



My Beloved Ones,

Today marks a joyous period in the life of our Church, for on November 15th we begin the Nativity Fast, the 40 Day preparation for the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The importance of the Spring Lent and its preparation for the Feast of Feasts, Pascha, means that many Orthodox do not place as much emphasis on this “Winter Lent”. Some might wonder why we Fast, because the period before the Nativity is not an especially somber time, unlike the events of our Lord’s Passion before Pascha. Indeed, with the joyous spirit of a secular holiday like Thanksgiving, images of parties and gatherings, as well as observances such as Christmas vacation, there are those who question whether the Feast is necessary at all for our modern world.

This Fast is also known as Phillip’s Fast, because St. Philip the Apostle’s Feast Day falls on November 14th, one day before the beginning of the Fast. St. Philip, John the Evangelist tells us was from Bethsaida, also the home of Philip’s fellow Apostles, Andrew the First-Called and Andrew’s brother, St. Peter. St. Philip’s zeal for the coming of the Messiah was so great, that he is known to have brought a group of Greek Jews to see the Lord, just as he most famously, demonstrated true faith by telling a skeptical Nathanael to, “*Come and see!*” (*John 1:46*)

Too often, we are also skeptical; if not of our Lord (like Nathanael), then of the many guides our Church gives to us. We question why—when so many of our Christian brothers and sisters eat and drink freely—we are asked to abstain. The reason, of course, is simple: just as we prepare ourselves for the Passion and Resurrection by sacrificing our own passions, we are meant to prepare for our Lord’s birth in a humble cave, by demonstrating a small kind of that humility, at least in spirit. Our Lord, consenting to born near beasts of the field, did not enter this world as a King. Is there a better way to honor His condescension by cleansing our bodies and hearts, so that we will approach Him quietly, reverently?

“*Come and see!*” said Philip to Nathanael. As we begin the feast named in this Saint’s honor, may we hold true to his words, and ask for his intercessions to our Creator, that we stay on the proper path to the humble manger.

Καλά Χριστούγεννα!

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta