was cleansed by the hot coal (*Is. 6:7*), then see the Virgin cleansed by Christ inside her. We, too, behold this Creator who comes united to human flesh without destroying it by fire.

As we journey in this season of the Nativity Fast, let us not be in a great hurry to reach our destination. Let us proceed slowly, savoring those wondrous anticipations we have been given to us in Scripture. Let us sing the hymns, making the anticipation of old our anticipation today. Let us forgo our favorite foods, not because we are sad, but because something—some One—greater awaits us at the end of the journey: God Himself, born as a child. ■

The Twelve Days (from page 1)

5 Golden rings	<i>the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) which gives the history of man's fall from grace</i>
6 Geese a-laying	<i>the six days of creation</i>
7 Swans a-swimming	<i>the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:6-8); also, the seven sacraments of the Church.</i>
8 Maids a-milking	<i>the eight Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-10); also, milking symbolizes Christ's love for us</i>
9 Ladies dancing	<i>the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)</i>
10 Lords a-leaping	<i>the Ten Commandments</i>
11 Pipers piping	<i>the eleven faithful Apostles</i>
12 Drummers	<i>the twelve points of the Apostles Creed; also, the twelve Apostles' preaching</i>

Maybe people think the "twelve days of Christmas" start on December 13 and are the most important shopping days before Christmas... I like the idea of Christmas starting instead of ending on December 25. We usually

don't celebrate our own birthdays until the day they occur or later. So why do we, in effect, celebrate Jesus Christ's birthday (Nativity) so long in advance?

It doesn't take much effort to make these changes, but it does feel weird at first. Yet it's not a matter of bucking the establishment. It's really all about getting things back into perspective. And it just makes sense.

Our society has come a long way from St. Ephraim the Syrian's statement about the significant twelve-day period between Christmas and Epiphany. However, I question our ultimate destination. We seem to proclaim Christmas earlier and earlier as time goes on...

The song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas," was used to teach spiritual truths, then it, too, degenerated, becoming a cute folksong. From now on let's limit the pre-Christmas hustle and bustle. Let's use the real "twelve days"—between Christmas and Epiphany—to pull away from the over commercialization of Christ's Nativity. Let's start making the Twelve Days of Christmas something special and joyful—a real celebration of Christ's birth—for us in America and for our children. We will be glad we did.

— Pearl Homiak