



Catechetical Resource Centre
Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Toronto

SOUL FOOD

Notes for living our faith in modern times

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Jesus is the reason for the Christmas season

The Christmas season is rife with commercialism. Ads urge us to buy expensive gifts, radios blare out songs about reindeer and movies feature a jolly fat fellow who lives in the North Pole. Social gatherings, with much carousing and merry-making, abound. Unfortunately, there are often only scant traces of the true meaning of the holiday, the celebration of the birth of Christ, our Saviour.



As Christians who want to avoid the trappings of the “holiday season” we may yearn to retreat and simply observe the religious holiday. But, better yet, we can

help keep Christ at the centre of Christmas by actively working to penetrate through the commercialism. Here are some suggested ways to do that:

Gifts:

Give gifts to children on St. Nicholas Day and spend Christmas morning at church. Choose modest gifts and cards with a religious theme for family and friends.

Charity:

Give to the needy, and teach children to do so too. Remember those who are alone and in need of love. Invite them to join in the Christmas celebrations with your family.

Music and Entertainment:

Sing and listen to *koliady*

(Christmas carols) on your music-listening devices. Meditate and ponder over the words and their theological message about the incarnation, Jesus’ birth when God becomes man in the birth of Jesus.

Consider taking time to attend a Nativity Play or concert of sacred music.

Decorations:

Place an icon of the Nativity in your prayer corner or a prominent place in your home and display a Nativity scene.

Socializing:

Remember to greet people with a hearty “Merry Christmas!” or “*Chrystos Razhdaetsya!*” (Christ is Born!)”



Did you know?

Nativity story

There are two versions of the Nativity story in the Bible. One is found in Luke's Gospel, the other in Matthew's. Both include Mary, Joseph, Jesus and Bethlehem, but that is where the similarity ends. Read the story of Christ's birth in both gospels and you will discover something very interesting: popular culture has combined details like the Wise Men from Mathew's Gospel with shepherds and manger scene from Luke's to create the rich Nativity story that we are familiar with today.

“It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you. Yes, it is Christmas every time you smile at your brother and offer him your hand.” – Blessed Teresa of Calcutta

Singing carols is more than making music

Koliady (Christmas carols) are a form of prayer. By caroling we worship and praise God and also learn about our faith.

In Ukraine, academics, monks and poets wrote *koliady* that helped to teach people about the Nativity.

Carols of other countries have an educational role too. For instance, the English carol Good King Wenceslas has catechetical lessons that are fitting for the Christmas season.

The carol tells of a good king who, on the “Feast of Stephen,” goes with his helper on a cold

wintery night to bring food and firewood to a poor peasant.

St. Stephen's Day is celebrated by Western Christians on Dec. 26. (The origin of the “Boxing Day” holiday.) In the Byzantine rite, St. Stephen is venerated on Dec. 27/Jan. 9.

St. Stephen's name comes from the Greek “Stephanos”, meaning “crown.” He is called the Protomartyr as he was the first martyr of the New Testament. An eloquent speaker, he was tried for blasphemy, tortured and stoned to death in 34-35 AD. While on trial, he saw both God the Father and the Son.

The popular English carol is about another saint, Saint Wenceslaus I (907-935). One of his biographers, in 1119, wrote: “Every night from his noble bed, with bare feet...he went around to God's churches and gave alms generously to widows, orphans, those in prison and afflicted by every difficulty.”

Like St. Nicholas about whom we sing the much-loved Ukrainian carol, “*O Khto, khto Mykolaja linbyt,*”, St. Wenceslaus offers us a noble example of Christian love and charity.



Book pick

Santa's Secret Story By Cornelia Mary Bilinski



This new story book for children aged 4-7, follows Rachel on a magical journey as she meets St. Nicholas and discovers the true meaning of Christmas that is revealed in God's love. Available from Pauline Books and Media at: www.pauline.org

Catechetical Resource Centre, Toronto Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy

Our mission is to provide materials for teachers, parents and adults who wish to grow in knowledge of their faith.

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