



COUNCIL OF BISHOPS OF THE  
UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE USA  
**ARCHPASTORAL NATIVITY FAST EPISTLE**

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St. Philip Fast in Anticipation of the Nativity of our Savior!

*Dearly beloved Clergy, Monastics and Faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Churches beyond the borders of Ukraine and those of our Holy Church in Ukrainian lands:*

***CHRIST IS AMONG US!***

We have begun the Fast of St. Philip, called such because it commences the day after the Feast of St. Philip the Apostle, which falls on 27 November (14 November on the Gregorian or New Calendar) and continues through the Eve of the Holy Feast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on 6 January (24 December on the Gregorian Calendar).

During this time of spiritual journey, we are to seek the ways in which we can place our lives into the context of the events of Bethlehem, knowing that in Christ our Savior we are claimed as God's own forever. The whole of this St. Philip's Fast and the salvation story is premised on the birth of the Child, which offers us a glimpse and hope of new life. Unfortunately, during this time each year we often fail to comprehend the reason of this special and sacred season.

During the next several weeks, we shall seek to proclaim in word and deed the possibility of new life for all humanity. By the time Orthodox Christians enter into the season of St. Philip fast and begin to prepare to greet into the world a new-born Child, the commercial world has already declared its version of the "Xmas Holidays". Being bombarded by the materialism surrounding the celebration of this "joyful season", we sometimes forget that we have entered the time of waiting, reflection and a heavy dose of joyful expectation. We are invited to fast in order to renew our faith, deepen our prayer life and prepare ourselves for a Holy Encounter with the Christ-Child. Now more than ever, we who proclaim our love to Christ must remind the world that the Nativity season is, indeed, a proclamation of the Incarnation of Christ – the Word who "was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1;14) in all humility as a child in a manger – while we remember the promise of Christ to return in all His Glory at the Great and Final Judgment.

To reflect on the historical Nativity of the Christ-Child and to await His glorious return has no value unless we willing and able to nurture this birth in our hearts every single day. In order to worthily celebrate Christ's Nativity, we are invited during this fasting period to participate in the fulfillment of God's mission "to bring good news to the poor, to release the captives and all who are oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk. 4:18-19).

The liturgical readings of the next several weeks, leading us to the Nativity of Christ are as much about our birth as they are to prepare us for the Nativity of the Savior. They are about our identification with the events we read and hear in the Sacred Scriptures. As Orthodox Christians, we need understand that there is certain urgency about how we live out our Christian values. We are invited to come and see Him – the Christ-Child – and to see ourselves in Him. Where do we encounter weakness in our own hearts? How do we become a neighbor to those who are weak in our society? How well do we represent the caring presence of God in the world?

When we live lives characterized by love and caring, we do image that presence to the world today. The parish communities that take seriously their call to image the reality of God offer what secular institutions cannot: holiness of life, rejection of evil, compassion for the other and a willingness to share. We cannot model a better way of living without first encountering the Christ-Child – the Incarnation. This time of St. Philip’s fast calls us to detach from the things and ways that are not of God and to stand with God.

As in the past, we call upon you all as our spiritual children to join us in praying fervently during this season for the leaders of the world we live in, especially for the end of the invasion of Ukraine with her boundaries intact. We ask you to also join in our prayers for all the many war-torn areas in the world – Israel, Gaza, and in other nations around the world suffering also through genocide, slavery and repression. Finally, we ask you to pray for our United States of America, that the divisions, hatred, racism and mass murders be ended. It is a secularized world full of strife, economic weakness and political instability. Pray for the maturity of those who lead the nations – again especially Ukraine, which is so dear to our hearts.

As we prepare ourselves for the sacred time of the Nativity of our Lord, we pray for your successful journey through St. Philip’s Fast and for your willingness to accept God’s Gift of Love to us all. May we all respond to the Good News of Christ’s Nativity by looking not only down at the world’s misery, but up to God and out to your family, friends, neighbors – and strangers.

*Assuring you of our prayers and love and requesting yours, we remain your servants in the Lord,*

**+ ANTONY**

*By the Grace of God, Metropolitan*

**+ JEREMIAH**

*By the Grace of God, Archbishop*

**+ DANIEL**

*By the Grace of God, Archbishop*