

Message by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios of Atlanta on the 40-day Nativity Fast



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday we will begin a joyous period in the life of our Church: the 40-day Nativity Fast, wherein we prepare for the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The importance of Lent means that many Orthodox do not emphasize this “Winter Lent”. Unlike Lent, the period before the Nativity is not especially somber. Indeed, with the joyousness of a secular holiday like Thanksgiving, as well as observances like Christmas vacation, there are those who question whether our modern world needs this Fast.

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, which was 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 humility 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 humility by cleansing our bodies and hearts, so that we will approach the Christ Child quietly and 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.

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Metropolitan of Atlanta