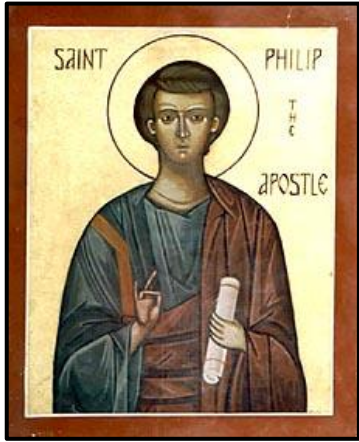


Pylipiwka (Philippian Fast, Philip's Fast)



The Philippian Fast is not a penitential, but rather, a fast of preparation, like the pre-Communion fast. By abstaining from certain foods, we are opening up a “space” in our lives through asceticism and obedience, into which God may enter.

At the time prior to the birth of Christ, Mary registered in Bethlehem with Joseph, who was of the house of David. She had conceived without seed and was with child; and her time to give birth had come. They found no room in the inn, but the cave became a pleasant palace for the Queen. Christ is born to raise up the likeness of humanity that had fallen.

The 40 day preparation for the feast of the Nativity of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ begins on **November 15** and ends on **December 24**. This period is called “Pylipiwka” or Philippian Fast. We are familiar with the preparatory period before the Resurrection. This is the Great Lenten Fast or the Forty Days’ Fast. The celebration of the birth of our Lord cannot be ascertained before the middle of the fourth century. The Church of Rome was the first to celebrate our Lord’s birth. Many think that the date of December 25 was chosen to supplant the feast of the god Mithra and celebration of the birth of the invincible sun god. Others think that the date was chosen for the same reason that the Roman pagans honoured the victory of the sun. It is around this date that the sun overcomes the darkness and the days become longer. Several times the prophets call Jesus Christ “Sun of Justice.” It was deemed proper to choose the day when the sun begins its victorious cycle of light by shortening the duration of the night.

The pre-Nativity period of preparation developed rather late. Scholars do not agree about the exact time when it began. Some hold that it began as early as possibly the fourth century, others the sixth, seventh or the eighth century. The present liturgical pre-Nativity season was finally established at the Council of Constantinople in 1166 (12th Century). The council decreed that the fast would begin on November 15 and last until December 24 inclusive. Thus, there was created another 40 day fast. As far as our liturgical texts are concerned, the period of preparation for the feast of the Holy Nativity of the Lord still begins on November 15.

The pre-Nativity fast is often called the Philippian fast because it begins on the day after the feast of St. Philip. The fast was introduced to prepare the church for a worthy celebration of the great and holy day of the birth of Christ. The regulations for the fast were far more lenient than for the Great Fast. Only Monday, Wednesday and Friday were days of strict fasting without meat, dairy products, wine or oil. On Sundays fish was permitted. Lay people were at first permitted to eat fish on other days too. To worthily meet our Lord and Saviour, we should sanctify this pre-Nativity season of Saint Philip’s Fast. Sanctifying, means spending our time in faith and in the service of God and in kindness towards our neighbor, especially those who are in need of our assistance. What we would have been had Christ not come to us? Together with the whole Church we should try to meet Christ as he deserves to be met and as it will, in His mercy, best serve our spiritual benefit!