

## Feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple

*"The Saviour's pure temple, the precious bridal chamber and Virgin, the sacred treasury of the glory of God, is brought today into the house of the Lord; and with her she brings the grace of the divine Spirit. God's angels sing in praise of her: She is indeed the heavenly dwelling place."*

(Kontakion of the feast)

**T**HE FEASTS OF THE MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD occupy first place in our Church calendar after the feasts of our Lord. The chief aim of the Marian feasts is to set before us the majesty, dignity and the holiness of the Most Pure Virgin Mary, and her role in the redemption of the human race, so that we may be inspired to venerate and imitate her. The greatest Marian feasts, such as her Nativity and Dormition, speak to us either of the very first moments of her existence on earth or of her departure into eternity. The only feast that has for its theme the childhood and youthful years of the Mother of God is the feast of the Presentation into the Temple, which we celebrate on November 21. In our church services this feast has the name, "The Entrance into the Temple of the Most Holy Lady, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary." The purpose of this feast is to remove the veil of certain mysteries from the childhood and youthful years of the Blessed Mother, and to throw some light on the mystery of her parents, her training in the temple, and her preparation for the supreme dignity of being the Mother of God.



Despite the fact that the Holy Gospel says nothing about the entrance of Our Lady into the temple, this feast traces its origin to the tradition of the Church and apocryphal writings, from which we learn that the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saints Joachim and Anna, being childless, had made a promise that, if they were blessed with a child, they would offer that child up to the service of the Lord in the temple in Jerusalem. The Lord God heard their prayers and blessed them with a daughter. When the little one was three years old, her parents brought her to the temple and placed her under the care of the high priest Zachary, the father of St. John the Baptist. Here the Most Holy Mother of God spent many years until, as a mature maiden, she was betrothed to St. Joseph.

This is a feast of anticipation, a different kind of anticipation. We honour the Virgin Mary by looking forward to the Incarnation of Christ celebrated in a little more than a month. The main theme of this feast is that she enters the Temple to become herself a Living Temple of God, inaugurating a New Testament and fulfilment of all prophecies from the Old Testament.

Furthermore, the Feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple celebrates the end of the physical temple in Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God. In the person of Mary and through the birth of Her Son Jesus Christ we are now able to become houses of God; we are now able to become temples of the Holy Spirit.

## Celebrating Our Deep Faith

Byzantine Catholic Worship: Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage

### St. John Chrysostom: "Golden-mouthed"

**O**UR FATHER AMONG THE SAINTS John Chrysostom (347-407), Archbishop of Constantinople, was a notable Christian bishop and preacher from the fourth and fifth centuries in Syria and Constantinople. He is famous for eloquence in public speaking, his denunciation of abuse of authority in the Church and in the Roman Empire of the time, and for a Divine Liturgy attributed to him. He had notable ascetic sensibilities. After his death, he was named Chrysostom, which comes from the Greek Χρυσόστομος, "golden-mouthed." The Eastern Church honours him as a saint (feastday, November 13) and counts him among the Three Holy Hierarchs (feastday, January 30), together with Saints Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian. Another feast day associated with him is January 27, which commemorates the event in 438, thirty years after the saint's repose, when his relics were brought back to Constantinople from the place of his death.



John Chrysostom is also recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, which considers him a saint and Doctor of the Church, and by the Church of England, both of whom commemorate him on September 13. His relics were stolen from Constantinople by crusaders in 1204 and brought to Rome, but were returned on November 27, 2004, by Pope John Paul II.

During a time when city clergy were subject to much criticism for their high lifestyle, John was determined to reform his clergy at Constantinople. These efforts were met with resistance and limited success. He was particularly noted as an excellent preacher. As a theologian, he has been and continues to be very important in Eastern Christianity, but has been less important to Western Christianity. He generally rejected the contemporary trend for emphasis on allegory (fables and stories), instead speaking plainly and applying Bible passages and lessons to everyday life. In some ways, he represents a sort of synthesis between the hermeneutic (interpretive) methods of the more allegorical Alexandrian School and the more literal Antiochian School.

His banishments demonstrated that secular powers had strong influence in the Eastern Church at this period in history. They also demonstrated the rivalry between Constantinople and Alexandria, both of which wanted to be recognized as the pre-eminent Eastern See. This mutual hostility would eventually lead to much suffering for the Church and the Eastern Empire. Meanwhile in the West, Rome's primacy had been unquestioned from the fourth century onwards. An interesting point to note in the wider development of the papacy is the fact that Innocent's protests availed nothing, demonstrating the lack of influence the bishops of Rome held in the East at this time.

## St. Philip's Fast: Preparing for the Feast of the Nativity

**E**ACH YEAR, it seems preparations for Christmas begin earlier and earlier – even before all the Halloween candy is given out and consumed. For some, this time of preparation is joyful, with the anticipation of the joyous celebration of Christ's birth. For others, preparing for Christmas means lots of work, increased expenses and family encounters which are stressful and negative. Regardless of your personal experience or familial expectations, you can use this time as an opportunity for you and your family to draw close to Christ and enkindle a deeper awareness of the Incarnation and its importance in our lives. This can lead to deep inner and family peace as we focus, not upon ourselves but on God's love for us and ways in which we can become more loving.

"God is with us!" (in Ukrainian, "Z nami Boh") proclaimed at Christmas, is central to the good news of our salvation. Our Byzantine Church takes the time (a full six Sunday's of Preparation from November 15 - December 25) to allow us sufficient time to reflect and act upon our resolve to love more deeply, despite the "Christmas rush".




The secular media gets our kids focussed on the commercial aspects of Christmas, earlier and earlier every year. St Philip's fast, is a positive way to countdown the weeks leading up to the Feast of Christmas. You may want to set some time on each week of the fast, depending on your family's schedule, to reflect and pray and even to light a candle in your family's icon corner. (If you do not have one, this would be a good time to arrange one.) In the Latin Church

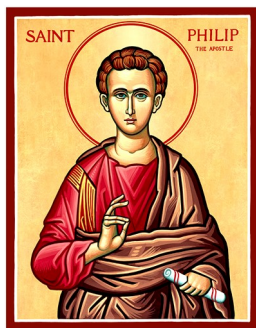
the tradition of the advent wreath — with 4 candles — plays a major role in Advent celebrations. You can do a modified version of that — just make sure that you have 6 candles for the 6 weeks of preparation. Many families light candles whenever they have family prayer time. It is a tradition that sets a great atmosphere of focus on God, especially when gathering around the icons in the family prayer corner. *Happy St. Philip's Fast!*



## Antiphon of St. Philip's Fast

 Bethlehem, be prepared; Eden is opened to all; O Ephratha, be made ready; for in the cave the tree of life has blossomed forth from the Virgin; for her womb has been shown to be a spiritual paradise, in which is the divine plant, from which having eaten, we will live and not die as Adam did. Christ is born to raise the image that had fallen.

[from St. Philip's Fast for Families]



## The Advent Wreath in Byzantine Practice

**T**HE CIRCLE OR WREATH is a Christian symbol for God who is eternal (no beginning and no end). Evergreen branches symbolize eternal life of which Jesus came to make us partakers. The candles represent Christ who is the "Light of the World." Along with fasting, prayer, Scripture reading, church attendance and participation in the sacraments, the practice of praying with a Pylypivka or Advent wreath adds meaning and a sense of preparation to the fast. This can be practiced at home as well as at church. One candle is lit each week along with the appropriate meditation.

A large white candle is placed in the centre of the wreath to represent our Lord, Jesus Christ or "Emmanuel" — a name which means "God is with us." It should be lit and reviewed each week before all others. (*Note: remember to extinguish the candles before going to bed — safety first at all times.*)

### FIRST WEEK (the evening of November 14)

The first candle, **blue**, reminds us of our righteous forefathers and foremothers who shone forth with **faith** and went to death believing and trusting in God's promise to send His Son. (Read Isaiah 9: 2; 6-7)

### SECOND WEEK (the evening of November 21 — review the previous candle)

The second candle, **green**, is lit for hope-filled prayers, and to remind us to have the same **hope** in God that Mary had, as we journey to the source of light and faith, and recognize Jesus as our Saviour and Master. (Read Luke 1: 5-31)

### THIRD WEEK (the evening of November 28 — review the first two candles)

The third candle, **gold**, is a symbol of our **love and caring** for one another, and to remind us that "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life." (John 3: 16-17)

### FOURTH WEEK (the evening of December 5 — reviewing the previous candles)

The **white** candle remind us of **peace** and the angel's message to the shepherds, "Peace on earth, goodwill toward men." May our hearts be filled with the peace of Christ as we increase our love for God and our faith and hope in Him. (Read Luke 2: 1-18)

### FIFTH WEEK (the evening of December 12 — reviewing the first four candles)

The **purple** candle represents **repentance**. It reminds us of our need to repent before we can meet the coming of Christ. "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand." (Matthew 4: 17) (Read Mark 1: 1-8; 14-15)

### SIXTH WEEK (the evening of December 19 — reviewing all candles first)

The **red** candle signifies the **Holy Eucharist**. It also reminds us that Christ, Who was born in Bethlehem, will come again at the end of time, and Who comes to us now in the great Sacrament of His Presence, the Holy Eucharist. The reason He was born in Bethlehem was that we might allow Him to come and be born in the manger of our hearts. "Let every heart prepare Him room..." (Read John 6: 52-58)