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# ❖ THE TORCHBEARER ❖

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Vol. 7 ... No. 3

November, 1998

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## ***From the Pastor...***

Beloved in the Lord:

This month brings two events that are important to the parish for different reasons. The first is our annual bazaar, which will be held on the weekend of November 6<sup>th</sup>. It is amazing to see the hard work of all those on the various committees who gather in the hall each night prior to the first day of this annual event. It is equally amazing to witness the crowds of people from near and far who have made this bazaar part of their yearly activities. If you look at the church's budget it is clear to see why the bazaar is so vital. However, the bazaar is vital for another reason too. It provides the parish with a common goal. It allows parishioners to meet each other and to feel united. The bazaar shows us in a very real way what this parish can accomplish when it sets its mind on something. The bazaar to be sure is vital to the "fellowship" aspect of the parish, but the "spiritual" aspect of the parish is just as important.

In addition to the bazaar, November also marks the start of our preparation for our Lord's birth. If you have looked at your mail recently, you can already see "holiday" catalogues being sent. I know that what I am about to say has been said before and will be said again, but I really feel that we must stop this trend. Christmas is not a holiday. Christmas is the birthday of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. If Christ were not born, what would our chances be for salvation? When Advent or "the fast of St. Philip" starts on November 15<sup>th</sup> what will our response be? This is the key word – response.

In theology classes in seminary, we learned about a very important word. The word is *synergia*



(synergia). As Bishop Kallistos Ware says in his classic book *The Orthodox Church*, "To describe the relation between the grace of God and free will of man, Orthodoxy uses the term cooperation or synergy; in (St.) Paul's words: 'We are fellowworkers with God' (I Cor. 3:9). If man is to achieve full fellowship with God, he cannot do so without God's help, yet he must also play his own part: man as well as God must make his contribution to the common work, although what God does is of immeasurably greater importance than which man does." (p. 226) To repeat: ***If man is to achieve full fellowship with God, he cannot do so without God's help, yet he must also play his own part.***

For some reason, people think that the only fasting period the Church has is Great Lent. How sad! Advent, like other fasting periods, allows us the chance to return to God. To refocus our minds, bodies, and souls toward that which is needful. Advent requires our full attention. God gives us so much can't we give him a little of ourselves? Can't we deny ourselves just a little? Just a little? To be sure the church is fellowship. I can't think of anyone who enjoys Arabic music, as much as I do, yet is this the sole purpose of the Church? I can't think of anyone else who enjoys the cooking of the Middle East as much as I do, but is this the sole purpose of the Church? The essence of the Church is being a member of the Body of Christ in full union with each other and in full communion with God through the life giving mystery of the Eucharist.

Make this Advent different. Make this Advent a time of reflection; reflecting on God's great love for us. Make this time a period of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving (giving to the poor). Instead of going to parties before Christmas, encourage your friends and family to celebrate AFTER the Feast. Would any one of us even consider celebrating before Easter? Would anyone of us even consider chanting

“Christ is risen...” on Good Friday? Then why would we “party” before Christmas?!

It is my fervent hope that all of us view Advent in a new way, a fresh way. It is my hope that our common journey towards Bethlehem allows to find once again right the right way. It is my hope that we can gather in this holy Church of St. John of Damascus on Wednesday, December 24<sup>th</sup> to pray together, to be together, to share in the Eucharist together, to celebrate together, and to shout from the depths of our hearts that “Christ is Born!! Glorify Him!!”

Assuring you of my love and prayers and wishing you all a most blessed Thanksgiving, I remain,

In Christ,

Rev. Fr. John K. Teebago, Pastor

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### ***Liturgical Notes...***

- Please remember that the Christmas Fast begins on Saturday, November 14<sup>th</sup>. Like other Lenten periods, the Church Calls us to increase (or even start) our efforts in prayer, fasting, and giving to the poor. It is also the perfect time to have your Confession heard. Confessions are heard on Sunday morning from 8:45 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. or by appointment. Please note, as in past years, Confessions will not be heard on Christmas evening. Let’s all do something to prepare ourselves for our Lord’s birth!

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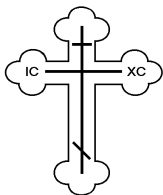
### ***Church Records...***

*“As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.”*

Maxwell Robert Zahka, son of Robert and Kara (O’Donnell) Zahka of Dedham, MA was baptized on September 27, 1998.

*Many Years!!*

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### ***Announcements...***

- 1999 Pledge Forms will be sent out in the coming weeks. As in the past, we ask that

everyone who considers St. John's “their church” to return this form. As always, the amount you pledge is confidential. It is from your response, that the Finance Committee can prepare the 1999 budget. Failures to return the Pledge Form will result in your pledge being automatically set by the computer at a default pledge of \$416 per year. Please help the church by sending this form back. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation!

- The deadline for the Christmas bulletin will be Tuesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> at 12 noon.
- The deadline for the Sunday, December 27<sup>th</sup> bulletin will be Tuesday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> at 12 noon.

***These deadlines must be strictly adhered to – please plan ahead.***

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### ***From the Church School...***

With so many new and exciting activities in progress already, this year is flying by for those of us involved in the Church School.

Our Teacher Workshop scheduled for November 15<sup>th</sup> promises to be informative and useful. Dr. Tony Vrame of Holy Cross Seminary Press will conduct a workshop, entitled “Bringing Faith to Life and Life to Faith.”

This workshop is not only open to teachers, but anyone who is interested in this topic is welcome! The workshop runs from noon to 2:30 p.m., and includes a pot luck lunch. Let me know if you’d like to attend.

By the time you read this Newsletter, the Overnight Retreat will have come and gone. It appears that enthusiasm is high amongst the students, and we look forward to the event. We’ll report back next month.

*Just a reminder...*

Our time in Church School is brief each week, sometimes less than an hour. To allow us the full benefit of our limited time with the kids, please refrain from checking up on your children, or interrupting the classes. If you need to dismiss your child early or get a message to someone, come to the Church School office, and we’ll gladly accommodate you. Thanks!!

As always, I welcome your support and input.

Faithfully,



**Church of St. John of Damascus**  
300 West Street  
Dedham, MA 02026-5594

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**THE TORCHBEARER**  
**is the Monthly Newsletter of the Church of St. John of Damascus**

*A Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America*

Rev. Fr. John K. Teebagy, Pastor

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**Services:** Sunday-Matins 9:00 a.m.,

Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

**Church Office Hours...**

Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

The deadline for the Sunday bulletin is Thursday at noon.

Please plan accordingly.

**DEADLINE** for the **DECEMBER TORCHBEARER**  
will be **November 10th.**

Please consult the Weekly Sunday Bulletin for any changes, corrections, etc.

***Church Office Hours...***

Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

The deadline for the Sunday bulletin  
is Thursday at noon.

Please plan accordingly.

## A Thanksgiving Prayer

By Fr. Alexander Schememann



*Everyone capable of  
thanksgiving is capable of  
salvation and eternal joy.*

*Thank you, O Lord, for  
having accepted this*

Eucharist, which is offered to the Holy Trinity,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and which filled our  
hearts with “the joy, peace and righteousness in the  
Holy Spirit.”

*Thank you, O Lord, for having revealed Yourself  
unto us and for giving us the foretaste of your  
Kingdom.*

*Thank you, O Lord, for having untied us to one  
another, in serving you and your Holy Church.*

*Thank you, O Lord, for having helped us to  
overcome all difficulties, tensions, passions, and  
temptations and for having restored peace, mutual  
love and joy in sharing the communion of the Holy  
Spirit.*

*Thank you, O Lord, for the sufferings you bestowed  
upon us, for they are purifying us from selfishness  
and remind us of the one thing needed: your eternal  
Kingdom.”*

*Thank you, O Lord, for having given us this country  
where we are free to worship You.*

*Thank you, O Lord, for this school, where the name  
of God is proclaimed.*

*Thank you, O Lord, for our families: husbands,  
wives and, especially children, who teach us how to  
celebrate Your holy Name, in joy, movement and  
holy noise.*

*Thank you, O Lord, for everyone and everything.*

Great are you, O Lord, and marvelous are your  
deeds, and no word is sufficient to celebrate Your  
miracles.

*Lord, it is good to be here! Amen.*

### Missions work in New England?

Building the One Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church  
**YOU CAN HELP**

All Saints Mission – Hingham, MA

Saint Michael the Archangel Mission – Falmouth, MA

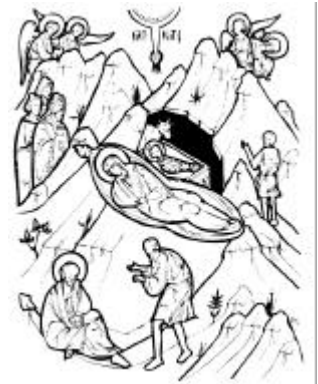
*Your help is invaluable and can come in many ways...  
it will surprise you.*

Call Fr. Boulous Khoury, NER Missions Coordinator  
for ways you can help. (617) 323-0323

## Christmas in the Orthodox Home

Some suggestions for a more meaningful Christmas  
Fast (Advent)

1. Prepare for the feasts of Christmas and Theophany AS A FAMILY. Abstain from meat at least on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.
2. Intensify your prayer life and be sure to read the Holy Scriptures DAILY.
3. In your Christmas preparations remember the poor and needy. Your care gives them hope.
4. Make a good Advent Confession and receive Holy Communion - the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ often during the Advent season.
5. Be sure to make Christ the center of your Christmas celebration.
6. Plan on bringing yourself and your family to the Christmas Divine Liturgy and that all are prepared to partake of Holy Communion.



7. And last, but not least , please remember -  
**OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IS THE  
REASON FOR THE SEASON.**

**St. John of Damascus Church School**  
presents

**“Bringing Faith to Life and Life to Faith”**

A Teacher Workshop  
led by

Dr. Tony Vrame from Holy Cross Seminary

Sunday, November 15<sup>th</sup> from 12 noon – 2:45 p.m.

Beginning with a Lenten Pot Luck Lunch, Dr. Vrame will  
conduct this informal,  
interactive workshop. Child care will be available.

Open to all interested parishioners.

Call for more information or reservations:  
Debbie Vogel (781) 440-0929

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## The Advent Period in Home Life

by Sophie Koulomzin

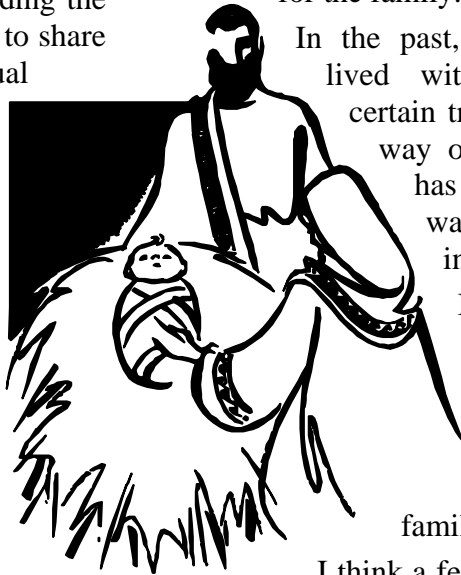
What is the meaning of the feast of the Nativity of Our Lord in our family life? How can we live through the preparatory period of Advent as a Christian family? Can this meaning be truly and naturally, unpretentiously, embodied in the experience of a family, a home with children, teenagers, adults and old people?

Of course, first of all, Christmas is a FEAST, a celebration, an occasion for joy. Understanding the real meaning of this joy (God coming to us to share our humanity) comes to every individual gradually, within the measure of his or her spiritual development, but the experience of joy, of rejoicing, of having a very happy time because it is Christmas is something that can be experienced by all members of the family, whatever their age, whatever their level of spirituality . . . if only there is someone within the family who remains a witness of the true meaning of this joy. The experience of a joyous celebration remains the foundation stone of understanding the meaning of the Lord's Nativity. CHRISTMAS MEANS JOY.

All parents realize, I think, that attending church services is not sufficient to have children and young people sincerely experience joy. The real challenge for a Christian family is to find a form of home celebration that will be enjoyable and creative for all its members, young and old and will yet keep a kind of transparency, through which the true meaning of the feast can be perceived within the spiritual capacity of each one. It may be a festive meal, a distribution of presents, lighting the Christmas tree, carol singing, or many other things. It has to be something that comes naturally, remains spontaneous, is not artificially imposed.

I have been asked to write a short article on the theme of home activities during Advent. But, I believe that most parents would agree with me, it is practically impossible to plan a program of activities for the family. The family is not a school, not an institution where the whole environment can

be carefully controlled, a curriculum planned, study material provided, tests carried out. A family is a unit, a "oneness," of individuals, of individual relationships, moods, different and constantly changing stages of development. Any attempt to IMPOSE a mood, a feeling, an emotion may call forth resentment and irritation that defeats the very purpose of the effort. Anything that will be felt by other members of the family as artificial or contrived and will not become a living part of the family experience. A family tradition has to be "grown into," has to become a natural way of life for the family.



In the past, individual Orthodox families lived within Orthodox societies and certain traditions were part of a general way of life, but today every family has to find its own AUTHENTIC way of living its own church life in a generally secular world.

I am afraid I am quite unable to write a theoretical article on the subject. I can only attempt to share with you how we tried to prepare for Christmas and live through the feast as ONE family.

I think a festive Christmas meal is enjoyed more and becomes more meaningful when it is preceded by a period of fasting and abstinence in whatever form, and for whatever length of time this is possible in your particular family situation. After the All Night Vigil on Christmas Eve we returned to a special Lenten supper, which we had around the Christmas Tree (my own particular idiosyncrasy was observed in that on that quiet occasion we lit real candles and not electric lights.) I have Ukrainian friends who have a very traditional Christmas Eve supper menu, but in our home we had never known that particular tradition.

I always wanted preparations for Christmas to involve the children's creativity. For many, many years our home celebration involved a home Christmas play. I am fond of theatricals, especially of the kind that draws upon the children's imagination and creativity. Old Christmas folk stories and legends adapted themselves easily to whatever number of children or grandchildren were available. Costumes and scenery were made up of

odd stuff found in an old trunk in the attic, with the help of colored paper, tinsel, glue, paints. Rehearsals were part of the Advent time and they did involve a sense of effort and work in preparation for celebrating Christmas. In our particular case it also served the purpose of teaching children Russian.

On Christmas Day, after Divine Liturgy, the whole family clan assembled for a festive dinner, which lasted quite long. As soon as it grew dark it was time for the play. Looking back at those plays so many years later, I can see how well they are remembered by my children (now parents of growing families), and many of our now adult grandchildren.

After the play, someone dressed up as Santa Claus, brought in all the gifts from grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins and from children to each other and to adults. It made a huge pile. We never made a big issue of "believing in Santa Claus." I guess the smallest children, up to about three or four years old accepted him in good faith, but whenever they began to ask questions, I always told them the story of Saint Nicholas bringing gifts secretly and how the tradition of Santa Claus was established in his memory.

Our Advent activities were usually various forms of preparing for celebrating Christmas. Some time before Christmas (in the days of "two calendars" it was usually on the "new style" Christmas) we built a manger scene, a "crèche" as we called it. Making the cave, the landscape around it, the clay figures, the lighting effects depended on the age and sophistication of the young artists and varied from year to year. We made decorations for the home, for the Christmas tree.

And then, of course, we prepared gifts. I am sure that, in terms of Christian experience of life, expressing our love to others through preparing gifts for them is a good way of preparing for the feast of Christmas. Obviously the children expected to receive gifts, just as we expect to receive a lot of things from our Heavenly Father, but they also **gave** gifts and that involved a lot of work, imagination and planning on their part (baking, building, sewing, painting, carpentering, etc.)

I regret now that we did not know how to involve our children in trying to give pleasure to people outside the family. I do believe that gift giving has to be a part of a personal relationship and I always

felt hesitant about dumping useless little impersonal gifts on old people in a Nursing Home. But as I look back, I believe that it might have been possible to interest children in a personal and continued relationship with a particular person who might be lonely or friendless.

In our family, in days past, the Pre-Christmas period was always linked to what used to be called "govenye", "making one's devotions" or what is now sometimes called a "retreat". That meant that we attended church, for several weekdays we abstained from certain foods and amusements and went to confession and received Holy Communion on Christmas Day. It was a family experience. I realize that today, when frequent communion is practiced in many families, the situation is different, but I do believe that a kind of family retreat before great Holidays is very helpful.

Of course, we made sure, as the children grew up, that they all knew well the Gospel Nativity stories and the special Christmas liturgical hymns sung in church. If there is time and place in the structure of family life for special Pre-Christmas instruction, many helpful suggestions can be found in the booklets "THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS" published by the OCEC.

I do not think that any family can ever say with self satisfaction that it has carried out a perfect program in preparation for the celebration of a great church feast, yet I know that many young adults, who have to a certain extent drifted away from taking part in the life of the Church, still cherish the family celebration of Christmas and Easter, and this experience remains for them a link with the experience of Church life.

Taken from The Word, December 1985

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## A Blessed and Happy Thanksgiving

to You and  
Your  
Loved Ones



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## Troparion of the Presentation of the Theotokos

*Today the Virgin is the foreshadowing of the pleasure of God, and the beginning of the preaching of the salvation of mankind. Thou hast appeared in the Temple of God openly and hast gone before, preaching Christ to all. Let us shout with one thrilling voice, saying, Rejoice, O thou who art the fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation.*



November 21<sup>st</sup>

## Entrance into the Temple of our most Holy Lady, the Mother of God and Virgin Mary

According to the Tradition of the Church, The Mother of God was brought to the Temple at three years of age, where she was consecrated to God and spent her days until she was fourteen or fifteen years; and then, as a mature maiden, by common counsel of the priests (since her parents had reposed some three years before), she was betrothed to Joseph.

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## Kontakion for the Presentation of the Entrance of Mary

*The all-pure temple of the Savior, the most precious bridal-chamber and Virgin, the treasure-house of the glory of God, today entered the Temple of the Lord, bringing with her the grace which is in the divine Spirit: Whom also the angels of God do celebrate in song; for she is the heavenly tabernacle.*

\* \* \* \* \*