

# ***Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church***

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## ***The Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost-The Nativity Fast (11.28.2021)***

### ***Luke 8:26-39***

And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when He went forth to land, there met Him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech Thee, torment me not. (For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.) And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that He would suffer them to enter into them. And He suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought Him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and He went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought Him that he might be with Him: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. (KJV)

God's Holy Church has prescribed the beginning of the Nativity Fast at this time. The is a time to orient the heart, the mind and the soul toward preparing well for the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ

The days leading to the Feast of the Nativity are a time to get the self in order in a way pleasing to the Lord God. This is a time to focus clearly on the depth of the meaning of the Son of God taking on human flesh.

The miracle of Jesus Christ's virgin birth is sufficient to occupy the depth of thought for all of life. The action of the Holy Spirit with the Mother of God, gives the believer plenty to think about in the days leading to the Feast of the Nativity.

The place of angels in Jesus Christ's birth deserves careful consideration in believers' hearts, minds and souls. Keeping the focus on Jesus Christ's birth and away from the crass materialism and corruption in the world is a challenge.

The Gospel for today addresses the presence of a man overtaken by devils. The Lord Jesus Christ brought peace to the man and restored him to his right mind.

Jesus Christ's action with the legion of devils made a decided difference.

Each believer faces demons within that are a challenge to living the life fully in Jesus Christ in today's world. The Nativity Fast is a time to address the demons within through increased prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

The Nativity Fast is a time to focus increasingly on the love and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ taking on human flesh is a definitive act of Divine Love.

When the Divine took on human flesh, He humbled Himself. He entered into the world in a common environment. He took on flesh in a specific time in human history and changed human history forever.

The glittering lights and commercialism in the world today do not speak to the depth of the meaning of Jesus Christ taking on human flesh. Believers need to fast, pray and turn to God's Holy Church to learn more about Christ's birth.

The days of the Nativity Fast are an opportunity to invest in the Kingdom of God. The degree believer's honor the Nativity Fast will equate to the degree of joy experienced on the Feast of the Nativity.

The Church in wisdom prescribes the Nativity Fast each year. Participating in the Fast is expected. Participating in the Fast is purely voluntary. The Fast involves more than discipline in use of food and drink.

The Fast involves focus of the heart, mind and soul on the meaning of Jesus Christ's birth. Believers are to use the days leading to the Feast to prepare in welcoming the Newborn Christ Child into the world.

Christ's birth will be celebrated in the present on the Feast of the Nativity. Each person will determine his or her readiness to welcome the New Born Christ Child into the heart, mind, soul and home.

God's Holy Church sets forth the journey to the Feast of the Nativity today. Each day of the Nativity Fast has value. Each moment is a time to invest in the Kingdom of God.

The man in the present Gospel was blessed by Jesus Christ to be restored to his right mind. Peace of mind is best experienced in the and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Demons afflicting believers are no challenge for Jesus Christ. The Nativity Fast is the Church's way of keeping believers focused on Christ. The Nativity Fast enables believers to refocus on the Christ first embraced at Holy Baptism.

Thank God for the arrival of the Nativity Fast. Thank God for the Church's wisdom in placing the Fast in our lives at this particular point in time. The world needs the peaceful presence of Christ initiated by His taking on human flesh.

Let us use the days of the Nativity Fast to experience greater peace and rightness of mind. Let us focus clearly on Jesus Christ taking on human flesh.

May the Feast of Christ's birth be approached with great anticipation and wisdom.

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The Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost. Holy Martyrs and Confessors Gurias, Samonas and Abibas. November 15/28, 2021. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania.

Father Rodney Torbic

### ***Bodily Fasting for the Soul's Benefit***

The Nativity fast begins on November 14/27, and lasts forty days. The Nativity fast is not as strict as Great Lent or the Dormition fast, and can be compared to the Apostle's fast. It was instituted by the Church so that we would worthily greet the feast of the Nativity of Christ after having cleansed our hearts by prayer and repentance.

The establishment of the Nativity fast, like many other long fasts, dates back to the early days of Christianity. Already in the fourth century, St. Ambrose of Milan, Philastrius, and Blessed Augustine recall the Nativity fast in their works. St. Leo the Great wrote about the antiquity of the Nativity fast in the fifth century.

At first the Nativity fast lasted seven days for some Christians and a little longer for others. At the council of 1166 held during the time of Patriarch Luke of Constantinople and the Byzantine Emperor Manuel, all Christians were instructed to keep the fast for forty days before the great feast of the Nativity of Christ.

The Antiochian Patriarch Balsamon wrote that "His Holiness the Patriarch himself said that although these fasts (the Dormition and Nativity fasts —Ed.) are not determined by the canons, let us nevertheless force ourselves to follow the unwritten Church tradition and obligate ourselves to fast ... beginning November 15."

The Nativity fast is the final long fast of the year. It begins on November 15/28 and goes until December 25/January 7, forty days in duration, and therefore it is called the Forty Days in the Church typicon, just like Great Lent. Because the last day before the fast falls on the commemoration day of the Apostle Phillip (November 14/27), this fast is also called the St. Phillip fast.

The Nativity fast is a winter fast; it serves to illumine the end of the year for us with a mystical renovation of our spiritual oneness with God and our preparation for the feast of the Nativity of Christ.

St. Leo the Great writes, "The very observation of abstinence is marked by four periods, so that throughout the course of the year we would know that we continually have need of purification, and that with a distracted life we always need to strive through fasting and almsgiving to eradicate sin, which multiplies through the frailty of the flesh and unclean desires."

According to the words of St. Leo the Great, the Nativity fast is a sacrifice to God for the fruits we have gathered. "As the Lord generously gave us the fruits of the earth," writes the holy hierarch, "so should we also be generous to the poor during the fast."

In the words of St. Simeon of Thessalonica, "The forty days of the Nativity fast is an image of the fast of Moses, who having fasted for forty days and forty nights, received the words of God inscribed on stone tablets. But having fasted for forty days, we gaze upon and receive the living Word from the Virgin, inscribed not on stones, but incarnate and born, and we partake of His Divine flesh."

The Nativity fast was established so that by the day of Christ's Nativity we would have cleansed ourselves through repentance, prayer and fasting; so that with a pure heart, soul, and body we could reverently meet the Son of God Who has appeared to the world, and so that besides the usual gifts and sacrifices we would bring Him our pure heart and desire to follow His teaching.

The rule of the Church instructs what we must abstain from during the fasts—"All who piously fast should strictly observe the canons concerning the quality of food; that is, abstain during the fast from certain foods, not as from things defiled [may that not be], but as from things not appropriate to the fast and forbidden by the Church. Foods from which we should abstain during the fasts are: meat, cheese, butter, milk, eggs, and sometimes fish, depending upon which of the holy fasts."

The rules of abstinence prescribed by the Church for the Nativity fast are as strict as for the Apostle's fast. Furthermore, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of the Nativity fast, fish, wine, and oil are not allowed by the typicon, and foods without oil (xerophagy) can be taken only after Vespers. On the other days—Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday—food may be taken with vegetable oil. Fish is allowed during the Nativity fast on Saturdays and Sundays and on major feasts, like the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple, on a church's patronal feast, and on commemoration days of great saints if they fall on a Tuesday or Thursday. If they fall on a Wednesday or Friday, the fast may be relaxed to include wine and oil.

From December 20—25 (old style) the fast is intensified, and fish is not blessed even on Saturday and Sunday. Meanwhile, the civil New Year falls on these days [for those observing the Julian calendar], and we Orthodox Christians have to be especially focused, so that we might not break the strict fast by parties, eating, and drinking wine.

Fasting bodily, we must also fast spiritually. "Brothers, in fasting bodily let us also fast spiritually, and break all communion with falsehood," commands the Holy Church. Fasting is first of all man's spiritual struggle with his passions. St. John Chrysostom warns, "He is mistaken who thinks that the fast consists only in abstinence from food. True fasting is departing from evil."

Bodily fasting without spiritual fasting does not bring salvation of the soul; to the contrary, it can even be spiritually harmful if in abstaining from food a person is filled with an awareness of his superiority, knowing that he fasts. True fasting is bound up with prayer, repentance, refraining from passions and vices, uprooting evil deeds, forgiving offenses, abstaining from marital relations, avoiding parties, entertainment, theatres, and watching television. Fasting is not a goal but a means—a means of humbling our flesh and cleansing it from sins. Without prayer and repentance, fasting becomes no more than a diet.

The essence of fasting can be expressed in the following Church hymn: My soul, if you fast from food but are not cleansed of the passions, in vain are we content with not eating: for if the fast does not bring you correction, it will be hateful to God as false, and you will be like the evil demons who eat nothing at all."

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov:

"Learn to have restraint in food—by temperance you will bring health and strength to the body and vigor to the mind, so needed for the work of salvation..."

St. Isaac the Syrian: "Fasting with discernment is the spacious dwelling-place of all goodness. Whoever is lazy in fasting brings all goodness to wavering, because fasting was the commandment given to our nature from the beginning as a precaution to eating food, and by breaking the fast our first created fell."

St. Ambrose of Optina:

You must fast sensibly; try to conduct the coming fast judiciously, considering your physical strength.

The Joy of All Who Sorrow Church, Michurinsk

## **The Prologue from Ochrid** *St. Nikolai of Zhicha*

### **1. THE ENTRY INTO THE TEMPLE OF THE MOST-HOLY THEOTOKOS**

When the Most-holy Virgin Mary reached the age of three, her holy parents Joachim and Anna took her from Nazareth to Jerusalem to dedicate her to the service of God according to their earlier promise. It was a three-day journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem but, traveling to do a God-pleasing work, this journey was not difficult for them. Many kinsmen of Joachim and Anna gathered in Jerusalem to take part in this event, at which the invisible angels of God were also present. Leading the procession into the Temple were virgins with lighted tapers in their hands, then the Most-holy Virgin, led on one side by her father and on the other side by her mother. The virgin was clad in vesture of royal magnificence and adornments as was befitting the "King's daughter, the Bride of God" (Psalm 45:13-15). Following them were many kinsmen and friends, all with lighted tapers. Fifteen steps led up to the Temple. Joachim and Anna lifted the Virgin onto the first step, then she ran quickly to the top herself, where she was met by the High Priest Zacharias, who was to be the father of St. John the Forerunner. Taking her by the hand, he led her not only into the Temple, but into the "Holy of Holies," the holiest of holy places, into which no one but the high priest ever entered, and only once each year, at that. St. Theophylact of Ohrid says that Zacharias "was outside himself and possessed by God" when he led the Virgin into the holiest place in the Temple, beyond the second curtain--otherwise, his action could not be explained. Mary's parents then offered sacrifice to God according to the Law, received the priest's blessing and returned home. The Most-holy Virgin remained in the Temple and dwelt there for nine full years. While her parents were alive, they visited her often, especially Righteous Anna. When God called her parents from this world, the Most-holy Virgin was left an orphan and did not wish to leave the Temple until death or to enter into marriage. As that would have been against the Law and custom of Israel, she was given to St. Joseph, her kinsman in Nazareth, after reaching the age of twelve. Under the acceptable role of one betrothed, she could live in virginity and thus fulfill her desire and formally satisfy the Law, for it was then unknown in Israel for maidens to vow virginity to the end of their lives. The Most-holy Virgin Mary was the first of such life-vowed virgins, of the thousands and thousands of virgin men and women who would follow her in the Church of Christ.

### **HYMN OF PRAISE** **SAINTS JOACHIM AND ANNA**

The parents of the Holy Virgin  
Lead her to the holy Temple,  
And according to their promise  
They give her to the Lord.  
They lead the Temple to the Temple,  
While angels chant,  
And chant with joy  
To the young Virgin in purest attire.

The virgins accompany our Virgin,  
With hymns and tapers;

Zacharias leads her  
To the Holy of Holies;  
And into the Holy Place he takes her,  
Where the awesome mystery is hidden.

Where the Ark of the Covenant is,  
Where the golden lampstand is,  
Where the staff and the manna are,  
Into the guarding place of all mysteries;  
There the pure Virgin is led--  
The Mystical Ark of the Living Christ.

### REFLECTION

Submit yourself to the will of God and do not pry too closely into God's judgments, for you can lose your mind. The judgments of God are innumerable and unfathomable. A monk in the wilderness, imagining that he had attained perfection, prayed to God that He would reveal to him His various judgments in the lives of men. God put the thought in his mind to go to a distant place to inquire of a spiritual elder concerning this. However, while the monk was on his way, an angel of God in the form of an ordinary man joined him, saying that he too wanted to go to that elder. Thus traveling together, they came upon the house of a God-fearing man, who treated them well, giving them to eat from a silver platter. When they had eaten, the angel took the platter and threw it into the sea. The monk found this both amazing and unjust, but he remained silent. The second day they came upon the house of another hospitable man who cordially received and treated them as kinsmen. Before leaving, that man brought out his only son for the travelers to bless. The angel of God then took the child by the throat and strangled him. The monk was greatly angered and asked the angel who he was, and why he had committed such misdeeds. The angel meekly replied to him: "The first man was pleasing to God in all things and had nothing in his house that was attained by injustice except that silver platter. By God's judgment, I threw that stolen platter away, so that the man would be righteous before God in all things. The other man was pleasing to God and had nothing in his house that would bring down the wrath of God except his son, who--had he matured--would have become a great criminal and a demonic vessel. Therefore, by God's judgment, I strangled that child in time to save his soul, for the sake of his father's goodness, and to save the father from many miseries. Behold, such are the mysteries and the unfathomable judgments of God. And you, elder, should return to your cell and not strive vainly by inquiring into that which is in the authority of the One God."

### CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the wondrous creation of the world (Genesis 2):

1. How God created man from the dust of the earth;
2. How He breathed the spirit of life into his nostrils;
3. How man became a living soul.

### HOMILY

#### **on the faithful as one body and one spirit**

... There is one body and one spirit (Ephesians 4:4).

The Holy Apostle counsels the faithful to strive to be *one body and one spirit*. By *one body* is understood "one Faith," without divisions, without heresies and without self-will: the whole Church is *one body* of which Christ is the Head. By *one spirit* is understood "love," the ardent love of all the faithful for Christ, from which proceeds mutual love. The many become as one; many men become as one man. This is the miracle of the Christian Faith and Christian love. There is no power in the world which can be a stronger bond among men: not the same blood, or the same language, or the same hearth, or the same parents, or any type of common material interests. None of these is even nearly as powerful a bond as Christian faith and love. By this powerful, irresistible bond, all the members of the Church are bound to each other. The Church of God stands as one man, in time and in eternity--*one body and one spirit*. There is nothing more contradictory to this wondrous unity than the pride of individual men. Pride distorts faith, cools love, creates heresies, divides the Church, and sacrifices the good of the whole for individual satisfaction. Pride, in essence, is the absence of both faith and

love. Brethren, may God save us from pride, the primal infirmity of the human race, that we may always be *one body and one spirit* in our Lord Jesus Christ.

**To Thee, O Lord Jesus; to Thee, the Head of the Church, be glory and praise forever. Amen.**

### **Services this Week**

**-Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew ( Monday, November 29th) Divine Liturgy 09:00 AM**

**-The Entry into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos ( Saturday, December 4th) – Divine Liturgy 09:00 AM**

**-24th Sunday after Pentecost – (Sunday, December 5th) – 09:00 AM Divine Liturgy**

**My beloved brothers and sisters,**

**I wish everyone a happy and blessed beginning of Nativity Lent!**

**May the Lord grant every blessing and progress, spiritual growth and fruits, that we may welcome the birth of our Lord and Savior in good health, Joy, and every prosperity!**

### **Donations Sunday, November 21, 2021**

Offering - \$762.00

Candles - \$104.00

Dues - \$200

#### **Donations**

In Memory of Donald “Dino” Uzelac – from Pamela Brown - \$25

#### **Large Candles**

In Memory of Julie Lambrinos from Kumovi Dan & Dyne Tomak

In Memory of Vincent Czubak from Olga Bulich

In Memory of Irene Marinkovich from Olga Bulich

In Memory of Joanne Pavich from Joe & Connie Bartis  
In Memory of Zivkovich Family from Janice Fall Urchek  
In Memory of Parents Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Robert & Milica Knepp

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## IMPORTANT DATES TO PLACE ON YOUR CALENDAR

\* Next Fish Fry – this Friday, December 3rd

\* Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup> -Annual Congregational Meeting – Liturgy will begin at **9:00 AM**

\* Sunday, December 12<sup>th</sup>, - St. Nicholas Slava

**Celebration! Blessing of Slavski Kolac with Honored Kumovi Peter & Joanne Todorich followed by Banquet in the Church Hall! Please mark your calendars!**

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Anyone interested in running for and/or remaining on the St Nicholas Church Council for 2022 must submit their name and intent in writing to a member of the nominating committee (Natalie Ofsanko, Carole McAllister and Joseph Golden) ASAP – You may also leave this information in the Candle Room to the attention of the Committee.

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Thank you to everyone who donated to Father Bojan Radunovic's son Isaija. We collected \$1,275 which was successfully sent and received by Father Bojan. Following is his message; "Thank you very much for your donation. I am very grateful for the love of your good people. God Bless you!!!"





## POINSETTIAS

Please contact Suzette Gardenhour if you are interested in purchasing a Poinsettia to decorate the Iconostas for Christmas. We will be supporting SEADS Garden Center.(SEADS Garden Center is a nonprofit organization with a mission to provide Sustainable Employment for Adults with Disabilities – located at the former Flower Barn)

Red - 6 1/2 Inch Pot - \$10.50

Checks made payable to St Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Quantity \_\_\_\_\_ Total Due \_\_\_\_\_

In Memory Of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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