

Liturgical preparation for the Nativity

Beginning on November 21, the feast of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple, the Canon of the Nativity is sung at Matins as *katavasia* (that is, the *irmosy* or theme song of the Nativity is sung at

the end of each ode of the canon). This is the first liturgical announcement of the Nativity: "Christ is born! Glorify Him!"

On the feast of the holy apostle Andrew (November 30), at Vespers, we hear the first pre-festive *stichera*:

Isaiah, dance for joy: receive the word of God! Prophesy to the Virgin Mary that the bush burning with fire shall not be consumed by the radiance of our God. Let Bethlehem be prepared! Let the gates of Eden be opened! Let the Magi come forth to see, wrapped in swaddling clothes, in a manger of beasts, the salvation which the star has pointed out from above the cave: the life-giving Lord, who saves us all!

As is common in the Byzantine Rite, our hymns look ahead, well in advance, to upcoming feast-days, so that we are ready for them when they arrive.

Recommended Reading

- Father Basil Shereghy. *The Liturgical Year of the Byzantine-Slavonic Rite*. (Pittsburgh, PA: Byzantine Seminary Press, 1968.) A good book-length introduction to the liturgical year as celebrated in the Byzantine Catholic Church.

- A Monk of the Eastern Church (Father Lev Gilet). *The Year of Grace of the Lord*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001.) An beautiful explanation and commentary on the liturgical year; an Orthodox standard.

<http://www.metropolitancantorinstitute.org/liturgy/November.html>

NOVEMBER is the third month of the liturgical year in the Byzantine Rite.

The feast of holy archangel Michael and all the angelic powers

On **November 8**, we celebrate the **synaxis of the holy archangel Michael and all the angelic powers** (sometimes called the "bodiless powers"). **Synaxis** means "*assembly*", and can refer to one of two kinds of gatherings:

- a gathering of the faithful in honor of some person or event
- a group of saints, honored together at a liturgical service

On this day, both meanings are present. The faithful gather together to recognize that God created the angels in advance of human beings, and that they have their own place in the divine plan. They serve as God's messengers; help to protect us from evil; and intercede before God.

The hymns for the Divine Liturgy on this day can also be sung every Monday, since on that day we commemorate the holy angels.

The Feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple in Jerusalem

On **November 21**, we celebrate the feast of the **Entry of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary into the Temple**. Tradition holds that, while she was still a child, the Virgin Mary was taken by her aged parents Joachim and Anna to be raised in the Temple in Jerusalem. The accounts of this event, which are not recorded in the canonical Scriptures, are taken from certain non-Scriptural books. But the theological message of the feast is clear: God prepared Mary from the beginning to be the Mother of His Son, and it was within the Temple that the living Tabernacle of God would live.

This feast day has a one-day pre-festive period, on which we sing the kontakion:

Filled with joy today by the auspicious feast of the Theotokos, the whole world cries out: This is the Heavenly Ark.

The kontakion of the feast itself expands on this theme:

The most pure Temple of the Savior, the most pure Bridal Chamber and Virgin, the Treasury of the glory of God, is led today into the house of the Lord, bringing grace in the Spirit of God. God's angels praise her in song: she is the Heavenly Ark.

The celebration of the feast continues for four more days, ending on November 25

Other feast days

In November, we celebrate the feast days of three of the Apostles:

- the holy apostle **Philip** (November 14)
- the holy apostle and evangelist **Matthew** (November 16)
- the holy apostle **Andrew** the "first-called" (November 30)

On **November 12**, we commemorate the holy martyr **Josaphat, Archbishop of Polotsk**, who labored ceaselessly to support his flock in the Catholic faith. He was killed by a mob in 1623.

The next day, **November 15**, is the feast-day of our holy father **John Chrysostom**, Archbishop of Constantinople. He was born in Antioch and was called *Chrysostomos* or "golden-mouthed" because of his eloquent preaching. He was chosen to be archbishop of the imperial capital of Constantinople, but was eventually exiled by his enemies. He died during his return from exile in 407.

For a complete list of saints' days as celebrated in our church, see the Calendar of Saints.

The Pre-Nativity Fast, or Fast of Saint Philip

The Christmas Fast, in preparation for the feast of the Nativity on December 25, is one of the minor fasts of the Church. This fast of forty days was introduced in the 12th century. Counting back 40 days from the feast of the Nativity, the fast begins on the evening of November 14 - the feast of the holy apostle Philip. As a result, it is traditionally called **Philip's Fast** or the **Philipian Fast** (in Slavonic, *Filipovka*).

This fast is not penitential, but is rather a fast of preparation, like the pre-Communion fast. By abstaining from certain foods, we are opening up a "space" in our lives through asceticism and obedience, into which God may enter.

Traditional rules of fasting

Customs vary, but in general the traditional Christmas fast calls for the faithful to observe **strict abstinence** (no meat, fish, dairy or other animal product, wine or oil) on **Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays**, and a **lesser abstinence** (no meat, fish, dairy or animal products) on **Tuesdays and Thursdays**. Fish is allowed on Saturdays and Sundays, but no other animal products.

Several popular feasts fall during the first three weeks of the Christmas Fast: the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple on November 21, the feast of Saint Nicholas on December 6, and the Maternity of Holy Anna (Conception of the Theotokos) on December 8 or 9. As a result, in many places the Christmas Fast either does not begin until December 10, or becomes stricter at that point.

In the Byzantine Catholic Church, this fast may be observed voluntarily, partially or in its entirety.