

# CHRISTMAS LENTEN HANDOUTS

Take some **INCENSE**, a bit of ordinary **STRAW**, a small **CANDY CANE**, a **CHRISTMAS GREETING CARD**, a colorful **BOW**, and a birthday **CANDLE** . . . add to these a few words by way of reminding ourselves of what is needful to prepare for Christmas, and for meditation, one or two of the hymns, troparia, or verses from our rich liturgical tradition . . . and you have something worth sharing with parishioners, shut-ins, visitors to your parish, or a friend. This makes a great Family Advent Activity for the Church School Students.

## The following materials are needed. Some are optional.

- Pieces of Incense
- Pieces of Straw
- Small Candy Canes packaged in cellophane
- Christmas Cards with their envelopes [Check the “dollar” stores.]
- Stick-on Bows sold in large packages. Mini bows work well.
- Birthday candles. White candles look best.
- Mini plastic zipper or candy bags from craft stores for the incense, the birthday candle, and mini-bow, if that size is purchased.
- Sandwich sized bags for the Christmas cards, and larger stick-on bows. Optional for straw.
- Ribbon or yarn – If bags are to be attached this way. ¼” satin ribbon works well; available a fabric and craft stores
- Single hole punch, if use ribbons
- Scissors
- Stapler
- Tape
- A set of 6 printed cards, which are included in this packet

## Methods of attaching the items to the cards include:

1. **Stapling** the bagged items (INCENSE, STRAW, etc.) to the cards.
2. **Taping** the bagged items to the cards.
3. Using a **ribbon or yarn** to tie the bagged item to the card that has had a hole punched in the top left-hand corner.

These **CHRISTMAS LENTEN HANDOUTS** are to be used in the following sequence.

**Week 1** - a few grains of incense (see your parish priest) placed in a small plastic bag and attached to the card on **INCENSE**.

**Week 2** - a bit of straw (craft and pet stores) attached to the card on **STRAW**.

**Week 3** - a small candy cane, readily available in stores, and already wrapped in cellophane, attached to the card on **CANDY CANES**.

**Week 4** - a Christmas greeting card available in stores, with its mailing envelope, inserted into a sandwich size bag and attached to the card on **ANGELS**.

**Week 5** - a stick-on bow placed in a small plastic bag and attached to the card on Christmas **GIFT** Exchanging.

**Week 6** - a birthday candle placed in a small plastic bag and attached to the card on **LIGHT**.

- There are six weeks to the Nativity Lenten season beginning **November 15th**. One item with its accompanying card can be distributed each week.
- Assembling the items and preparing the cards can be a project for teens, youth groups, church school, or other church groups.

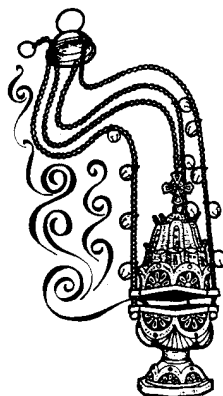


- Each set of two sheets should be copied back-to-back, cut in half horizontally, then folded in half, to resemble a greeting card. There will be six cards.
- The back page has been left blank. Depending on how they are to be used one of the following could be placed on the back page before the cards are duplicated and distributed.
  - A. The name, address, phone number of the parish and name of the parish priest, plus the times of church services on Sundays and for the Nativity Feast.
  - B. The Church’s name and the year.

## Who gets these cards?

1. The handouts can be distributed each Sunday in the Narthex by greeters, one to a household.
2. If the parish is too large, the handouts can be delivered in person to shut-ins and others in need of out-reach.
3. Each family of the Church School can be given a set before the Lenten Period begins to be used as Family Advent Activity.

*The Liturgical Texts included in this series were adapted from The Festal Menaion, translated by Mother Mary and Bishop Kallistos Ware. This project, developed by Preoteasa Clara Mancantelli, first appeared in the Fall 1987 Packet of the Department of Religious Education of the Orthodox Church in America, compiled by Matushka Faith Kuharsky, who has also granted permission to reprint. A new layout has been done by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div. Director of Religious Education, Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh / 174 St. Clair Drive, Akron, OH 44307 / 330-376-0629 / pmonest@neo.rr.com / www.phyllisonest.com 2003*



**Incense** is hardly the gift we would choose for anyone on our Christmas shopping list. Yet for the Magi it was a most appropriate gift to bring the newborn Child they had journeyed to find and to worship.

As we begin this Nativity Fast, the world would have us rushing out to pre-holiday sales and parties. Let this **incense** remind us that this is the time to prepare to receive and celebrate the first and **GREATEST** of all Christmas gifts: God's gift of His Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, Who became man that we might all be saved.

Come, join us as we praise, worship, and receive Him Who is coming to be born - not in a stable as He did 2000 years ago - but in the hearts of men.



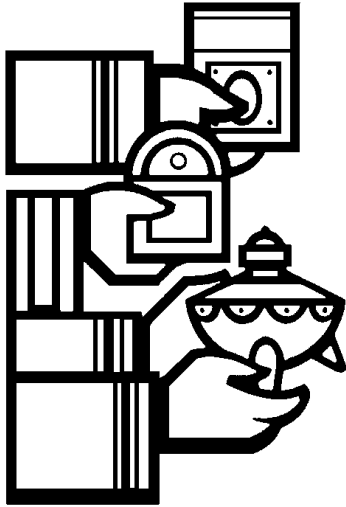
**STRAW?** Today most of us have no use for straw. Still it remains a simple reminder of Christmas: the lowly manger filled with **straw** on which the newborn Jesus lay.

There is certainly nothing glorious or regal about **straw**. How then did it serve as a bed for the King of Kings?

Why did God choose for Himself the lowliest and humblest of beds?

How could the Creator of all be contained in a Virgin's womb? Or be bundled as a Babe in swaddling bands?

As we move toward our celebration of this wondrous Birth, let us rejoice even in a bit of **straw** "for Christ was born of the Virgin that all of us may be saved!"



**WHAT SHALL WE OFFER YOU,  
CHRIST,  
WHO FOR OUR SAKES  
APPEARED ON EARTH AS MAN?**



***According to the law of mortal man,  
You appeared as a babe and accepted  
To be wrapped in swaddling bands;  
Thereby You loosened the bands of my  
Offences, bestowing freedom on those  
Who cry aloud to You: O God, our  
Deliverer, blessed are You!***

***From Matins of the Forefeast of the Nativity***



***Every creature made by You offers You  
thanks:***

***the angels offer You a hymn;***

***The heavens, a star;***

***The magi, gifts;***

***The shepherds, their wonder;***

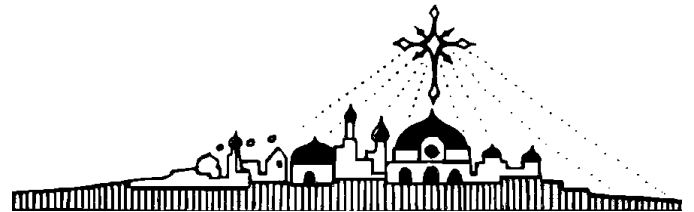
***The earth, its cave;***

***The wilderness, a manger;***

***And we offer You a Virgin Mother.***

***O God, Who are from all eternity, have mercy  
upon us.***

***From Vespers of the Nativity***



***Come, O Bethlehem, prepare for the birth.  
Come, Joseph, and be enrolled with Mary.  
O most sacred manger!  
O swaddling clothes that carry God!  
There the Life was wrapped,  
Even Christ our God,  
Who shall tear to pieces the bands of death,  
And bind fast mortal men to incorruption.***



## CANDY CANES:

Even children are quick to identify **Candy Canes** with this season. But how did this bit of candy come to be traditional holiday fare?

Some say that **candy canes** remind us of the staffs used by the shepherds as they tended their flocks on the hillsides of Bethlehem, and to whom the angels came and proclaimed: **CHRIST IS BORN!**

And when these shepherds came to see the Child, they found more than an Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes: they found the **TRUE SHEPHERD** of all men. For it is with the loving concern of a devoted shepherd in search of His lost sheep that Christ comes.

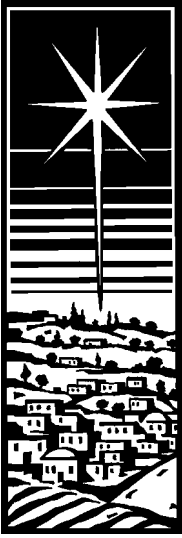
So let us also rejoice like tired, lonely, frightened sheep gone astray when their Shepherd lifts them upon His shoulders and takes them home.



On that first Noel, it was the **Angels** who spread the Good News: **CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!** bringing peace, hope, and joy to the hearts of those lonely, weary shepherds who kept watch over their flocks.

This Christmas, take a moment to imitate those **Angels**. Spread the Good News of the coming of Jesus Christ to someone in need of your concern: a friend, co-worker, a neighbor, or relative whose name might not otherwise appear on your Christmas card list.

Send **one EXTRA** card to spread **JOY, HOPE, and PEACE** this Christmas season, that all who long for God's presence in their lives might be reminded through **YOU** that Christ has come so that **ALL** may be saved.



*The Creator, when He saw man  
perishing,  
Whom He had made with His  
own hands,  
Bowed the heavens and came  
down.  
From the divine and pure Virgin  
He took all man's substance,  
Being made truly flesh:  
For He has been truly glorified.*

*From Matins of the Nativity*

*You, O Bethlehem, are not least among cities:  
For in you is born the King and Lord  
Who shall tend as a shepherd  
The people that is His own.*

*From Matins of the Forefeast*



*The shepherds hasten to Bethlehem,  
revealing the True Shepherd  
seated upon the Cherubim  
and lying in a manger.*

*For our sakes  
He has taken upon Himself  
the form of a child.  
O LORD, GLORY TO YOU!*

*From Matins for December 26*



*Heaven and earth are united today,  
for Christ is born.  
Today God has come upon earth  
and man gone up to heaven.  
Today for man's sake is seen in the flesh  
He who by nature is Invisible.  
Therefore let us also give glory  
and cry aloud to Him:  
Glory to God in the highest,  
And on earth peace, which Your  
Coming has bestowed upon us,  
O Saviour: Glory to You!*

*“GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST,”  
I hear today in Bethlehem from the angels,  
glory to Him whose good pleasure it was  
that there be peace on earth.*



*The Virgin is now more spacious than the  
heavens.  
Light has shone upon those in darkness,  
and has exalted the lowly who sing like  
the angels:  
GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!*

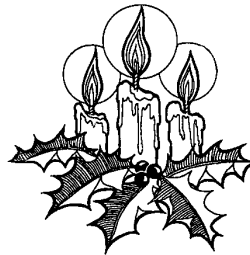
*From Great Compline of the Nativity*



Who wants to be reminded of how few Christmas shopping days are left! By now, for some of us, fatigue and frustration have turned our exchanging of **gifts** into more of a chore than a joy.

All the more reason to take a moment to remind ourselves that what makes our **gifts** welcomed and cherished is not what we paid for them, but the spirit in which we have given them.

Make your gift an expression of your love and concern. As you add a final **bow** to the **Gift**, add your PRAYER as well. Pray that the HOPE, JOY, FORGIVENESS, PEACE, AND SALVATION we receive from God through Jesus Christ might fill the hearts and lives of all those you reach out to with **gifts**. This Christmas, exchange more than a **gift** with others. Spread the true meaning of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, God, and Saviour, Jesus Christ.



Traditionally, a **light** in a window has been a sign of WELCOME HOME to weary travelers. Soon many of us will be welcoming home loved ones for the holidays.

**Lights** - aglow everywhere now - remind us of WHY Jesus Christ has come: to bring the **LIGHT of HOPE** to those overwhelmed by the darkness of fear, loneliness, despair, illness, and sin.

When we grow weary of the burdens, disappointments, and confusion of our lives, Jesus Christ awaits ready to help our return home – home to the FORGIVENESS, JOY, PEACE, and LOVE of God our Father.

So take a moment to light one more candle and recall the wonderful, never-fading LIGHT brought into this world by Jesus Christ. CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!



*What mysteries beyond mind and speech!  
 God in His compassion is born on earth.  
 He puts on the form of a servant that  
 He may snatch from servitude to the enemy  
 those who with fervent love cry out:  
**BLESSED ARE YOU, O SAVIOUR,  
 WHO LOVES MANKIND***

*From Matins of the Forefeast Nativity*



*You have come as a mediator between  
 God and man, O Christ our God.  
 Through You, O Master, We have a way  
 to escape from the darkness of ignorance,  
 and come to Your Father,  
 The Author of Light.  
 Let the people who once sat in darkness  
 see the light shine forth that knows  
 no evening: Him Whom the star  
 once made known to Kings from Persia  
 who worshipped fire.*

*Greatly rejoice, O Heaven: Be glad, O earth.  
 For the Lamb of God has been born on earth,  
 granting the world forgiveness.*

*The Word Who is in the bosom of the Father  
 has come forth without seed from the Virgin.*



*The Magi were struck with wonder  
 seeing Him in Bethlehem as a child;  
 and all things give Him glory.*

*From Matins of the Forefeast of the Nativity*

*The preaching of the prophets,  
 foretelling the manifestation of Christ,  
 has today received its saving fulfillment:  
 for He has come in the flesh to enlighten  
 those in peril of darkness.*

*The Son of the Father without beginning  
 has appeared to us, God the Lord  
 made flesh of the Virgin,  
 to give light to those in darkness, to gather  
 the dispersed.*



*Therefore, the  
 far-famed  
 Birthgiver of God  
 we magnify you.*

*From Matins of the  
 Forefeast of the  
 Nativity*

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