

THINK ABOUT IT ... Choose the correct answer:

1. The word Nativity means:
 - A. Birth
 - B. Fast
 - C. Resurrection
 - D. Lent
2. How long is the Nativity Fast?
 - A. One week
 - B. Nine days
 - C. Twelve days
 - D. Forty days
3. The Nativity Fast is sometimes called Winter Lent because:
 - A. It starts 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. Get closer to God
 - B. Learn self-discipline
 - C. Repent and work to change bad habits
 - 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. What colors are symbols of celebration of the Nativity?
 - A. Pink and orange
 - B. Blue and turquoise
 - C. Purple and black
 - D. Gold and silver
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



“God is with us! Understand this all nations,
and submit yourselves, for God is with us.”

**The Virgin shall bear a Son. He shall be called Emmanuel:
“God is with us.”**

During the **Nativity Fast**, Orthodox Christians prepare for the celebration of the Nativity of Christ.

The word “**nativity**” means “**birth.**” In western countries, the celebration of the Nativity 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.”

This special period lasts 40 days, the same as Lent, and it is therefore sometimes called the **Winter Lent**. We begin the Nativity Fast on November 15. For those who follow the Julian calendar, the Winter Lent begins 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 from sins**. If we look around in the church during this time, we do not yet see the Nativity colors of white or silver, and gold, which are colors of celebration.

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 get closer to God.**

* The Orthodox Church teaches that there is a **connection between the body and the soul**, so what happens to one affects the other. Fasting means avoiding, or not having, or not doing certain things. Fasting involves eating less and not having 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 teaches us **self-discipline**, which helps us grow in spiritual maturity.

Self-discipline means learning to use our inner strength to overcome (stop) behaviors and habits 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.**

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

* During Fast periods, the Church also encourages us to increase our **charity**, such as helping the poor, the sick, and others who have hardship in their lives, because Christ taught that we must **love and help others**, as the Good Samaritan did.

UNDERSTAND 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