

THE NATIVITY FAST

(NOVEMBER 15–DECEMBER 24)

Did you know Christmas in the Orthodox Church is preceded by a 40-day spiritual journey?

In the Orthodox Church, the Nativity Fast (also called the Christmas Fast or Advent) is a sacred season of preparation and reflection, beginning each year on November 15. Just like Great Lent prepares us for Pascha, this fast prepares our hearts for the Birth of Christ.

This 40-day fast invites us into repentance, prayer, and almsgiving, while also practicing fasting — abstaining from meat, dairy, and other foods — depending on local custom and spiritual guidance. But fasting is never just about food. It's about softening the heart, slowing down, and making room for Christ to be born within us.

The Church Fathers teach us that fasting and feasting go hand in hand. The more we empty ourselves in humility, the more fully we can receive the joy of the Feast of the Nativity. The church services, hymns, and readings during this time help us enter into the mystery of the Incarnation: that God became man, taking on flesh to redeem the world.

As St. John Chrysostom teaches, "Behold a new and wondrous mystery: my ears resound to the Shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn… Today He who Is, is born."

While the world rushes into decorations and noise, the Church calls us to a quiet joy, a time of expectation and hope. The cave of Bethlehem becomes a mirror for the soul: have we made room for Christ to be born in us?

Let this season be one of watchfulness, gentleness, and longing for the Light that has come into the world!