



**Orthodox Church of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

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The Meaning Behind Our Traditions
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Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Today's gospel lesson teaches us on the true meaning of our Orthodox traditions. Our faith is a living faith, a loving faith, a faith which primarily is about uniting ourselves to God. Our Orthodox traditions assist us in this faith, but we must be careful that our faith remains in God, not in our traditions.

One of our traditions is the Nativity Fast. During this fast, we abstain from certain foods, lessen the amount of food that we eat, and cut back on worldly entertainments. We do this because we are about to celebrate something truly miraculous: God's incarnation; God bowing the heavens and coming down to be one with His creation. To help us contemplate this great mystery of our faith, the Church gives us the Nativity fast where we put our primary focus on serving God rather than serving ourselves.

Modern society completely inverts the fast. The days leading up to Christmas are spent in overindulgence, not fasting. The birth of Christ is replaced with Santa and a vague

notion of holiday cheer. I like to listen to old time radio shows from the 30s and 40s, and even in those radio shows, the announcers would say things like “And remember that the season is about the birth of our Savior.” But today, you’ll find none of that. Christ has been thrown out of our modern, secular Christmas traditions. With all this secularism around us, how are we as Christians meant to behave?

In today’s gospel lesson, a woman who had an infirmity for 18 years was at the synagogue. When Jesus saw her, He laid hands on her, told her she was loosed from her infirmities, and she was made straight, glorifying God. The ruler of the synagogue angrily rebuked this act, saying that one shouldn’t be healing on the Sabbath, the day of rest. The law given by God to Moses stated that Man was to rest on the Sabbath and keep it holy. The ruler of the synagogue deemed the healing as a “work,” thus breaking the part of the commandment that stated you must rest.

As followers of Christ, when participating in the traditions of the Church, we must keep in mind the true meaning behind our traditions, not focusing primarily on the outward aspects of the traditions. To rebuke Christ for miraculously healing on the Sabbath completely misinterpreted the true meaning of the commandment which was meant to keep a day dedicated to God. This miracle pointed people to God, as does the commandment to keep the Sabbath (when the woman was healed, she glorified God). However, the ruler of the synagogue did not understand this and acted with ungodly anger. What a contradiction, striving to keep legalistic interpretations of commandments given by God to the point that you rebuke God Himself.

Let us not keep this Nativity fast as a legal obligation to our tradition. As we will probably be visiting non-Orthodox family and friends this season, do not refrain from partaking in the food they give us, striving to keep a legalistic interpretation of the fast. Rather, eat what has been provided to you, keeping the inward, spiritual meaning of the fast. Once you are done visiting, pick back up the outward aspect of the fast as well. Remember what our faith is and what it is not. It is not a legalistic faith focused on rules and regulations. It is a faith which unites us to God. This is the faith we want to proclaim to those around us.

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