

The Holy and All-Praiseworthy Apostle Andrew the First-Called



Let us praise God's herald, whose name is "courage," Peter's kinsman who leads those in the Church who follow the chief apostle, for as then to Peter so now to us he cries aloud: "We have found the One so longed for!" (Kontakion of the feast)

The Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called was the first of the Apostles to follow Christ, and he later brought his own brother, the holy Apostle Peter, to Christ (John 1:35-42). The future apostle was from Bethsaida, and from his youth he turned with all his soul to God. He did not enter into marriage, and he worked with his brother as a fisherman. When the holy Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John began to preach, Saint Andrew became his closest disciple. Saint John the Baptist himself sent to Christ his own two disciples, the future Apostles Andrew and John the Theologian, declaring Christ to be the Lamb of God.

After the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, Saint Andrew went to the Eastern lands preaching the Word of God. He went through Asia Minor, Thrace, Macedonia, he reached the River Danube, went along the coast of the Black Sea, through Crimea, the Black Sea region, and along the River Dniepr he climbed to the place where the city of Kyiv now stands.

CHRISTIAN PRAXIS ACTIVITIES

As with most periods of fast before the great feasts, the season of Advent or Pylypiwka is a time for a deeper interior conversion to Christ by embracing the four forms of Christian praxis. Here are some suggestions for ways to put into practice those four forms or asceticism during the Nativity Fast.

Prayer

Spend at least 15 minutes in the morning and evening in prayer each day, and include the Jesus Prayer (Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner) 100 times a day. Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession).

Fasting

Abstain from meat and dairy products on Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays. With each meal, eat only an amount that is sufficient for nutritional needs without feeling full. Fast from select forms of entertainment (TV, movies, Internet, etc.)

Almsgiving

Increase your parish tithe for the season. Give your time, talent and/or treasure to the parish or special charity. Share your possessions with the poor and needy.

Charity

Examine your conscience each night, asking for forgiveness from God or others as needed. Meditate on the Ten Commandments or The Beatitudes and put one or two of them into practice. Find opportunities to share your faith with others.

Celebrating Our Faith

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



St. Michael the Archangel: One of the Great Princes

Our Liturgical Year is like a beautiful mosaic made up of the feasts of our Lord, the Mother of God, and an immense throng of Martyrs and Saints. The centre of this splendid mosaic is our Lord Jesus Christ, as God and as Man. Day and night, His Pilgrim Church on earth and in heaven, the Church in glory, that is — the very great choir of Angels and Saints — sing to Him eternal praises. The holy Angels are God's everlasting choir of glory; they are the messengers and servants of God. The Angels also fulfill a great role in the redemption of the human race.

The Holy Church, conscious of the great significance of the Angels for the glory of God and our salvation, has provided a special place for the veneration of the Angels in the mosaic of the Liturgical Year. Here, first place is given to the feast of the Synaxis of St. Michael the Archangel and the rest of the Angelic Powers (November 8). Established in the fourth century, this feast is called a synaxis (or assembly) because on this day the Church celebrates the assembly of all the bodiless powers together with St. Michael the Archangel, Chief of the heavenly hosts, and the assembly of the faithful on earth who gather together to pay homage to the heavenly powers.

Michael the archangel is described in the Bible (in the books of Daniel, Jude, & Revelation), as a warrior angel who engages in spiritual combat. The word archangel means "angel of the highest rank." Most angels in the Bible are portrayed as messengers, but Michael is described in all three books as contending, fighting, or standing against evil spirits and principalities. We do not have a full picture of any angel, and only two are named in the Bible (Gabriel is the other). Scripture only gives us hints of their movements during human events, but it is safe to say that Michael the archangel is a powerful being.

Despite his great power, Michael is still in total submission to the Lord. His dependence on the Lord's power is seen in Jude 1:9: "But when the archangel Michael contended with the devil and disputed against the body of Moses, he did not dare to bring a condemnation of slander against him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'"

There is a spiritual war being fought over the hearts and souls of mankind. Michael the archangel is a strong angelic prince who protects Israel and submissively serves God by doing battle against Satan. The Devil can do his worst, but "he [is] not strong enough" to conquer heaven's forces (Rev. 12:8).

How Are We Presenting the Nativity Fast to Our Children?

IT'S NOVEMBER, and that means that it's time for the Nativity Fast or Christmas Fast (in Ukrainian, Pylypiwka) and referred to as Advent in the West. For Eastern Christians living in Canada and the U.S., this is a very important fast, because in this society, we really need it. In our culture, many stores start pressing us to purchase Christmas gifts and ornaments even before the end of October. By the time Christmas Eve arrives, how many Christmas parties will you have attended? By midday on the 25th of December, you may well be worn out from a month of celebrating Christmas before Christmas even had a chance to arrive. Frankly, by the time the evening of December 25th rolls around, we are tired. By Christmas Day, some have been celebrating this holiday for weeks already.



The truth is that just about everyone knows that this is not a healthy system — it's not physically healthy, financially healthy, or spiritually healthy, and you don't have to be a Christian to recognize what a mess our holidays are. This is not a structure designed to help us receive Christ. This does not invite us to marinate in the amazing reality of the Incarnation of God.

OUR BYZANTINE TRADITION

Of course, Eastern Christianity doesn't celebrate feasts like this; we don't gorge ourselves for months in anticipation of a holiday, only to be worn out and exhausted by the feast itself. We fast before we feast, preparing our hearts to more fully receive Christ when finally, the anticipated feast day arrives. We, as Eastern Christians have another way to experience Christmas, and we are passing it along to our children. Not only should we observe the Nativity Fast or Advent with them, but we should draw their attention to the ways in which the society around them feasts without ceasing, and how fasting can alter our experience of the feast. As we're raising kids in an unorthodox society, we need to talk about the differences with them so that they're not just blindly absorbing whatever input our North American culture is giving them; they should discern what they want to take in and make part of themselves from what they will reject and hold at bay. We can teach our children that the fast is not merely about food, it's about preparation, about the journey which is worth taking, because it leads to a better reception of Christ.



*The "One Who Comes" dispels the darkness and ushers in the New Law's grace
By crushing evil's head — the serpent, whose lies enslave the human race.
To bring us hope, He hears the poor's plea:
"Jesus! Son of God and Son of Mary!"*

*As dew forms on the flower at morning, the Lord will come to dwell with the poor;
As starlight sought and long-awaited, as sun whose warmth and heat will endure.
So Christ will shine with heavenly splendor.
Jesus! Guide us, guard us, warm us evermore!*

Receiving A Preview of God's Goodwill

For us Christians, anticipation of Christmas should not be based upon Santa and gift exchanging, but upon the coming of the Messiah. To set things in the right tone, the Church provides for us a special feast on November 21, which in our Byzantine tradition we call **The Entrance of the Theotokos (God-bearer) into the Temple**.

When Mary was three years old, Joachim and Anna decided that the time had come to fulfill their promise, and to offer her to the Lord. The Virgin Mary dwelt in the Temple for nine years until she reached the age for marriage. At that time, she was taken from the Temple by the priests and elders and entrusted to Joseph as the guardian of her virginity.



This is a feast of anticipation, but a different kind. 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 prophesies from the Old Testament.

The Entrance of the Theotokos 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.

Three Dos and Don'ts of Christian Life

- 1. DO FORGIVE OTHERS.** The Body of Christ is different from the world for the most part. We don't hold grudges, we hold hands.
- 1. DON'T ROB GOD.** This is not about money and robbing God of tithes and offerings, but robbing God of His due glory.
- 2. DO PRAY FOR OTHERS.** St. Paul wrote: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" and surely part of that 'every thing' is to be praying for one another.
- 2. DON'T GOSSIP.** This is one of the most destructive things that believers can do. It is nothing short of assassinating someone's character, and it's very close to slandering someone's good name.
- 3. DO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.** Jesus didn't hope that we would, didn't suggest that we would, but commanded that we would love one another "just as I have loved you."
- 3. DON'T GRUMBLE.** Grumbling against a church leader or anyone else in church is serious business to God because it's essentially grumbling against Him, for even members of the Church are parts of the Body of Christ.