

## *Celebrating Our Faith*

Byzantine Catholic Worship: *Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage*

### Why Do We Sing Christmas Carols Until February 1st?

**I**T'S THE MIDDLE OF JANUARY and we're still singing Christmas carols during the Divine Liturgy! Yes, that's correct. But why? Well, in a nutshell, it's because the actual Christmas 'season', like Easter (Advent and Great Lent also), lasts 40 days, whereas the Christmas 'feast' (which includes the post-feast) is only 7 days long (until December 31 in the Gregorian calendar). Then it comes time for the fore-feast of Theophany, another important event during this festive season on January 6, which itself has a post-feast of 8 days (until January 14).



Still not sure or understand it all? Here are four very good reasons why we sing Christmas carols until February 1, and have been for many years.

- 1) **The Feast of the Presentation on February 2 is the traditional end of the Christmas season.** On that day, forty days after His birth, Joseph and Mary brought Jesus, their first born son, to the Temple in accordance with the Law. So, really, for all of January we can remember Jesus as a newborn, and Our Lady, His Mother Mary and St. Joseph facing the daily adjustment that all first-time parents face.
- 2) **It is much easier to focus on the Nativity of Christ after the days of feasting.** The parties are over, the feasts are eaten, and the presents are unwrapped. We can finally get back to a more normal pace of life which for Christians includes daily prayer. Why not use the time after His Nativity, while the liturgical year is waiting to present Him in the temple, to contemplate further the wonder of God made flesh.
- 3) **In the bleak season of January, we need a little Christmas spirit.** January, much more than December, needs a little cheering up. In our northern climate, the outside temperature can be quite frigid, and the darkness of night is long. The season of Lent has yet to begin, but we know it's coming (there are the Pre-Lenten Sundays), so why take on the penance of ceasing to celebrate before you have to?
- 4) **Most Christmas carols are still appropriate after the feast.** You can skip all the songs about Santa, kids frolicking in the winter snow, and longing to be home for the holidays, but keep the carols about Christ being born. Newborn babies are not forgotten 12 days after their birth, but are cared for and loved as they grow. Let us enjoy the 'babymoon' with Mary, the Virgin Mother, singing about the birth of her Son as long as we can!

## What sort of New Year's Resolutions should a Christian make?

**I**T'S A NEW YEAR, and that is worth celebrating. Now that the holidays are over, as well as the hustle and bustle of it all, this may be the perfect time to look at those resolutions that you may have made, but unfortunately have already gone by the wayside.

The key to setting and accomplishing most goals and beyond can actually be found in The Bible. Matthew 6:33 says it quite simply: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."*

Common New Year's resolutions are commitments to quit smoking, to stop drinking, to manage money more wisely, and to spend more time with family. By far, the most common New Year's resolution is to lose weight, in conjunction with exercising more and eating more healthily. These are all good goals to set. However, 1 Timothy 4:8 instructs us to keep exercise in perspective: *"For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."* The vast majority of New Year's resolutions, even among Christians, are in relation to physical things. This should not be. However, if God is the centre of your New Year's resolution, it has chance for success, depending on your commitment to it. If it is God's will for something to be fulfilled, He will enable you to fulfill it. If a resolution is not God honouring and/or is not in agreement in God's Word, we will not receive God's help in fulfilling the resolution. You still haven't made any? Try these.

### GROW YOUR FAITH

The very definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 tells us that true faith is much bigger than we can do or see on our own. Faith also takes shifting the focus away from yourself and onto God and others. This might mean getting more involved in community service, volunteering your time more often, or truly getting involved in our parish functions at a deeper level.

### RESTORE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Read the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 11:15-23. Like the father in the story, Jesus is also watching and waiting for you to come home. No matter where you have been or what you have done, God's forgiveness is waiting to be graciously given to you. Today is the day to ask for forgiveness, turn towards Him, and run in His direction.

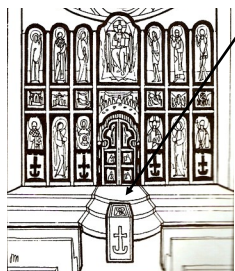
### DEVELOP MORE FAITH-BASED RELATIONSHIPS

There is no better place to do this than the Church, for it is a destination designed to help Christians deepen their walk with the Lord as well as fellowship with other believers, and it can provide a great network for outreach and support.

So, set your goals wisely and remember: be proactive, not reactive, and be happy in 2018! *Bless us God, our Father, in the coming year...*

# Divine Liturgy 101: Prayer before the Ambon

**THE LAST PUBLIC PRAYER** of the Divine Liturgy is the "Prayer Before the Ambon" (Greek, *ophistambonos*; Ukrainian *амвон*, 'amvon') originally a prayer of thanksgiving said as the clergy descended the ambon at the end of the service. [Note: In the publication **The Divine Liturgy: An Anthology for Worship**, Ottawa, 2004, it is referred to as the ambo]. Before we go any further, however, let's look at what the ambon is.



The ambon is the platform from which the deacon reads the Gospel and says the litanies, and the priest gives the dismissal during the Divine Services. (Holy Cross does not have one, but the former Church of the Ascension did, as well, the Ukrainian Orthodox of Church St. Vladimir's does.) The ambon is considered to be a part of the altar (i.e., *the sanctuary*), so normally only the clergy will go up onto it. The exception is that the faithful may step up onto the ambon when they

come forward to receive Holy Communion. [Note: In the Roman Catholic Church, the stand from which the Gospel is read is formally called the ambo (not ambon), normally in the form of a lectern or pulpit.]

In ancient times, there was a large collection of Prayers Before the Ambon, written for the different Feast Days of the church year and for those occasional services (weddings, funerals, etc.) that called for a celebration of the Divine Liturgy. In some Orthodox Churches this more extensive collection of prayers is used.

Most parishioners are very familiar with it. Located on pages 75-76 of the navy blue missals, the Ambon Prayer, (always intoned by the priest rather than a deacon) prepares us to return into the world following the Divine Liturgy, encouraging us to bring it our prayers. (You see Father Stepan turn around and go to the edge of the altar and turn toward the icon of Christ on Sundays).

*You bless those who bless You, O Lord, and sanctify those who trust in You. Save Your people and bless Your inheritance. Protect the fullness of Your Church. Sanctify those who love the beauty of Your house and glorify them by Your divine power. Do not forsake us who hope in You. Grant peace to Your world, to Your churches, to the priests, to our nation under God, to our government, and to all Your people. For all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from You, the Father of Lights. And we give glory, thanks, and worship to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever.*

The Divine Liturgy: An Anthology for Worship contains many Alternate Ambo Prayers for the various holydays and special Sundays throughout the liturgical year. It is the decision of the parish pastor whether to use them, and sometimes they have been published with the inserts of troparia and special texts for a particular commemoration for the faithful to read.

# Feast of the Three Holy and Great Hierarchs

**ON THE 30<sup>TH</sup> OF JANUARY**, each year, we celebrate the memory of three great and very outstanding bishops, teachers, preachers and Fathers of the Eastern Church: **St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. John Chrysostom**. Among our people this feast is known as the feast of the "Three Saints." These three hierarchs-bishops were giants of faith, courage, holiness and learning. They handed down to us the pure faith of the Council of Nicea; they expounded the dogmas of the Holy Trinity, Christ's divinity and the Holy Eucharist. Because of their great merits, in her liturgy our Eastern Church calls them equals of the Apostles, instruments of the Holy Spirit, pillars of the Church and universal teachers of the whole world. All three lived in the fourth century — the golden age of the Christian faith. St. Basil and St. Gregory were sons of Cappadocia in Asia Minor, intimate friends of approximately the same age. St. John Chrysostom, an Antiochian, was younger than the other two by twenty years. Apostolic zeal for the holy faith and salvation of souls united them.



Disputes raged in 11th century Constantinople about which of the three hierarchs was the greatest. Some argued that Basil was superior to the other two because of his explanations of Christian faith and monastic example. Supporters of John Chrysostom countered that the "Golden-Mouthed" (Ukrainian: Zoloto-ustiy) Archbishop of Constantinople was unmatched in both eloquence and in bringing sinners to repentance. A third group insisted that Basil's close friend, Gregory the Theologian, was preferred to the others due to the majesty, purity and profundity of his homilies and his defense of the faith from the Arian heresy. All three have separate feast days in January: Basil on January 1, Gregory on January 25, and John Chrysostom on January 27. The Eastern Churches teach that the three hierarchs appeared together in a vision to St. John Mauropous, bishop of Euchaita, in the year 1084, and said that they were equal before God: **"There are no divisions among us, and no opposition to one another."** As a result, a January 30 feast day commemorating all three in common was instituted around 1100 under the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos.

The service of the feast beautifully praises and glorifies the Three Hierarchs for their fervent love of God and neighbour, their unwavering faith, their significance for holy Church, their illustrious virtues, wisdom and intercession. "Basil, divine intellect," we sing in the Aposticha of the Small Vespers service, *"Gregory, divine voice, John, most beautiful lamp. May they be glorified, these three distinguished representatives and ministers of the Trinity."* In the Aposticha of the Solemn or Great Vespers we sing: *"O instruments of the Holy Spirit, and trumpets of divine thunder, O lightnings of preaching, O golden, light-bearing, resplendent lamps of God: O most blessed Basil, O most wise Gregory and O most venerable John, implore Christ our God to save those who honour you."*