

THINK ABOUT IT ... Choose the correct answer:

1. Another name for the Nativity Fast is:
 - A. St. Philip's Fast
 - B. Dormition Fast
 - C. Sts. Peter and Paul's Fast
 - D. Great Lent
2. How long is the Nativity Fast?
 - A. One day
 - B. Nine days
 - C. Twelve days
 - D. Forty days
3. The Nativity Fast is sometimes called Winter Lent because:
 - A. It occurs on the first day of winter
 - B. It is the same number of days as Great Lent
 - C. It continues all winter until the first day of spring
 - D. All of the above
4. Orthodox Christians observe times of Fasting to:
 - A. Draw closer to God
 - B. Practice self-discipline
 - C. Repent and work on our spiritual growth
 - D. All of the above
5. The Nativity Fast ends on:
 - A. New Year's
 - B. Christmas
 - C. Epiphany
 - D. The first day of spring
6. Repentance is symbolized by what color?
 - A. Red
 - B. Green
 - C. Purple
 - D. Yellow
7. The name for the Christ child is Emmanuel, which means:
 - A. "Lord have mercy"
 - B. "Let us attend"
 - C. "God is with us"
 - D. "Come and see"

The Nativity Fast (St. Philip's Fast)

**The Lord will give you a sign. The Virgin shall bear a Son.
You shall call His name Emmanuel - "God is with us."**



Icon - "The Virgin of the Sign"

The Nativity Fast (The Fast of St. Philip)

During the **Nativity Fast**, Orthodox Christians prepare for the celebration of the Nativity of Christ. The word “**nativity**” means “**birth**.” In western countries, this day became known as Christmas (Christ’s Mass) because it is a day when religious services (which some churches call a “Mass” and we call the “Liturgy”) are held to celebrate the birth of Christ, the Son of God, our Savior.

We know that in the present-day **secular** American tradition, the “holiday season” begins in November (usually the day after Thanksgiving). The Nativity Fast occurs at the same time as the secular American “holiday season.” But it is a lot different in its meaning from secular “holiday” celebrations and traditions.

The original meaning of the word “holiday” actually was “Holy Day,” a **sacred** day to glorify God and His Saints. The Nativity Fast is meant to get us ready, not for a present-opening party, but for a celebration of the birth of Christ.

In many Christian churches, several weeks prior to Christmas are known as Advent, from a Latin word that means “coming.” In the Orthodox Church, this season of preparation for the Nativity of Christ always begins on November 15, the day after the Feast of the Apostle Philip. For this reason it is known as **St. Philip’s Fast**.

This special period lasts 40 days, the same as Lent, and it is therefore sometimes called the **Winter Lent**. For those who still follow the Julian calendar, the Winter Lent does not begin until November 28 which is actually November 15 on the Julian calendar.

Similar to the period of Great Lent, the Nativity Fast was established by the Church as a time for **repentance**. If we look around in the church during this time, we do not yet see the Christmas colors of red, green, white, silver, and gold. During the Nativity Fast, we see vestments and cloths that are **purple**, a color that is a symbol of repentance.

So, two things are happening around us during this time, and both are called “the Christmas season.” Some of the things during this season are “**secular**” and others, which are more important, are “**sacred**.” Secular things are not “bad.” There is a time and place for them. But we should not allow secular things and parties to take the place of Church observances.

Why does the Church have time periods called “Fasts”?

* We know that some things are “secular” and some things are “sacred.” If we spend too much time doing what is “secular” then we have less time for God, Who loves each of us and gives us many blessings, for which we must remember to thank Him. A Fasting period helps us **to draw closer to God**.

* The Orthodox Church teaches that there is a **close connection between the body and the soul**, so what happens to one affects the other. Fasting means abstaining from (avoiding, or not having, or not doing) certain things. One aspect of Fasting involves eating less and avoiding certain kinds of foods. It’s not that God wants us to be undernourished. Food is good for us and necessary for health. But learning to control what we eat and when we eat is a spiritual practice that teaches us **self-discipline**, which helps us grow in spiritual maturity. Self-discipline is necessary in order for us to have the inner strength to overcome other kinds of behaviors and habits: those that are spiritually unhealthy (sins) and to work to increase our **spiritually healthy** habits.

* Therefore, fasting involves **repentance** and self-discipline. These help a person **to become more like God created us to be**.

* So, the Church teaches that Fasting isn’t only about what foods we eat. Through practicing Fasting, a person learns to also “**fast**” **from -- to control -- anger, greed, envy, gossip, and selfishness**.

* In addition to Fasting, **almsgiving (charity)**, such as helping the poor, the sick, and others who are experiencing hardship in their lives, is also important because Christ taught that we must **love and help others**, as the Good Samaritan did.

UNDERSTAND THE ORTHODOX USE OF THE WORDS:

SECULAR = activities or things that have no religious meaning, things that do not have the purpose to worship or glorify God

SACRED = holy, connected with or related to God, things and activities dedicated to a religious purpose

REPENTANCE = to feel sorry for past actions, words, or thoughts that are spiritually unhealthy (sins) and to ask God for His help so that we become stronger to not repeat them but instead to replace them with spiritually healthy habits