

The Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church

The Great Feasts of the Church are celebrations that honor our Lord and his Mother. It is expected that Orthodox Christians celebrate the Great Feasts by attending Liturgy and receiving communion. Because some of the feasts fall during the weekday, this may not be possible. In this event, please plan on attending the Great Vespers the night before and, if you can, stopping in to light a candle the day of the feast on your way to work or school.

Please also remember to mark your calendar so you know when the Great Feasts are.

Fixed Feasts

- **The Nativity of the Theotokos (September 8)**¹ — In this Feast, we celebrate the birth of the Mother of God.

The Apolytikion: “Your birth, O Theotokos, brought joy to the whole world, for from you dawned the sun of righteousness, Christ our God. Freeing us from the curse, He gave us His blessings. Abolishing death, He granted us eternal life.”



¹ Please note that the Church Year begins on September 1st, not January 1st.

- **The Elevation of the Cross (September 14)**—This is the celebration of the finding of the cross by St. Helene in the 4th century. Once it was discovered, it was elevated by St. Macarius, Archbishop of Jerusalem.

Apolytikion: “Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance, granting our rulers to prevail over adversaries, and protecting Your commonwealth by Your Cross.”



- **The Entrance of the Theotokos (November 21)**—This feast, occurring 40 days after the Theotokos’s birth, celebrates her entrance into the Temple as a young girl. There is stayed until she was betrothed to Joseph.

Apolytikion: “Today is the prelude of God's pleasure and the proclamation of man's salvation. The Virgin is clearly made manifest in the temple of God and foretells Christ to all. Let us also cry out to her with mighty voice, ‘Hail, fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation.’”



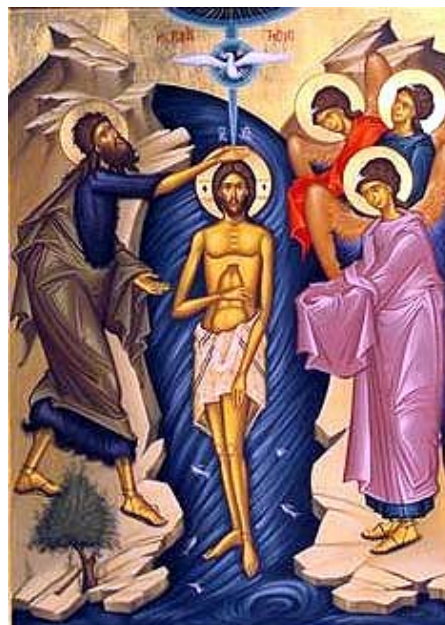
- **The Nativity of Christ (December 25)**—This is the celebration of our Lord’s birth.

Apolytikion: “Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, hath shined the light of knowledge upon the world; for thereby they that worshipped the stars were instructed by a star to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high. O Lord, glory be to Thee.”



- **Theophany (January 6)**—This feast is sometimes called Epiphany. For Orthodox Christians, it celebrates the baptism of Christ and the revelation of the Trinity.

Apolytikion: “Lord, when You were baptized in the Jordan, the veneration of the Trinity was revealed. For the voice of the Father gave witness to You, calling You Beloved, and the Spirit, in the guise of a dove, confirmed the certainty of His words. Glory to You, Christ our God, who appeared and enlightened the world.”



- **The Presentation of Christ (February 2)**—This feast, which occurs 40 days after Christmas, celebrates when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple after his birth. While there, he encountered Ss. Simeon and Anna.

Apolytikion: “Hail Virgin Theotokos full of Grace, for Christ our God, the Sun of Righteousness, has dawned from you, granting light to those in darkness. And you, O Righteous Elder, rejoice, taking in your arms, the Deliverance of our souls, who grants us Resurrection.”



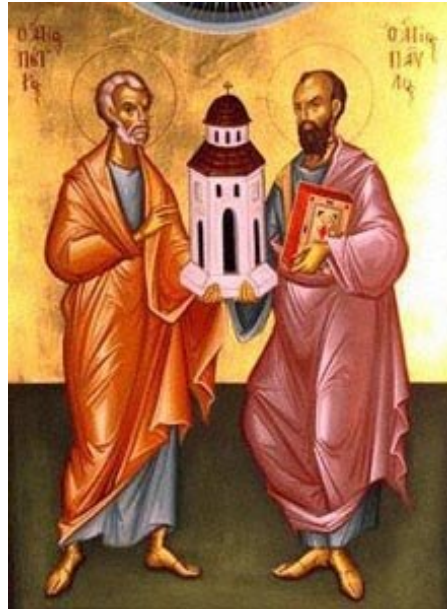
- **The Annunciation (March 25)**—This Feast is the celebration of when the Angel Gabriel came to Mary and asked if she would bear the Son of God. She, of course, said, “Yes.”

Apolytikion: “Today marks the crowning of our salvation and the revelation of the mystery before all ages. For the Son of God becomes the son of the Virgin, and Gabriel proclaims the grace. Wherefore, we also cry out with him, ‘Hail, O full of grace, the Lord is with you.’”



- **Ss. Peter and Paul (June 29)**—In this feast, we celebrate the two great saints of the church: Ss. Peter and Paul. I added them to this list because we fast in preparation for this feast.

Apolytikion: “First in prominence among the Apostles, and teachers to the Universe, intercede to the Master of all for peace in the world and for our souls great mercy.”



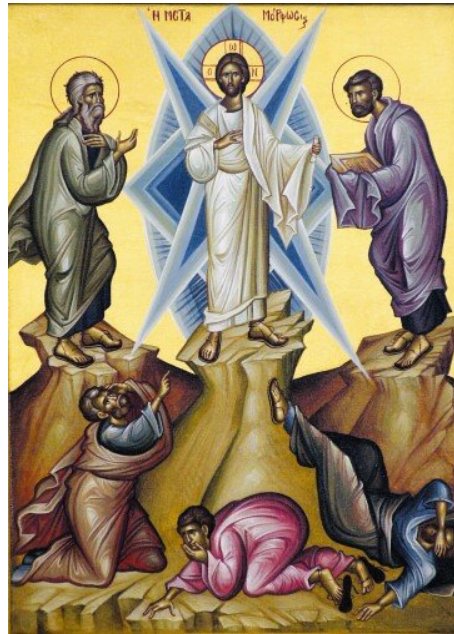
- **Holy Apostles (June 30)**—This is our Patronal Feast Day. We celebrate the 12 Holy Apostles.

Apolytikion: “O Holy Apostles, we ask your prayers before the merciful God, that he grant unto our souls forgiveness of our transgressions.”



- **The Transfiguration of Christ (August 6)**—In this Feast, we see Christ’s divine light revealed to his apostles as he stands between Elijah and Moses.

Apolytikion: “You were transfigured on the Mount, Christ God revealing Your glory to Your disciples, insofar as they could comprehend. Illuminate us sinners also with Your everlasting light, through the intercessions of the Theotokos. Giver of light, glory to You.”



- **The Dormition (August 15)**—This feast is sometimes called the Assumption. In this feast, we celebrate the falling asleep and her bodily translation of the Mother of God into heaven.

Apolytikion: “In birth, you preserved your virginity; in death, you did not abandon the world, O Theotokos. As mother of life, you departed to the source of life, delivering our souls from death by your intercessions.”

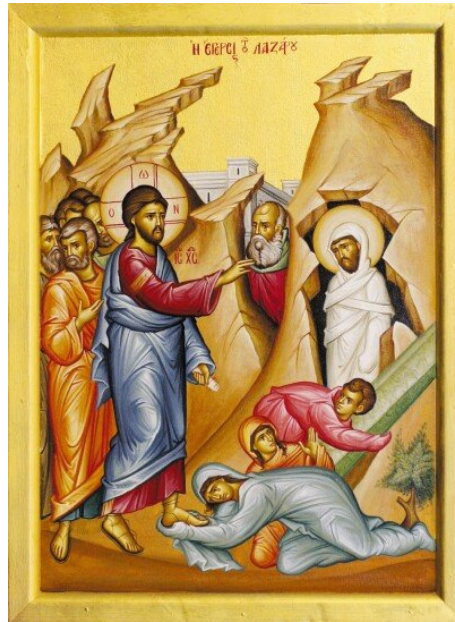


Movable Feasts

These feasts fall on different dates, depending on when Pascha is celebrated. Please consult a calendar for specific dates.

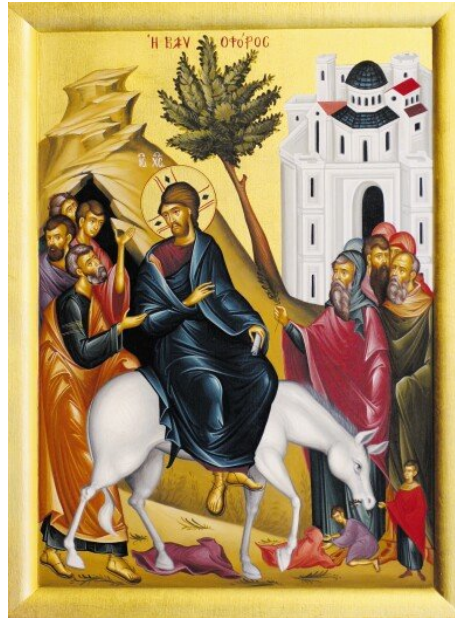
- **Soul Saturdays**—On these days, we pray for our departed loved ones. You may submit a list of names to Fr. Dustin and bring Koliva. Soul Saturdays are celebrated the Saturdays before Meatfare Sunday, Cheesefare Sunday, the First Sunday of Lent, and the Saturday before Pentecost.
- **Saturday of Lazarus**—This Feast celebrates Jesus raising Lazarus from the death and looks forward to his own resurrection. It is celebrated the weekend before Pascha.

Apolytikion: “O Christ our God, before Your Passion, You raised Lazarus from the dead to confirm the common Resurrection for all. Therefore, we carry the symbols of victory as did the youths, and we cry out to You, the victor over death, ‘Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’”



- **Palm Sunday**—In this feast, we see Jesus enter into Jerusalem to prepare for his death. It is celebrated the Sunday before Pascha.

Apolytikion: “O Christ our God, before Your Passion, You raised Lazarus from the dead to confirm the common Resurrection for all. Therefore, we carry the symbols of victory as did the youths, and we cry out to You, the victor over death, ‘Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’”



- **Holy Week:** this is the week leading up to Pascha. During this week, there are many services including: Bridegroom Matins, Unction, Vespereal Liturgy, the Twelve Passion Gospels, the Royal Hours, and the Lamentations.

- **Pascha (Passover), the Feast of Feasts**—This feast, sometimes called Easter, is the celebration of Christ’s resurrection. On Saturday morning, we celebrate with a Vesperal Liturgy, the First Resurrection Service. Then, late at night, we celebrate with the Anastasi (Resurrection) service. On Sunday, we celebrate with the Agape (Love) Vespers.

Apolytikion: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.”



- **Bright Week**—this is the week of resurrection. In some years, we may celebrate the Feast of St. George on Bright Monday. The highlight of the week is usually the Feast of the Life-Giving Font, celebrated on Bright Friday.

- **The Ascension**—In this feast, which always falls on a Thursday (40 days after Pascha), our Lord leaves earth, ascends into Heaven and is seated at the right hand of God.

Apolytikion: “O Christ our God, You ascended in Glory and gladdened Your disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. Your blessing assured them that You are the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.”



- **Pentecost Sunday**—In this feast, which is always 50 days after Pascha, we celebrate the of the Holy Spirit to the Church.

Apolytikion: “Blessed are You, O Christ our God, who made fishermen all-wise, sending upon them the Holy Spirit and, through them, netting the world. O Loving One, glory to You.”



Fasting

Fasting is a part of Orthodox Christians' regular spiritual practice. The general rule for fasting is: no meat, wine, dairy, oil, or sexual activity during the fasts. For rules on specific days, please consult an Orthodox calendar.

Orthodox Christians fast every Wednesday and Friday throughout the year (with a few exceptions). Wednesday is in recognition of Christ's betrayal, and Friday is in remembrance of his crucifixion.

Additionally, there are extended fasts through the year: the Lenten period (in the Spring during the weeks before Pascha), the Apostle's Fast (in early summer), the Dormition Fast (first two weeks in August), and the Advent Fast (also called St. Phillip's fast; from November 15th until Christmas). These fasts help us prepare for an upcoming feast.

Fasting is also an ascetical practice that includes discipline. It's about learning to overcome the passions that enslave us. The idea is that if we can learn to control our stomachs (gluttony), we can take what we've learned to conquer other passions (e.g., pride, anger, greed, lust, envy)

“Fasting therefore signifies a radical change in our relation with God and with the world . God – not the self – becomes the centre , and the world is his creation , a dialogue amongst ourselves and with the Creator . Fasting prevents us from identifying ourselves with the world in order merely to possess it , and enables us to see the world in a light coming from elsewhere . Then every creature , every thing , becomes an object of contemplation . Fasting puts between ourselves and the world a wondering and respectful distance . It enables us to hunger for God as well , and to welcome our bodily hunger as an echo , the ‘ sighing ’ of creation .” (Source: *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* by Olivier Clement)