

## **Year 2: Using our Senses in Worship**

### **December: Things We Hear in Church**

- Bells
- The Censer
- Singing Hymns: why don't we use musical instruments
- Special Melodies: The 8 Tones, Prokemenon, Kontakion, Troparion
- The Gospel and Epistle: What a Reader does
- Movements: Standing up for the Theotokion, the Creed, the Gospel
- Beatitude: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst...
- Some activities for the Feast of the Nativity

### **Saints and Feasts This Month**

- The Saints of North America:  
Hieromartyr Alexander Hotovitzky of New York, December 4  
St. Herman of Alaska, December 13

### **Memory Verse:**

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5: 6)

**Monthly packets are also available online at:  
[www.saintalexis.org/youthministry.html](http://www.saintalexis.org/youthministry.html)**

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## All About Bells by Natalie Ashanin

Does your church have a bell? More than one? Do you know when it is rung and why? Although bells are not as important in our daily life as they once were, they are still all around us. If we stop to think about it, we hear them from the chiming of the clock on the courthouse tower to the tinkle of the ice cream truck, the jingles tied on a baby's shoes or the measured tones of a church bell.

In times past almost every church had at least one bell, and many had several. Before the development of newspapers, radio, or TV, church bells warned of danger or announced the death of parish members. The bell would toll once for each year of the person's life. They would also ring for happy occasions, such as weddings, or to announce great victories or important events.

The origin of bells in Christian worship can be traced to the ram's horns and silver trumpets used in the Old Testament to announce the beginning of a feast. The Book of Exodus mentions "gold bells and pomegranates". Pictures of the fruit were embroidered around the hems of the priests' robes, with a golden bell sewn between each pair. Every time the priest took a step, the music of the bells was like a little hymn, praising God. In some oriental cultures a gong was used rather than a bell. In North America and Africa, primitive tribes have shaken seed-filled rattles in religious ceremonies. Throughout history, many cultures have used these sounds to express their feelings of joy and sadness.

During the first three centuries when Christians were not free to worship, there were special messengers who went from door to door to announce the services. Later they used trumpets, or wooden hammers with which they knocked on the doors. From this emerged a wooden plank struck with a wooden hammer. This has been preserved in the Orthodox Church on Mt. Athos, the holy mountain in Greece. On Mt. Athos, where there are many monasteries, they still use the semantron, the board and hammer, to call the monks to worship. It is said that the semantron, which some monasteries have named "Adam", goes all the way back to Noah, who used it to call the animals to the ark. Just as the ark was the means of salvation from the flood, so the Church is the means of salvation from sin, and church bells call us to our salvation just as the semantron did in Noah's time. Following the Greek custom, the first Russian churches and others used these wooden or iron boards, until later bells were introduced.

Because Christianity began as a forbidden religion [in the Roman Empire], it did not use bells until the fifth century. It was not until the 12th century that the use of bells became widespread. Some churches, especially those in the West, built belfries on their churches to house their bells, while others, particularly in the East, built separate bell towers. In the West, the bells were usually rung by swinging them back and forth, whereas in Orthodox lands, especially Russia, the bell itself remained stationary while the clapper was pulled back and forth to hit the bell. This allowed for many different kinds of peal, from solemn and slow to the joyous ringing of the Paschal season. Bell ringing of this type is a special art, involving the use of both arms and feet to manipulate the ropes controlling the clappers. In pre-Revolutionary Russia, during the three days of Easter [Pascha], it was the custom for anyone who wanted to do so to try their hand at ringing the bells, so that the air was constantly filled with the sounds of bells proclaiming that "Christ is Risen!"

In lands conquered by Islam, ringing church bells was forbidden and the church used the wooden board and hammer to call people together. Whenever Orthodox lands were freed of the Moslem yoke, the church bells joyously proclaimed their freedom.

In churches which are fortunate enough to have them, bells are rung just before and at the beginning of the Liturgy to call the people together and at certain times during the service. There are little jingling bells on the censer which make a lovely tinkling sound as the priest censures the church. Bells can be solemn, bells can be happy, but they always claim our attention. Church bells remind us that God is calling us all to Him. *Little Falcons, Vol. 4, Iss. 4, 1997 (Bells), pp. 4-7. <http://www.theologic.com/oflweb/forkids/bells.htm>*

## Ring Like the Masters of Old!

**I'd never played bells before.** And certainly, I'd never organized a team of bell ringers, either. Yet I had to take our demonstrator set to a nearby parish for its patronal feast– and the bishop was going to be there! I was a little nervous at first, but we did great. I even noticed the bishop smiling whenever we rang. Now I'm an expert! How did we do it?



I figured that people who like to dance, or play bongos (or violins), or even just clap their hands would make good ringers. And there's a lot of dancing and rhythm in the lives of teenagers anyway, so I headed for the younger crowd. "Ok, kids, who's ringing? Here's what we gotta do....!"

Bell ringing can help involve kids in church, by the way, since a fair amount of ringing goes on in connection with our services, and people naturally want to know *why* we ring as we do. Also, bell-ringing is an evangelical dimension of liturgical life that women have traditionally excelled at, as you can see in our video.

### **Organize the ringers for a little practice**

So let's say you have five bells. You can set up your bells so that one person can handle everything, but joy is good to share, so we'll use three ringers: our leader will give the pulse with our big no. 5; one will strike nos. 4 & 3, and one will trill 2 & 1.

### **Poise the tongues of your bells to sing**

Now hold the ropes with a little tension so you keep the clapper near the lip of the bell. I actually hold the tongues of smaller bells directly, ignoring the ropes– this gives me more control. You should be able to strike the tones with a flick of the fingers or a short jerk on the rope. Don't let the clapper travel all the way back to vertical, but keep it near the lip so you can strike quickly and responsively, and easily keep control of your rhythm.

Use ear plugs– you can buy them at the drug store in bottles of about 20 pair. Or use industrial ear protectors– the ones that look like earphones. Also, if you keep your mouth open when you play, the sound will not affect your eardrums too harshly. Bells are loud, so take care!

### **Now strike a pulse and play!**

Are you ready? Let the leader start with a nice, relaxed pulse on no. 5. Not too fast, not too slow: a good,

steady, ambulatory *pulse*. "Pulse" is the key to everything rhythmic:

5... 5... 5... 5... bong... bong... bong... bong....

Once you have the basic pulse, start doing this with nos. 3 and 4 start in between those "5's":

3-4-3, 3-4-3, 3-4-3,

ding-dong-ding, ding-dong-ding, ...

So this is what both ringers are doing together now:

**5-3-4-3, 5-3-4-3, 5-3-4-3,...**

*Bong ding dong ding, Bong ding dong ding,....*

Do that for a few measures. Finally, the person playing 1 and 2 can go ching-a-ling-a-ling, ching-a-ling-a-ling on top- improvise, try variations, be creative, have fun.

When the leader gives the signal, count out your last couple of measures and end with three big yanks on all the ropes at once-

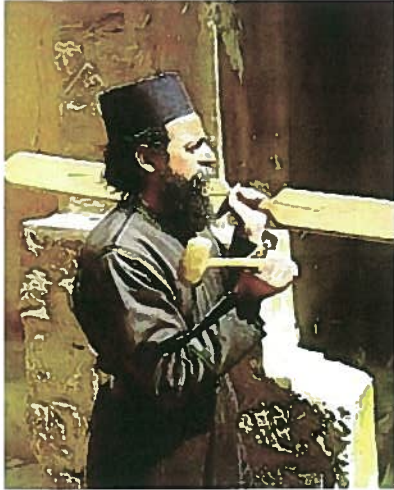
....**5-3-4-3**, clang, clang, *Clang!*

The ringing should be a little more relaxed before the Liturgy and not too long; brighter and faster and longer afterwards. You can develop your patterns, more festive or more solemn, based on what the Typikon calls for.

**If you can clap hands, you can ring bells.**

It's the combination of instrument and virtuosity that creates the so-called "krasniy" ("red" or "beautiful") or "malinovy" ("raspberry") sound of Russian bells. And yes, it takes a while to learn how to ring bells properly, to produce this "raspberry sound". But learning to make this sound is well worth the trouble, considering that for years and centuries to come, this is the voice that will announce to your parishioners÷ and to the whole world÷ that it is indeed ***"time to begin the service to the Lord"***.

From: <http://www.russianbells.com/ringing/playing.html>



This is the "semandron" which means "call to prayer." Some say that in times past when eastern orthodox lands were dominated by the moslem turks the orthodox christians were not allowed to ring their church bells so they used these very resonant pieces of wood to call the faithful to services... amazingly the sound could be heard loud and far. Others say that the semandron is much older. There is a legend that Noah used the semandron to call the animals to the ark.

Monks at Mount Sinai announcing the services by striking a hand-held (above), or a stationary (below) semantron. A metal semantron (not hand-held) is called a **talanton** in Greek, or **bilo** in Russian.



From <http://www.russianbells.com/history/history2.html>

## THE CENSER

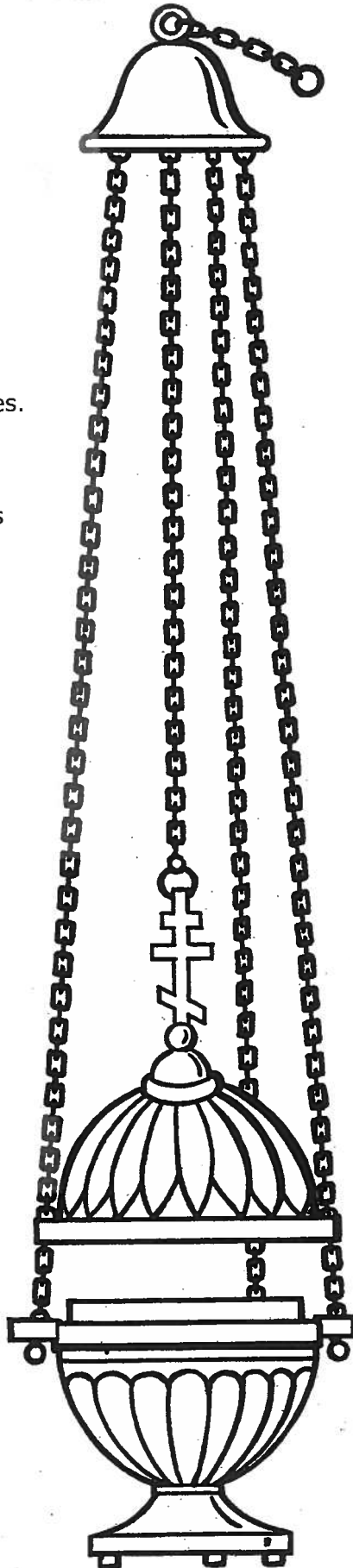
The censer is a cup shaped vessel with chains for swinging it. Ignited charcoal is placed in it and incense over it to make it smoke. The censer is used at nearly every church service.

The smoke that comes from the censer is to remind people that their prayers should be sincere and warm, which means from the heart, if they are to rise to heaven; their hearts should be filled with love and burn with earnestness, laying aside all thoughts of earthly anxiety. "Let my prayer be set before Thee as incense" (*Psalm 141:2*).

There are certain times during the Divine Services when incensing is prescribed. At the end of *Proskomedia* (Preparation for Divine Liturgy) the Altar Boy holds the censer and the Priest incenses the prepared elements while he is praying. Just before the beginning of Divine Liturgy the Priest incenses the Altar on the four sides, the Table of Oblation and the icons in the Sanctuary, then he goes out the north door to the amvon and stands in front of the Royal Doors. He incenses the right side of the Iconostas and then the left and returns to the center again from where he incenses the people. All this time the Priest is reciting the 50th Psalm. This incensing is to call the attention of the people to prepare for the Divine Liturgy.

The second incensing during the Divine Liturgy is at the time of the reading of the Word of God. At this time the attention of the people is called to the importance of the reading of the Holy Gospel. The third time of incensing is during the singing of the *Cherubimic Hymn*, when the people are reminded that they are "mystically representing angels." At this time, the Holy Gifts are offered to God on the Altar. The next time the censer is used in Divine Liturgy is when we extol the Most Holy Mother of God the Virgin Mary, and the Choir sings: "Meet it is in truth to bless Thee . . ."

The last time the censer is used in the service of Divine Liturgy is after Communion, when the Gifts are taken from the Altar.



**Why are there bells on the censer?**

The bells represent Christ and the apostles. Also, they represent the Scripture saying " Make a joyful noise unto the Lord". Also, in the Old Testament, the priest when insensing the altar would have bells on the censer so people would know that the priest was offering sacrifice. (The curtain to the Holy of Holies was closed.)

Draw the bells on  
Father's Censer



**Questions and  
Answers about  
Orthodoxy**

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## Musical Instruments

### QUESTION:

I am a member of the Greek Archdiocese and I am wondering why musical instrument such as organs are not found in OCA Churches, or in Churches I visited in Greece or on Mt Athos? It seems Psalm 150 condones praising the Lord with stringed instruments.

### ANSWER:

Actually, the tradition of the Orthodox Church is to have no musical instruments in the church. This is not unique to the OCA, as you experienced during your trip to Greece and Mt. Athos. The appearance of organs in Orthodox churches is, to my knowledge, pretty much limited to Greek and a few Antiochian Orthodox parishes in the US. I have never heard of organs or other musical instruments used elsewhere. Hence, the use of organs in some churches in the US is an innovation of recent origin. If I am not mistaken, His Eminence Archbishop Spyridon of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America has addressed his concerns over the introduction of organs into the church's worship.

It is true that Psalm 150 condones praising the Lord with stringed instruments. This, however, never carried into Christian worship. One could say that there are many things one finds condoned in the Old Testament -- the sacrificing of animals, for example -- which were not carried over into the New Testament Church, in which Christ becomes the sacrificial lamb and the human voice becomes the musical instrument par excellence.

## Liturgical Music

In the Orthodox Faith, our singing in church is meant to be an Icon of worship. We sing our prayers. Our prayers are sung. And hardly ever do we hear prayers simply said. The Orthodox Church's tradition is to offer up prayers to God in uttered heightened speech called sacred singing. It is important to understand that liturgical music is not something added to prayer. Rather, it is the way we pray in church when we assemble together as God's People.

This tradition of sung worship is fundamentally Biblical. For both the people of the Old Testament as well as the New, worship means first to gather as a group, and then to sing praise with one mouth and one heart. As a matter of fact, more than two-thirds of the Bible is phrased in such a way that it is obviously meant to be sung. Especially the Book of Psalms the essential prayer-book of the Church in essence, is a song-book. Orthodox hymnody developed from the singing of Psalms and Scriptural Odes, first as simple responses and refrains, later developing into Troparia, Kontakia and strophic hymns on these Biblical verses.

The word antiphon in our prayer-books describes how the people originally divided themselves into two parts and sang the Psalm verses back and forth, from one side to the other. Our liturgical texts show that the assembly responds in a type of song to whatever is chanted by the Bishop, Priest, Deacon, or Cantor. We can see from the earliest tradition that choirs developed later. Choirs, however, were never meant to completely replace the voice of the people in worship. Not only must the chants and music help the people make the prayer their own, but, clearly, somewhere in every Orthodox Divine Service, the people themselves must take some part in singing.

Indeed, what must be understood is the function of sacred singing in Orthodox worship. What is singing in Church supposed to do? A sacred song is not unlike a holy Icon; except that the holy Icon is seen and the sacred song is heard, the functions are the same. This painting of words and sounds has as its purpose the bringing of the community into the presence and the awareness of sacred mystery.

Bringing us together is no small part of sacred music's function. Just as receiving Holy Communion together is a sacred sign that all who partake become one body in Christ, so singing must be the expression of this same unity of hearts and minds, drawing us harmoniously together into one voice. For ultimately, it is Christ Who is our Song.

*Excerpt taken from "These Truths We Hold - The Holy Orthodox Church: Her Life and Teachings".  
Compiled and Edited by A Monk of St. Tikhon's Monastery. Copyright 1986 by the St. Tikhon's Seminary  
Press, South Canaan, Pennsylvania 18459.  
[http://www.orthodoxed.org/about\\_orthodoxy.html](http://www.orthodoxed.org/about_orthodoxy.html)*

## *Songs We Sing at Divine Liturgy*

### *What is a Tropar (Troparion)?*

The Troparion is a short hymn or song in the Orthodox Church, generally of only one stanza, that carries a theme that is repeated throughout the service. For instance the Theotokion is a special hymn to the Theotokos.

It is truly right to bless you, O Theotokos, ever blessed, and most pure, and the Mother of our God: more honorable than the cherubim, beyond compare more glorious than the seraphim — without corruption you gave birth to God, the Word. True Theotokos, we magnify you!

The most famous Troparion is the Paschal Troparion:

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

### *What is the Kondak (Kontakion)?*

The Kondak is an extended or longer song, or a sermon set to melody, sometimes 18 or 24 stanzas long. The word “kontakion” means “from the pole” in Greek. The Kontakion were so long that the text was rolled up on a pole for the services. In the Divine Liturgy, only part of the Kontakion is sung, right after the Tropars.

According to tradition, Saint Romanus the Melodist wrote the first kontakion in the sixth century, the Kontakion for the Birth of Our Lord, by divine inspiration

### *What is the Prokeimenon?*

A **prokeimenon** is a liturgical verse or scriptural passage sung or read before the epistle and gospel. After Fr. Deacon or Father says “Let us attend!” the Reader chants the prokeimenon and we all sing it after him.

In the Orthodox Church, we sing each of these special songs in a different melody each week. There are 8 melodies or tones.

*Summarized from entries in Orthodox Wikipedia [www.orthodoxwiki.org](http://www.orthodoxwiki.org)*

## READING OF THE GOSPEL

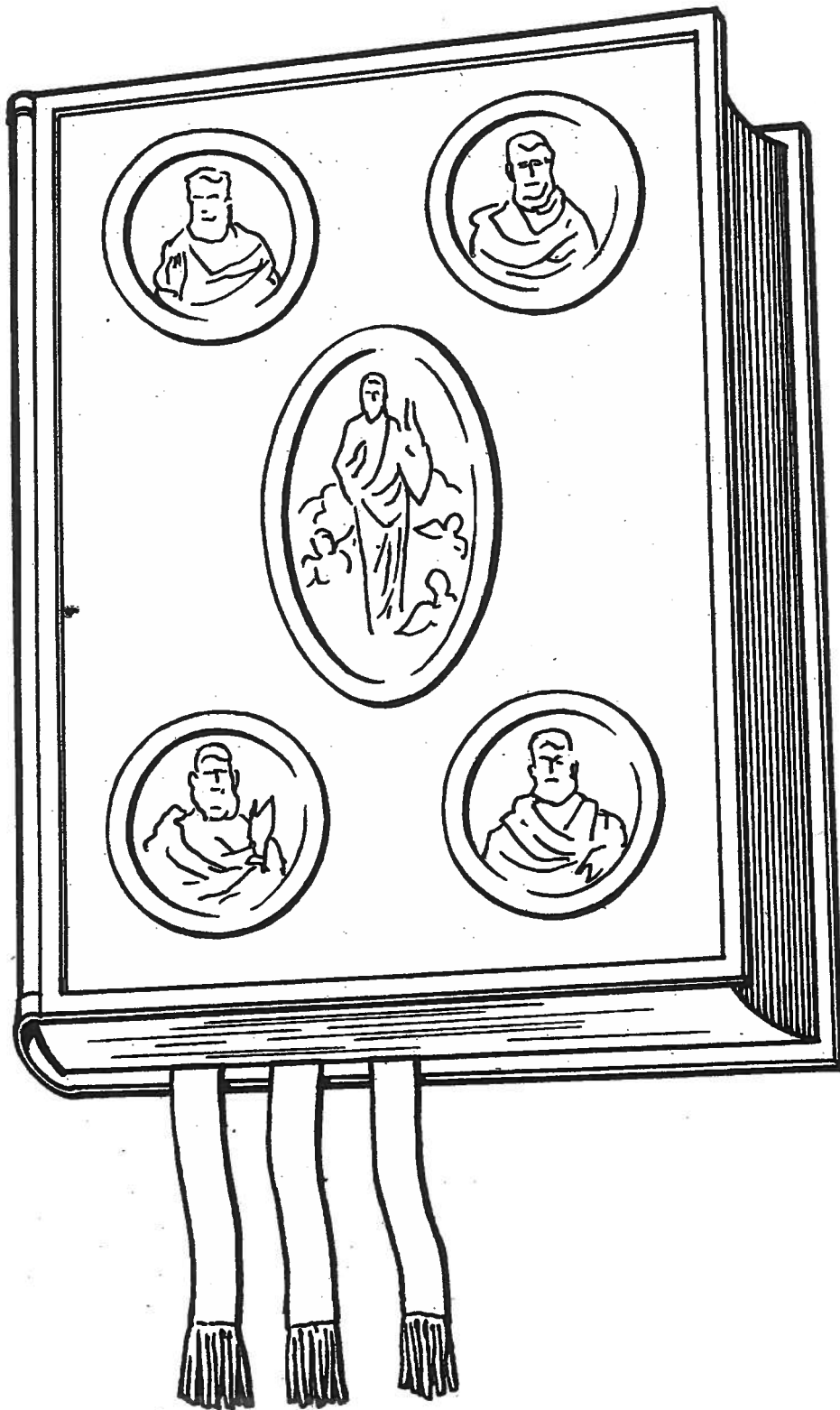
The word GOSPEL (Evangelion) means "good news" or "glad tidings" which we hear from it concerning our salvation and the Kingdom of God as announced to the world by Our Saviour Jesus Christ. The Gospel is a Holy Book that contains the Word of God revealing the earthly life and teachings of Christ. It consists of the first four books of the New Testament and were written by St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John.

During the service of Divine Liturgy the Priest reads the Gospel facing the people (unless there is a Deacon). The reading of the Gospel is preceded by an exclamation from the Priest standing at the Altar: "Wisdom! Let us attend! Let us hear the reading of the Holy Gospel, Peace to all of you!" He blesses the people, and the choir responds: "And to thy spirit." Then the Priest says: "The reading of the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew (or another Evangelist from whose Gospel the reading is taken)," and the choir sings: "Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee." Then the Priest reads the lesson appointed for that day.

Every Sunday and every day of the week has its appointed reading of the Gospel. Easter marks the beginning of the cycle. The Easter Gospel is always the first chapter of John, verses one to seventeen. The peculiarity of the reading of the Easter Gospel is that after each verse the bells are rung as a joyous proclamation that Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God. The seven Sundays after Easter are named after the subject of the Gospel for that Sunday, for example, the first Sunday after Easter is called Thomas Sunday, because the Gospel reading is about Thomas being rebuked by the Risen Lord for his unbelief. An other cycle of Gospel reading begins the first Sunday after Pentecost and continues to the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee (four weeks before Great Lent). The Lenten Season has another cycle up to Easter Sunday.

Every Feastday (holyday) has a reading of the Gospel concerning that particular event which is being commemorated. The sermon of the day is usually based upon the reading of the Gospel for that day.

For the Sunday Matins there is a separate cycle of Gospel readings about the Resurrection of Christ. At Feastday Matins the Gospel is usually taken out to the center of the church for veneration.



# Christmas Traditions around the World

## Jordan

Christmas in Jordan is very simple. Every family prepares for the feast by cleaning their house from top to bottom: they are going to be welcoming their Lord, and when the king comes to your home, it has to be clean!

*As a family, make plans to prepare your house and hearts for the coming of the Lord.*

## Ukraine

On Christmas Eve in the Ukraine, families prepare a Holy Supper, *Sviata Vecheria*, which is a meal consisting of twelve parts in honor of the twelve apostles. This Lenten meal consists of both bitter and sweet foods as a reminder that life is filled with both joy and difficulties.

The youngest child stands watch for the first star of the evening. Once the star is sighted, the feast begins with a prayer.

*Prepare your Christmas meal to celebrate the coming of the Lord—make sure to schedule it around Church services (because some churches celebrate the Nativity Liturgy on Christmas Eve). Print out prayers so that everyone can pray together (see pages 5 and 8 of For to Us a Child is Born).*

## Romania

Singing carols is a very important part of Romanian festivities. On the first day of Christmas, many carolers walk through the streets of the towns and villages, holding a cardboard star decorated with biblical scenes. The leader of the group carries a wooden star covered with metal foil and decorated with bells, colorful ribbons and an image of the Nativity in the center.

*Make cardboard stars and cover them with foil, then decorate with ribbons and bells—if you can, print out an icon of the Nativity and affix it to the middle of the star. Make plans to either go caroling as a family or sing carols together at home.*

## Greece

The celebration of Christmas lasts from December 25 to January 6 (Epiphany). Presents are placed under the Christmas tree, but are often not opened until New Year's Day. In Greek tradition, St. Basil's is the name given to Father Christmas. The saint is supposed to visit children and give presents on New Year's Day (when Basil's memory is celebrated).

*Learn more about St. Basil and his support of the poor. Make a donation in honor of St. Basil in the New Year.*

## Simple Traditions You Can Start

- Remove Baby Jesus from your Nativity Scene. Wrap Him in a box and place Him under the tree. Make Him the first Gift you open as a family and place in your Nativity set. As you do this, read Matthew 2:1-20 (the Christmas Gospel)
- If you have younger children, help them Bake a birthday cake for Jesus. Older Children can learn to make the Christopsomo (Christ's bread).
- Create a Faith Capsule during the 12 days Of Christmas. Use a container and place an Item inside each day to remind you of the Celebration of the birth of Christ (ie: a Clipping from your tree, a piece of wrapping Paper, a paper icon, pictures, quotes, etc.). Have each family member write or draw A card to thank God for the gift of His Son. After you share your creations with one Another, place these in the time capsule too. Decide which day you will open it next Year and mark it on your calendar.



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## About.com: Greek Food

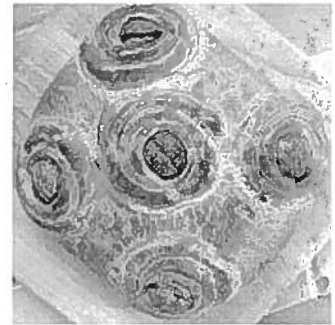
### Christopsomo: Greek Christmas Bread

Be the first to [write a review](#)

From Nancy Gaifyllia, former About.com Guide

In Greek: Χριστόψωμο, pronounced hree-STOHP-soh-moh

Christopsomo, or Christ's Bread, is considered a sacred tradition in many Greek Orthodox homes, and the care with which it is made is said to ensure the well-being of the home in the year to come. Only the purest and most expensive ingredients are used. The bread is often decorated with pieces of dough formed into representations of the family's life (boats, animals, etc.). Ingredients are for simple loaves ([see photo<sup>1</sup>](#)), and directions for a decorated loaf as shown at left can be found below.



Christopsomo - Decorated Greek Christmas Bread  
Photo © N. Gaifyllia, licensed to About.com, Inc.

**Prep Time:** 4 hours

**Cook Time:** 45 minutes

**Total Time:** 4 hours, 45 minutes

#### Ingredients:

- 8 cups of all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 1/2 tablespoons of dry yeast
- 1 cup of warm water (105F, 40C)
- 1 cup of warm red wine
- 1/2 cup of olive oil
- 1/4 cup of orange juice
- 1/4 cup of brandy
- grated peel of 2 oranges
- 1 cup of sugar
- 1 1/2 cups of raisins
- 1 1/2 cups of walnuts, coarsely chopped
- 1/3 cup of pine nuts
- 1 tablespoon of grated gum mastic or 1 tablespoon of crushed anise seed
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- -----
- For the Topping
- milk
- 2 whole walnuts in shells
- sesame seeds

#### Preparation:

1. Mix the yeast with 1/2 cup of warm water and 2 tablespoons of flour, stir until dissolved and set aside for 10 minutes, until it bubbles.

2. In a large mixing bowl, sift the salt with 2/3 of the flour. Make a well in the center of the flour and pour in the yeast mixture, the remaining warm water, and the wine. Mix until a soft dough forms, cover with waxed paper and a damp towel, and set aside to rise for 1 1/2 to 2 hours, until doubled in bulk.
3. Punch the dough down and knead for several minutes until any air pockets are gone. Sift in the remaining flour, add the oil, orange juice, brandy, and grated orange peel.
4. In a small bowl, mix the sugar, raisins, walnuts, pine nuts, gum mastic or anise, cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg until blended, and add to the dough.
5. Knead well until the dough is firm and doesn't stick (about 10 minutes), cover, and allow to rise for 1/2 hour.
6. On a lightly buttered baking pan, shape the bread into two circular loaves, about 8 inches in diameter. Cover with a dry cloth and a damp cloth over that, and place in a warm place to rise again, until doubled in size.
7. Using a floured knife, score a cross into the top of the loaves, and place one whole, unshelled walnut at the center. Brush the bread with milk and scatter with sesame seeds.
8. Place a pan with at least 1 inch of water in the bottom of the oven and preheat to 450F (230C). Place the bread in the preheated oven for 15 minutes, then remove the pan with the water, reduce heat to 390F (200C) and bake for another 25-30 minutes.
9. Remove from oven, brush lightly with water, and cool on a rack.

**Preparation tip:** Use a mortar and pestle to crush the anise seed.

**Decorate Your Christmas Bread (photo):** At step 6, pull a fistful of dough from each loaf. Pat the dough back into shape to rise. When risen, use the small pieces of dough to create designs: roll them out into strips and coil around whole walnuts pressed into the top in the shape of a cross (photo), or make them into the shapes of your choice and place on top of the loaves. Continue with the recipe. Brush with beaten egg instead of milk to get a brighter glaze.

*This About.com page has been optimized for print. To view this page in its original form, please visit:*

<http://greekfood.about.com/od/greekbreadspitas/r/christopsomo.htm>

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**Links in this article:**

1. <http://greekfood.about.com/od/greekfoodphotogalleries/ig/Greek-Food-Photos/Simple-Christopsomo.htm>

# A Family Advent Calendar on a Chain

Dear Parents,

We invite you to lead your family in making *A Family Advent Calendar on a Chain* with your children. Attached are two pages of dated cutout figures and a page with "*The Nativity Story*."

Help your children cut out one figure each day and attach it to the chain link for that day. Since each figure is dated, you will have no trouble matching it with the appropriate link. While a child is attaching the figure to the chain, read the part of the Nativity story pertaining to the figure of the day.

While our children may be provided with many Christmas activities between now and Christmas in preschool or public school, most of these will be of a secular nature. This Advent Activity, with its focus on the story of the birth of Christ, will [1] serve as a daily reminder of the religious meaning of Christmas, and [2] familiarize our children with the story of the Nativity. As we tell the Nativity story there are words that are unfamiliar to our children because they speak of a time and place removed from our daily experiences. We hope that this simple retelling of the story will provide definition and visual examples that will help make the story more meaningful. In addition, this Advent chain-calendar will help our children count down the days until Christmas in a spiritual way as they wait to complete the chain that they can hang on the tree or elsewhere in the home.

We wish you and your family all the joy and promise that this holiday offers, and we hope that sharing in this project brings us all closer to each other and to the meaning of Christ's birth.

*Sunday Church School Director and Staff*

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## ***Needed Materials***

- Colored paper
- Scissors to cut the strips and the people and items
- 60 or more - 6"x ¾" strips of colored paper; you can add more links afterwards if needed
- Tape to connect the paper strips together to make the links of the chain
- Markers, crayons or colored pencils to add color each of the people and items
- Glue to attach the people and items from the story to the chain
- Marker or pen to write the dates on the paper chain

## ***Directions***

1. Cut the 60 strips of paper for the chain links
2. Tape the strips together to make the chain links
3. Beginning with the 5th link mark the first date December 11.
4. On every 4th link mark the next date, December 12, December 14, ... until you get to December 24

# THE NATIVITY STORY - An Advent Calendar

**December 11--MARY**—This is Mary, Jesus' mother. She was a very good person - she was kind and gentle. She also loved God very much. She was just the right person to be Jesus' mother.

**December 12--ANGEL**—This is an angel. He is a special angel. His name is Gabriel, and God often sent him to deliver messages to people. Gabriel came to Mary one day to tell her that God wanted her to do something very important - to be Jesus' mother. Gabriel told Mary that she would have a baby soon, and the baby's name would be Jesus and the baby would be God's son.

**December 13--JOSEPH**—This is Joseph, and he was Mary's husband. He was a very nice person. He took very good care of Mary.

**December 14--DONKEY**— This is a donkey. A very long time ago, when Mary, Joseph, and Jesus lived, there were not any cars or buses or trains or airplanes. When people wanted to take a trip, they either walked or rode on donkeys. Mary and Joseph had to take a trip, even though Mary was going to have a baby any day.

**December 15--OUTLINE OF BETHLEHEM**—This is part of the town of Bethlehem. That is where Mary and Joseph were going on their trip. It is the place where Jesus was born. There were a lot of people from out of town in Bethlehem when Joseph and Mary got there. The town was very, very crowded.

**December 16--INNKEEPER**—Another name for a hotel is an "inn." The man or woman who runs an inn is called an innkeeper. When Mary and Joseph got to Bethlehem, they needed to find a place to stay, but Bethlehem was very crowded. Mary and Joseph were very tired, and Mary was ready to have her baby. However, every place, every inn, where they stopped was filled, and the innkeepers told them that there was not any room for them.

**December 17--STABLE**—This is a stable. A stable is like a barn. It is a place people keep animals, like cows and sheep and goats. Because Mary and Joseph could not find any place else to stay in Bethlehem, they had to stay in a stable.

**December 18--STAR**— Because Jesus was the Son of God, a very special thing happened when Jesus was born. A very bright star appeared in the sky. It told people that Jesus was a very important and a very special person.

**December 19--WISE MAN**—A wise man is a very smart person. Three wise men saw the bright star in the sky, and they knew someone very important was born. They traveled very far to find this baby. They brought presents so they could give them to the baby.

**December 20--SHEEP**—On the hills around the city of Bethlehem, people kept sheep. The sheep grazed or ate the grass on the hills. On the night when Jesus was born, there were many flocks of sheep grazing on the hills around Bethlehem.

**December 21--SHEPHERD**—A shepherd is a person who cares for sheep. He makes sure they have enough to eat; he takes care of them if they get sick, and he keeps away other animals that might hurt the sheep. On the night Jesus was born, there were many shepherds on the hills around Bethlehem watching over the flocks of sheep.

**December 22--ANGEL**—Do you remember that sometimes God sends angels to give people messages? Well, on the night that Jesus was born, God sent an angel with a message for the shepherds. The shepherds were scared when they first saw the angel, but the angel told them not to be afraid because he was bringing them very good news—that a very special person was born that night, a person who would help them and bring them closer to God. The angel told them that they could find the baby in a manger. The shepherds went to Bethlehem to see the baby. It was Jesus.

**December 23--MANGER**—A manger is a box on legs that holds food for animals. When Jesus was born, Mary made a bed for him in a manger, like this one.

**December 24--CHRIST CHILD**—Christmas is the day we celebrate Jesus' birthday. Jesus is very special because He is God's son. Jesus was born a long time ago. He grew up and was a teacher. He taught people about God and about the way we should act to be closer to God—to be kind to other people, to love God and to love other people.

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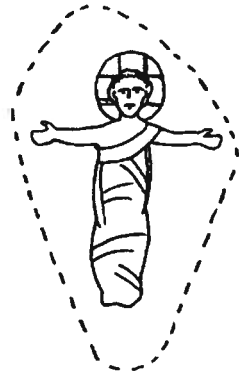
*Reformatted by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div., Director of Religious Education, Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh, 2004.*



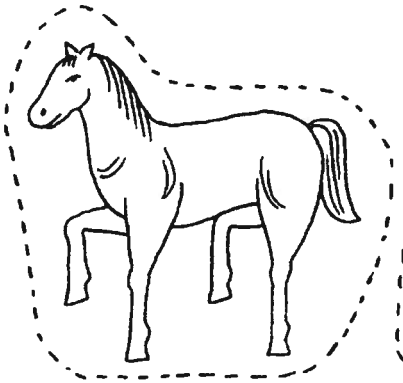
December 11



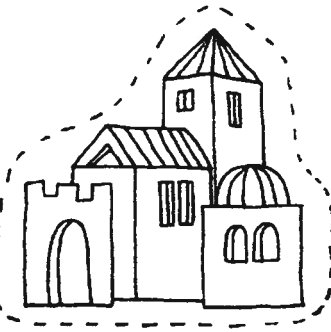
December 12



December 24



December 14



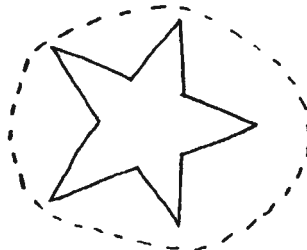
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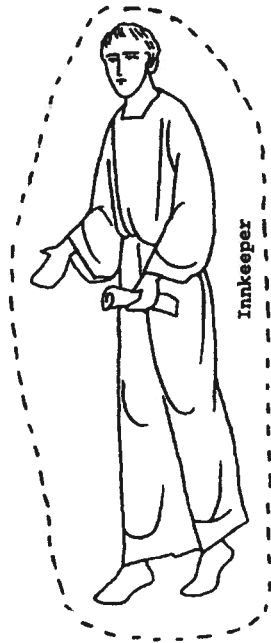
December 23



December 17

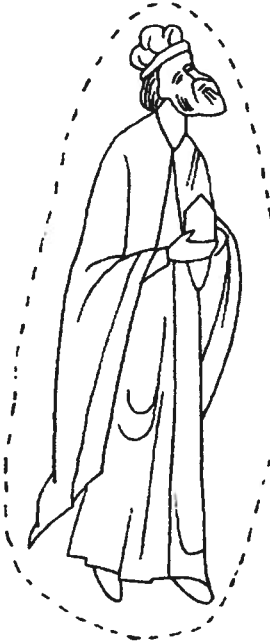


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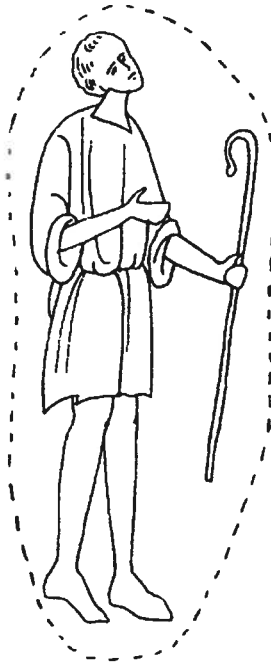


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December 16



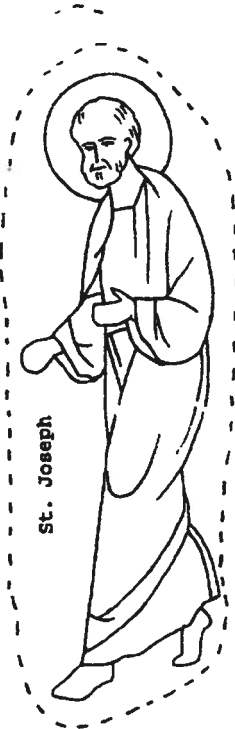
December 19



December 21



December 22



St. Joseph

December 13



December 20

ST. ALEX

ANDER  
HOTOVITSKY

HIEROMARTYR  
OF THE BOLSHEVIK  
YOKE

MISSIONARY  
OF AMERICA



# **St. Alexander Hotovitzky**

## **New Hieromartyr of Russia • Missionary to America**

**Commemoration Date: December 4<sup>th</sup>**

On February 11, 1872, in the city of Kremenetz, Russia, St. Alexander was born. His father, Alexander, was an archpriest and the rector of the Volhynia Seminary. As a child, his parents taught him the importance of loving everyone and, especially, the Orthodox Church.

After his graduation from St. Petersburg Theological Academy, he began his missionary work in the Diocese of the Aleutians and North America. At that time this was the only diocese which covered all of North America. His first assignment was at St. Nicholas Church in New York City, where he was tonsured a reader.

At the age of twenty-four, following his marriage to Maria Scherbuhina, he was ordained to the diaconate. He was ordained to the priesthood on February 25, 1896 by Bishop Nicholas at the Diocesan Cathedral in San Francisco, California. Only a week after his ordination, he returned to St. Nicholas Church in New York where he accepted the assignment as the parish priest.

St. Alexander was a very successful missionary priest. He loved the people he met while traveling to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, and to the many other towns and cities throughout North America. His missionary work was very dangerous. At times he was beaten and jailed because of his love for God, the Church, and for teaching young children religion.

On February 26, 1914, he said good-bye to the Orthodox Churches in North America and traveled to Helsinki, Finland. Three and half years later, he was assigned to Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow, Russia. While in Russia, a revolution occurred and the church was in danger. St. Alexander had to help the poor and save the sacred, religious items that were being taken from the churches and given to the government.

St. Alexander continued to fight for the Orthodox Church and in 1937 he was arrested for the last time because of his belief in God. Since his life ended due to his suffering for Christ, many people consider him a martyr.

He died at the age of 65 on August 19, 1937. The glorification services for Saint Alexander were held on December 4, 1994 in Moscow, Russia.

# Elimination Game

## St. Alexander Hotovitsky

For this activity, follow the directions below. After you are finished, place the remaining words in order on the lines below the instructions to complete the Epistle verse for the Feast of Hieromartyr Alexander.

	A	B	C	D
1	red	let	pizza	green
2	get	are	Philip	giraffe
3	wicked	Peter	banana	met
4	five	dog	John	pleasing
5	sinful	apple	lion	Andrew
6	cat	to	evil	seven
7	set	wrong	James	pasta
8	purple	eleven	God	blue

1. Cross off the colors in each corner.
2. Cross off the odd numbers in rows 4, 6, and 8.
3. Cross off all the animals.
4. Cross off all of the foods.
5. Cross off the 3-letter words that rhyme and end with "et".
6. Cross off the names of some of Jesus' disciples.
7. Cross off the words opposite of "good."

**Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices**

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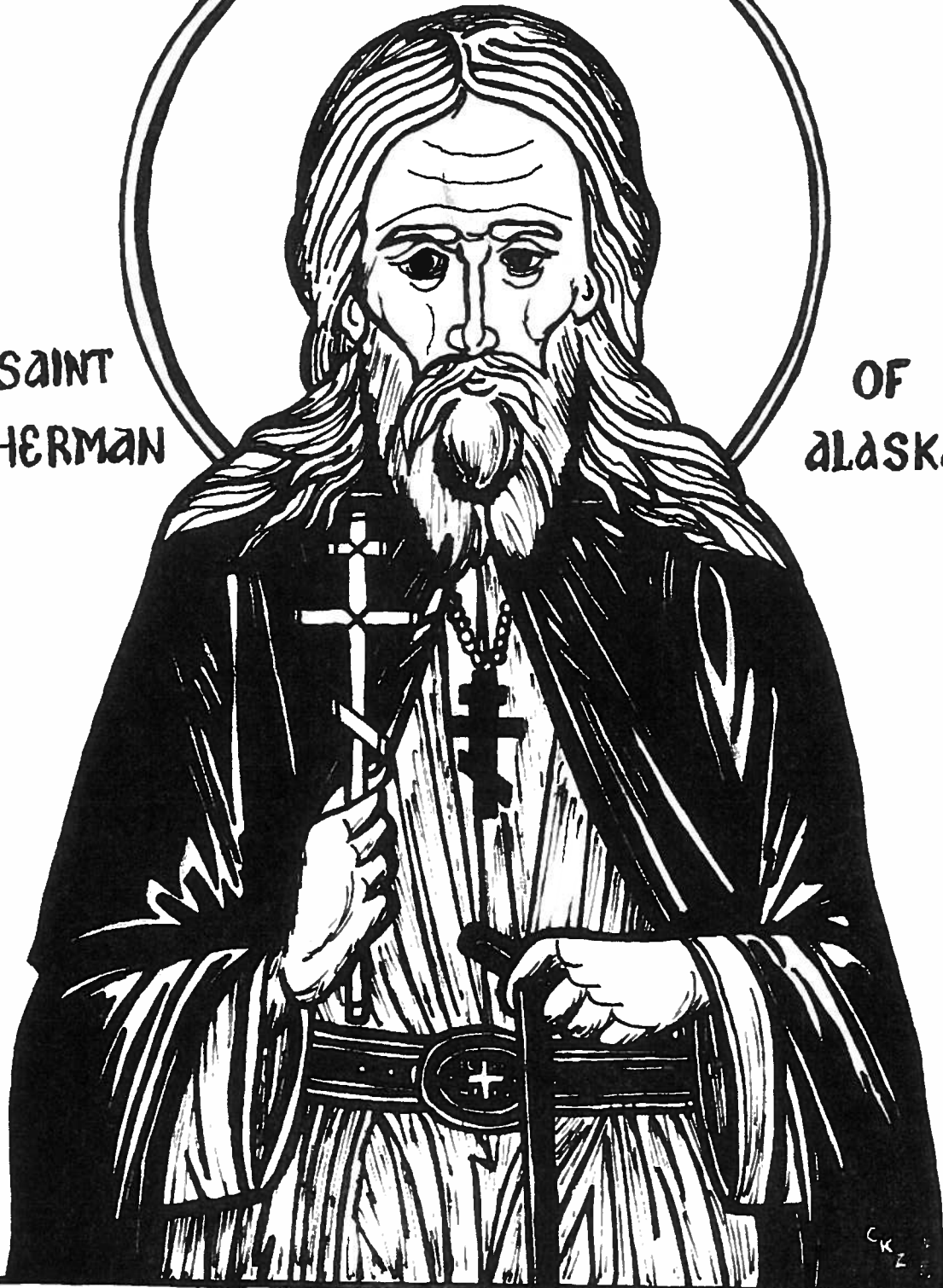
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Hebrews 13:16

Saint  
HERMAN

OF  
ALASKA



# **St. Herman of Alaska**

## **Wonderworker of All America**

**Commemoration Date: August 9<sup>th</sup> and Dec 13**

Monk Herman was born in 1756 to a merchant class family in Serpukhov, Russia, part of the Moscow Diocese. As a young boy, he had a very prayerful life. At the age of sixteen, he decided to go to Holy Trinity Sergius Hermitage about twelve miles from St. Petersburg, Russia to study about the church.

From the time he was a young monk at the Monastery, many miracles began to occur in his life. He found a large sore on his neck that grew larger and larger and made it very difficult for him to swallow. His face became disfigured. He decided to lock himself inside his cell, a small room, and pray before the icon of the Theotokos. During the night, he dreamt the Theotokos healed him. When he awoke the next morning, the sore had disappeared.

He lived at the Hermitage for about five years and then decided to go to the Valaam Monastery near Finland. While Monk Herman was at the Monastery, he was chosen, along with nine other men, to go to Kodiak Island in North America. They walked across Russia and Siberia and then went by boat to Alaska. In 1794 his life on Kodiak Island began as he ministered to the Russian fur traders who had settled there.

About a mile and a half by water from Kodiak Island is Spruce Island. Monk Herman loved Spruce Island. It reminded him of Valaam. Spruce Island was covered with trees and for the first summer on the island Monk Herman lived in a cave he had dug by himself. After that summer, the Russian American Company built him a cell in which he lived for the next forty years.

He planted potatoes, cabbage, and many other vegetables and ate fish from the little river that ran through the middle of the island. Whether it was summer or winter, Father Herman wore the same clothes. This included a deerskin shirt without sleeves, shoes, klobuk, and a cassock. He slept on a wooden bench and his blanket was a wooden board.

While he was on the island, he loved to feed the animals by hand, especially the bears. He enjoyed giving advice to people that were having a hard life, and was especially concerned about the children. One day there was a flood on the island and everyone was frightened. The people asked Father Herman for help. He took the icon of the Theotokos, placed it on the ground and asked the people to pray. The water never went past the icon.

Another time, there was a forest fire on the island where Father Herman lived. He and his friend Ignatius dug a ditch and covered it with moss. The fire roared up the hill and stopped as soon as it reached the moss.

These are just some of the miracles that happened during Father Herman's long life. On December 13, 1837, at the age of 81, he died in his cell on Spruce Island. On August 9, 1970, the Orthodox Church in America canonized Father Herman as the First American Saint.

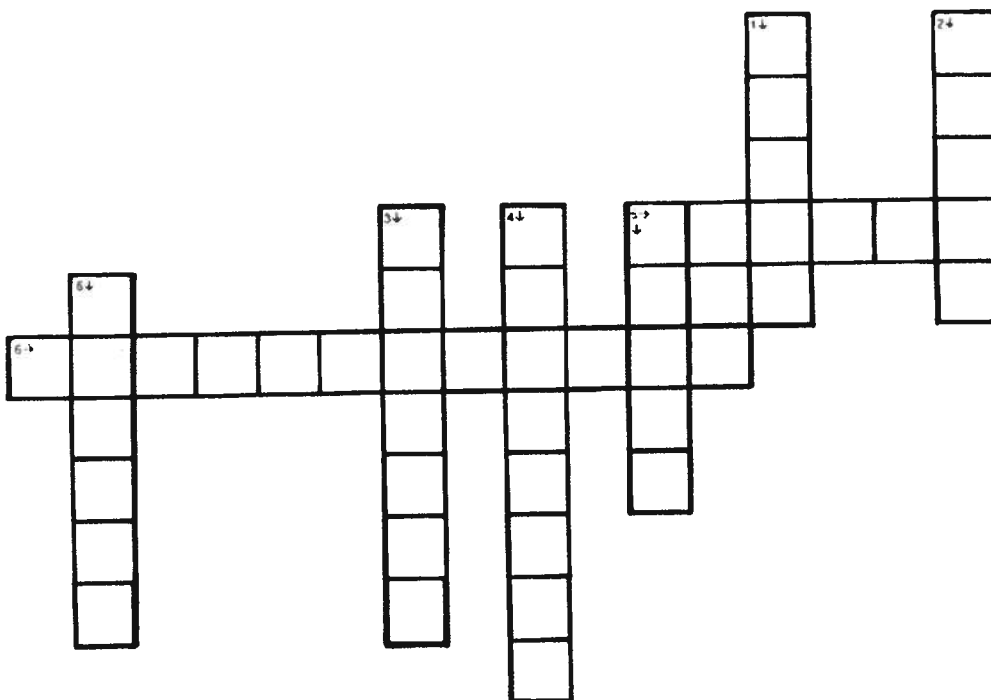
## Crossword Puzzle

### St. Herman of Alaska

Fill in the answers to the crossword puzzle by placing the underlined words into the correct spaces. The words are taken from the Troparion (Tone 4) of the Akathist Service to St. Herman.

- (6 down) O Blessed Father Herman of Alaska
- (5 across) North Star of Christ's Holy Church
- (2 down) the light of your holy life and great deeds,
- (4 down) guides those who follow the Orthodox way.
- (5 down) Together we lift high the Holy Cross,
- (3 down) you planted firmly in America.
- (1 down) Let all behold and glorify Jesus Christ,
- (6 across) singing His Holy Resurrection.

*Check out the music downloads for the North American Saints at [www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org).*



# The Beatitudes.



## The Fourth Beatitude

Blessed are those who  
hunger and thirst for  
Righteousness,  
for they shall be satisfied.

### What is Righteousness?

Righteousness means always doing what is morally right, just, ethical, honorable, noble, virtuous, and Godly. It is a lifestyle that Jesus approves of and is pleased with. When Jesus Christ is the one who leads a Christian's life Jesus makes the decisions that the righteous person will follow. A righteous believer walks with God everyday, and in everything that he does and thinks about. Every decision that he makes, everything that he reads and looks at, is done the way that Jesus would have done them.

"For the Lord is righteous;  
He loves righteousness;  
and the upright will behold His face."

In every situation that comes across his life The righteous person asks himself "What Would Jesus DO?" When you walk close to God and Jesus is in your heart you will know immediately whether something is right or wrong, just or unjust, godly or ungodly because Jesus is communicating with you all the time. The Holy Spirit will lead you and guide you and He will warn you whenever something is not right.

In this Beatitude Jesus said to HUNGER and THIRST after RIGHTEOUSNESS. Hunger and Thirst are appetites that return to us every day, and frequently during the day. Your living body requires to be fed healthy food so that it can continue to be strong throughout the day. When we walk with God in righteousness our Soul requires and desires to be feed with constant meals throughout the day. These are meals of righteousness to walk daily with God, to do the will of God, and to be like Jesus.

When Jesus Christ lives within your heart you have a desire to seek to walk in righteousness and to lead a Godly life every second of the day. For a righteous person knows that God's way of life is what fills you with peace and joy. You realize that nothing can be more perfect, more pure, and more pleasing to Our Heavenly Father then living a life that God totally approves of.

