

He who measures  
the heaven with the  
span of His hand lies  
in a manger a span's  
breadth; He whose  
cupped hands contain  
the sea is born in a  
cave; His glory fills  
the heavens and the  
manger is filled with  
His splendor....

—St. Ephraim  
the Syrian



## FOR TO US A Child Is Born PARENT GUIDE

Dear Parents,

More than 2,000 years ago, Christ entered this world as a tiny baby. In many ways, His birth wasn't much different from that of our own babies. Christ was bathed, swaddled, and likely given to his mother to nurse. People came to celebrate his birth bringing gifts. On the eighth day He was given His name, and on the fortieth day He was presented to the Temple. But His seemingly ordinary entry into the world was actually quite extraordinary! He was born of a virgin—a gift of love from our heavenly Father for the salvation of the world. He didn't receive gifts of cute outfits or toys, but gold, frankincense, and myrrh: gold a gift for a king, frankincense a gift for God, and myrrh a gift for a man who is to die.

*For to Us a Child is Born* was created for young people in grades 6-9. The title, taken from the book of Isaiah, is a prophecy of the extraordinary event. This guide is offered as a companion for you and your family to use alongside the zine and as a way to bring the lessons of the feasts into your home. You can download it from [www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/religious/christmas\\_guide](http://www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/religious/christmas_guide). As we enter into this season, we pray that this resource will help your family grow closer to our Lord and Savior. May we all experience the joy of the Nativity so that we proclaim triumphantly: Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

With Love in Christ,

Center for Family Care  
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

### PRAYERS FOR THE NATIVITY FAST

#### For Families with Older Children

Lord Jesus, You have come so many times to us and found no resting place, forgive us for our overcrowded lives, our vain haste and our preoccupation with self. Come again, O Lord, and though our hearts are a jumble of voices, and our minds overlaid with many fears, find a place however humble, where You can begin to work Your wonder as You create peace and joy within us. If in some hidden corner, in some out-of-the-way spot, we can clear away the clutter, and shut out the noise and darkness, come be born again in us, and we shall kneel in perfect peace with the wisest and humblest of men.

Help us to enter into this Christmas Fast with humility, yet with joy. And finally Lord, give us Christmas from within, that we may share it from without, on all sides, all around us, wherever there is need. God help us, every one, to share the blessing of Jesus, in whose name we keep Christmas holy. Amen.

(From Presbytera Emily Harakas and Fr. Anthony Coniaris, *Daily Meditations and Prayer for the Christmas Advent Fast and Epiphany*, p. 11. © 2000, Light and Life Publishing. Used with permission.)

#### For Families with Younger Children

Lord, Our God as you entered into the world as a newborn baby, enter also into our hearts so that we may prepare for your glorious coming.

Help us to be still so we can hear the angels announce your Nativity.

Help us to keep our eyes clear so we may follow the star to your Son's birth.

Help us to turn our minds, hearts, and whole bodies toward you so that we may realize that the best gifts come from above.

As You so loved the world that You gave us your only begotten son, help us to share this love with family, friends, enemies, and everyone we meet.

We ask this in your holy name Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.



## Using *For to Us a Child is Born* with Younger Children

Even though *For to Us a Child is Born* is written for grades 6–9, it can easily be adapted for use with younger children. Using the vivid images, parents can bring the rich theological tradition of the Nativity to life for their children. Determine the best approach for your children's developmental level to keep them attentive.

Don't try to present everything in the zine all at once, or even this year. In the words of St. John Cassian, "Less is more. It is not the amount of learning that must be our aim, but the quality of learning. Better to learn two verses with understanding than a whole page with wandering thoughts."

### Set the Stage

For adolescent readers, the introduction of *For to Us a Child is Born* paints a picture of what Christmas has become in our society. For younger children, it would be best to simply discuss Christmas with them. Ask them what they know about Christmas, and make a list of the things they tell you. You could also ask them to draw a picture that reminds them of Christmas. Hold onto these items so you can use them again.

- ✧ Present any vocabulary words you want them to learn (such as Nativity, Incarnation, Messiah, swaddling, and Magi, which will be heard throughout the services of Christmas).

## THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS CHALLENGE

The twelve days of Christmas refer to the period between Christmas and Epiphany (January 6). This is a time of celebration—rejoicing in the birth of our Lord! We have suggested activities for each of the twelve days, but consider creating your own as a family. Don't let a day go by without marveling at the tremendous gift we received from our Lord on Christmas Day. Are you ready to take the challenge?

### December 25

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!  
(Katavasia of the Nativity)

After attending the Divine Liturgy, greet everyone by proclaiming "Christ is Born!" Respond with "Glorify Him!" Continue doing this for the twelve days of Christmas.

### December 26

Christ, what shall we  
offer you? (Vespers)

Look at page 7; focus on the wise men and their gifts. Use the Bible to find out what gifts they brought the baby. Discuss what gifts we can offer Jesus on the occasion of His birth.

### December 27

Lord Jesus, receive  
my spirit (Acts 7:59)

On this day, we commemorate the First Martyr and Archdeacon Stephen. You can read about him in today's epistle reading: Acts 6:8–7:5, 47–60 (perhaps shorten the reading and adapt it for young children). Notice his extreme faith as he was being martyred. Discuss how we can look to him as an example of faith and love.

### December 28

Glory to Him who has been  
born on earth! (Matins)

Have everyone head outside to create the Nativity scene in snow. Make sure to have hot cocoa waiting for when you finish. If you don't have snow, be creative: use clay, sand, paper, or whatever you can find.

### December 29

God is with us (Compline)

Learn to chant the beautiful Compline hymn on page 8. Listen to the Greek version at <http://www.goarch.org/multimedia/audio/lentandholyweek/lentenkatavasies/lnt-katavasies6-gr>. Pair the chant with the English words to learn as a family.

### December 30

The One Who holds  
the universe (Matins)

Go star-gazing. If your town has an observatory open, make the trip. Discuss how amazing it is that God can hold the whole universe in His hand yet came down to the earth as a baby. Read Psalm 104. With younger children, have them create a picture of either this psalm or of God's beautiful universe.



- ✧ Don't be afraid to supplement the text with readings from a children's Bible or biblical storybooks. For example, page 2 discusses the *Protevangelion of James. The Story of Mary, the Mother of God* by Dorrie Papademetriou (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press) is an adaptation from this source.

### Learn by Doing

Children benefit from active participation in learning. Create interactive, applied activities that help them dig deeper into the topics at hand.

- ✧ On page 1, there is a timeline of events surrounding the birth of our Lord. Help your children create their own timelines. Include the Nativity fast and special feast days—check the dates at [www.goarch.org/en/chapel](http://www.goarch.org/en/chapel). Add the twelve days of Christmas and Theophany. Display the timeline for the whole family.
- ✧ Look closely at the icons on pages 6 and 7. Do you have any icons in the house of the Annunciation, Nativity, or Theophany? If so, compare and contrast these to the ones in the magazine. Visit *Saints alive!* at <http://games.goarch.org> and let your child paint an icon, put an icon puzzle together, or look at a variety of icons.
- ✧ As you learn about St. Nicholas and the tradition of Santa Claus on page 4, come up with a small philanthropy project your child can do anonymously.
- ✧ Have your child create a picture using the beautiful Katavasia of the Nativity on page 5. Add this hymn to your evening prayers. If you can, see if your priest has the music and learn how to chant it.

### Review

Come full-circle at the end of your session. If at the beginning, you created a list of all your child knew about the Nativity, pull out the list and add to it. Keep the list and continue adding to it over time. If your child drew a picture that represented what he or she knew about Christmas, create a new picture reflecting what was learned.

#### December 31

The bread you do not use  
is the bread of the hungry  
(St. Basil the Great)

Get the entire family involved in making the Vasilopita. Begin with a prayer and read about the tradition of the Vasilopita on page 11.

#### January 1

O righteous Basil, revealer of  
heavenly things! (Kontakion)

Start the New Year by attending the Divine Liturgy as a family. When you come home, cut your Vasilopita and thank God for the blessing of a New Year.

#### January 2

Sanctify both me and  
the waters (Matins)

Schedule a time for the priest to bless your home. Pick up some plastic bottles at a craft store and have each member of the family decorate one to store holy water next to the icons in their room. You can use paint pens, decoupage, and puffy paint.

#### January 3

Draw in the water of gladness  
(Great Blessing of the Water)

As the Nativity season comes to a close, make a list of all that you are grateful for. Discuss how you can give proper thanks for these things. Also, this would be a good time to write those Christmas thank-you notes.

#### January 4

Holy Trinity, glory to You!  
(Prayer to the Holy Trinity)

On the feast of Theophany, the Trinity is revealed—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Read the Gospel lesson for this feast Matthew 3:13–17 and look at the icon on page 13 and discuss as a family.

#### January 5

Light from Light (Matins)

Make a point of attending the Vespers of Theophany as a family. If your family's schedule allows, attend the Liturgy the next day as well. For more ideas for celebrating the feast, read *Diving In: Living Theophany in the Orthodox Christian Home* by Nichola Krause, which can be found at [www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/family/2011-website/articles/art-feastdays](http://www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/family/2011-website/articles/art-feastdays).



# 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 (page 10) and his support of the poor. Make a donation in honor of St. Basil in the New Year.*

## SIMPLE TRADITIONS YOU CAN START

- ❖ Remove the 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 reading).
- ❖ If you have young children, help them bake a birthday cake for Jesus. Older children can learn to make the Christopsomo (Christ's Bread). You can find a recipe at <http://greekfood.about.com/od/greekbreadspitas/r/christopsomo.htm>.
- ❖ Create a Faith Capsule during the twelve days of Christmas. Use some sort of container and place an item inside for each day to remind you of this year's celebration of the birth of our Lord (i.e. 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 as well. Decide which day you will open it next year and mark it on your calendar.
- ❖ Create your own traditions to celebrate the birth of our Lord!



Center for Family Care  
79 Saint Basil Rd.  
Garrison, NY 10524  
[family.goarch.org](http://family.goarch.org)  
(845) 424-8175