

## **Parish Prayer List (Living)**

*(Parish)*

Evangelos	Carolyn	Robert	Sharon
John	Maria	Anamay	Ron
Lawrence	Dianna	Seraphim	Evdokia
Anthony	Pauline	Nadja	Jerry
Beverly	David	Michael	Anastasia
Nina	Walter	Nathan	Mary
Joseph	Duncan	Thecla	Michael
Reader Mark	Tatiana	Travis	Jason
Susan Mary	Clint	John	George
Magdalini	Connie	Emil	Sophia
Barbara	Yevgeniya	Roman	Ilija
Olga	Marina	Efthalia	Denny

*(non-Parish)*

Alexandra	Rachael	Jessilyn	Amanda
Christopher	Fr. Michael	Paige	Sean
James	Nicholas B.	Karin	Grant
Michael	Helen	Susan K	Nadia
Anna	Brian	Kathy Tanner	Salvatore
Josephine	Nicholas (Nadja's brother)	Alma	Randy
Peter	Maria	Michael	Timothy
Petrese			

## **Parish Prayer List (Fallen Asleep)**

Barry Stavrou (+9/27)

Lois Lynn (+10/11)

Barton Lynn (+10/22)

Nicholas Georgeopoulos (+11/3)

Betty Pilja (+12/6)

Mary Louise Blomeley (+12/10)

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## **Thoughts from the Fathers**

The Holy Spirit sets us all on different paths: one man lives a life of silent solitude in the desert; another prays for mankind; still another is called to minister to Christ's flock; to a fourth it is given to comfort or preach to the suffering; while yet another serves his neighbour by his goods or by the fruits of his labour - and all these are gifts of the Holy Spirit given in varying degrees: to one man thirtyfold, to another sixty and to some a hundred. If we love one another in simplicity of heart, the Lord through the Holy Spirit would show us many miracles and reveal great mysteries.'

-St. Silouan the Athonite

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## Nativity Fast



*Make ready, O Bethlehem: let the manger be prepared, let the cave show it's welcome. The truth has come, the shadow has passed away...*

On November 15th we begin the forty day period where we proclaim the miracle of God becoming man. This is the time in the Orthodox Church where our attention is drawn to the great mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We await his coming in anticipation of the great joy of His birth on Christmas Day. For our preparation the wisdom of our Church asks us to participate in a fast, with all the inconvenience and discomfort it may bring. If this is a season of such great joy, why is this the practice of Orthodox Christians around the world? Why are we asked to fast when we hear daily the hymn "*Hark, the herald angels sing!*" almost every pace we go?

By our fasting we are reminded that this is not simply the birth of a baby, but God being united with man. It is the moment when the unchangeable is joined with the changeable, eternal life with mortal life, He who holds the universe in His hand and who created all comes in the flesh for our salvation.

*Thou who has adorned the vault of heaven with stars has been well pleased to be born as a babe; and Thou. Who holds all the ends of the earth in the hallow of Thy hand art laid in a manger of dumb beasts... (Sticheron of Third Hour, Eve of the Nativity)*

This is an event that should make us tremble with awe and wonder, bring us to humility and desiring to offer thanksgiving. But are we not engulfed in the secular traditions of this holiday season with its

focus on gifts and parties, where the significance of this great event is often less than an afterthought? Do we take time to think about why God was incarnated and became man? Do we reflect on the truth that it is through His becoming one with us that we can now become one with Him? Do we remember that before this event man was not able to overcome the fear of death, held in bondage to sin? The reality is that the Virgin birth of Jesus is the greatest miracle in the history of mankind. Now man can become like God and be united with Him in Paradise with eternal life. With a fast we are preparing for celebration of the beginning of the transformative journey He prepared for our salvation.

November 15 is the starting point for a spiritual journey to the day of this great joy. This journey is one one that requires our development of greater humility so we can fully appreciate what God have given to us. This is by nature an ascetic journey. Like our journey to be united with God, it is not one where we can make use of our social relationships or our material possessions. This is a journey where we must learn to surrender our souls to the will of God, relinquish our control over the journey to Him whose birth we are about to celebrate. This is the spirit we must embrace as we enter into this fast. It is a period of preparation just as the manger was prepared for Christ.

*Make ready, O Bethlehem: let the manger be prepared, let the cave show it's welcome. The truth has come, the shadow has passed away; born of a Virgin, God has appeared to men, formed as we are and making godlike the garment He has put on. Therefore Adam is renewed with Eve, and they call out: 'Thy good pleasure has appeared on earth to save our kind.'*

Christmas Day is about the great mystery of God's becoming like us, we who are bound to death, so He can transform us to become like Him, overcoming our mortality and becoming fully alive in Him. The Canon of Matins for the Nativity says, "*He establishes a path for us, whereby we may mount up to heaven.*" This coming event is not just about God coming to us, but all of humanity being lifted up into He who is born on Christmas Day in the form of man, Christ the Incarnation of God.

This Nativity fast is to help us lift ourselves above all those things which bind us to our worldly life, freeing ourselves to be united in Him. As we fast we are reminded that we depend on Him for our food and have also are in need for spiritual food that is much more than our daily bread. We learn this by forgoing the extra sweets, the pleasurable drinks, the abundant foods so we will not be fully

satisfied by the earthly pleasures but seek instead the treasures that are beyond this life and world. In this process of fasting we are lifting our thoughts to things that are of the heavenly realm that bring us true joy and unbounded pleasures. The fast is a time to break our attachments to those things which have power over us, learning to set them aside so we can be freely governed by God's will alone.

By engaging in this period of fasting where we can work towards our purification with the help of God's grace, we cooperate with God in our spiritual growth and the all important journey to become one with Him. after all, this is the aim of our Orthodox way of life. In this way we are able to approach Him on Christmas Day with joy, just as did the Magi and the shepherds of Bethlehem.

Cleansing our minds through fasting, let us offer through our lives virtues instead of myrrh, preparing with faith our entry into the feast of the Nativity, storing up treasure in our souls and crying: Glory in the highest to God in Trinity, whose good pleasure is not revealed to men, that in His love for mankind He may set Adam free from the ancestral curse (death). Christmas Day is truly the day of our Salvation. This is the joy we should celebrate when this day comes. The Nativity Fast is like the fast of Lent, but not quite as strict. Let us not rebel against such self-imposed constraints on our desires, but embrace this practice which Christ Himself practiced and called us to do likewise when He said, "When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites." Note he did not say IF you fast, but WHEN you fast. Why do we resist this important practice? It seems odd that we are willing to pay large sums of money to enter into special diet programs like Jenny Craig, while, when the Church asked us to engage in such fasts for our spiritual well being, we resist and even think it something impossible to do. Unfortunately fasting is not practiced in much of the Christian world these days. Our Protestant friends do not fast and even the Catholics no longer give much importance to fasting. It is a Tradition given to us through Christ Himself and passed on to us by the Apostles that many have lost. But the Orthodox Church still teaches this important practice. If you do choose to follow our Lord and do as He asks of us and enter into a fast in preparation of this most special day, you will be rewarded when that day comes.