

Making a Family Orthodox Advent Calendar

by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div.

Want to help your family focus on "the reason for the season"? Want a great craft idea that can be used from year to year? The **Orthodox Advent Calendar** is just the project, but you'll have to start soon in order to have it ready for November 15/28! We can make each day of Advent exciting by reading the text, then taking out the corresponding item or icon from that day's pocket and attaching it to the tree. When Christmas comes our tree will be filled with reminders of the meaning of the feast.

The "Orthodox Advent Calendar" was originally originated at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Lexington, MA. The following is an adaptation by Phyllis Meshel Onest and Lydia Lekas. The 16 small, laminated icons for this project can be purchased from Lydia Lekas. To be sure of availability and cost please contact her at smplgifts@aol.com or 5644 Virginia Ct. Hudson, OH 44236.

Needed Materials

Red felt: 18" x 30"; green felt: 18" x 30"; gold puffy paint; 24" of 1/4" dowel rod; 30" cord; sewing machine, green and red thread, 10" length of self-sticking velcro or a package of velcro squares that will be cut into small strips and attached to the back of the icons and pieces. *Optional:* approximately 48" of gold ribbon and gold thread for the garland; 8" of ribbon to attach the calendar text to the felt banner; hot glue gun.

16 miniature icons: SS. Andrew, Anastasia, Barbara, Herman, Ignatius, Katherine, Matthew, Nicholas, Romanos, Savas, Spyridon, Stylianos, Archangel Gabriel, Nativity of our Lord, Presentation of the Theotokos, Prophet Daniel.

Miniature Nativity set from a craft store: Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, Three Wise Men, Angels, Shepherd, sheep, donkey, camel. (If you cannot find all these pieces in a set, purchase/make the missing ones separately.)

The following small items can be wooden or resin or felt, purchased or hand-made: anchor, bell, candle, candy cane, church, cross, dove, fish, gift box, green wreath, heart, moon, poinsettia, reindeer with a red nose, star, turkey, and the word, "Joy". (I used wooden items purchased from Pat Catan's craft store.)



Directions:

Make a casing for the dowel rod by folding over 1" red felt and stitch the edge of the casing.

Cut five 2"x18" strips off the end of the green felt for the pockets.

Beginning 1/2" up from the bottom of the red felt piece, position and pin the 5 strips, allowing 1/4" between each strip. Mark off 2" squares with pins. Before sewing, please note which "calendar" you use. If it's *Gregorian/New Calendar*, Nov. and Dec. will take up 2 squares. If it's *Julian/Old Calendar*, assign 2 squares for Nov., but only 1 square each for Dec. and Jan. Before stitching the pockets as shown in the drawing, be sure that there is enough space for the tree. See #4.

Add the months and dates using the gold puffy paint. (Refer to the diagram.)

Using the diagram, make a pattern for the tree from newspaper or large construction paper. Cut out the tree from the remaining green felt. Lay tree 1 1/2" from the top of the red felt banner so that the star can be placed at the very top of the tree. Pin in position and stitch. (*Suggestion: Quilt the tree to the red backing and/or drape and sew a garland of gold or silver ribbon so that the tree does not sag with repeated use.*)

Attach the decorative cord to each end of the dowel rod with a knot and a spot of hot glue.

Cut 1/4" strips of the rough sided velcro and attach one strip to the back of each item and icon. Trim to fit. Place each item or icon in its corresponding pocket.

Laminate the following calendar text pages, punch a hole in the top left corner, and attach them to the rod with a ribbon.

Additional Notes

If there is more than one item for a pocket, such as the 3 Magi or on Thanksgiving, or stable animals, place the extra pieces in one of the extra pockets assigned to Nov. or Dec. St. Katherine is celebrated on November 25 in the Greek tradition and on November 24 in Slavic tradition. The green wreath to be used on November 24 can be switched with St. Katherine without disrupting the schedule of days.

If you need to replace an item because it cannot be found, consider the following:

Teddy Bear - How safe we feel to hold a cuddly teddy bear. How much more comforting it is to transfer our worries to Christ in our daily prayers.

Ornaments shaped like balls remind us that our world was created by God. We are to go into the world and preach the Gospel. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..." (see **Matthew 28: 19-20**).

Orthodox Advent Calendar

Directions:

Beginning November 15/28 read the text for the day then take the corresponding item or icon from that day's pocket and attach it to the tree. When Christmas comes the tree will be filled with reminders of the meaning of this very special Feastday.

Check the Nov. And Dec. Pockets for extra items that you don't want to forget to include.

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Special Note:

Since Thanksgiving is celebrated on the last Thursday in November and will change each year, insert it on the correct date. It can be stored in the pockets marked "Nov." Likewise, for those using the Julian/Old Calendar, Thanksgiving would not be included some years.

Thanksgiving is more than turkey and parades. Let us turn our hearts and minds to God and say, "Thank you, God, for all our blessings," just as the pilgrims did so many years ago.

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Nov.15/28: Archangel Gabriel is one of the archangels. He was the messenger from God to earth who announced to the Virgin Mary that she was to have a baby who would be the Saviour of the world (**Luke 1:26-35**).

Nov.16/29: St. Matthew was a tax collector for the Roman government. He gave up wealth and power to follow Jesus. Matthew means "the gift of God". By spreading God's word,

he became a gift of God to others (**Matthew 9:9**).

Nov.17/30: The Bright Star in the East guided the wise men and the shepherds to the place where Jesus lay so that they could bow down and worship Him. **Matthew 2:1-2:** "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." From the Nativity Troparion we learn that "Those who worshipped the stars were taught by a star to worship You, the Sun of Righteousness."

Nov.18/Dec.1: The Dove is a symbol of peace and of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. After the flood, the dove brought Noah a branch of olive tree, which meant that the earth was free of water and there would once again be peace. At the time of Jesus' baptism, He heard the voice of God the Father, and the Holy Spirit in the likeness of a dove, rested on Him (**Luke 3:21-22**). When we pray "O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth..." we are praying to the Holy Spirit.

Nov.19/Dec.2: The Church is where we, the faithful, come together in Christ and to each other. Here we come to worship God, hear the Gospel, and receive the sacraments. In **Matthew 16:18** we read, "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the

Son of the living God.' And Jesus said '... And I tell you, you are Peter, and this rock [Peter's proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God] I will build my Church.'"

Nov.20/Dec.3: The Cross reminds us that Jesus, the Son of God, suffered and died for us. It is a sign of victory over Evil, Sin and Death. Jesus reminds us that "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross." (**Matthew 16:24**).

Nov.21/Dec.4: The Presentation of Mary. When the Virgin Mary was three, her parents Joachim and Anna took her to the Temple in Jerusalem. She lived there until she was about twelve years old. Through prayer and study she prepared to become the Mother of Jesus. She heard what the prophets foretold and followed. We are called to be like her, to "Hear the words of our Lord and to Follow." We, too, are called to be "temples of God": She carried Jesus in her womb; we receive Him in the Eucharist/Communion.

Nov.22/Dec.5: Gifts are given at Christmas time, but the greatest gift of all is not under the tree! The greatest gift is God's gift to us, His Son, Jesus. We gave Jesus a gift at His birth, too. In the Nativity Vespers we hear: "What shall we give You, O Christ, for You appeared on earth as a man for our sakes? Every creature whom You created offers You thanksgiving.

The angels give You praise; the heavens, the star; the Magi, gifts; the shepherds, wonder; the earth, the cave; and we, the Virgin Mother."

Nov.23/Dec.6: Joy to the World!

One of the carols we sing says, "Joy to the World, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare Him room. And heaven and nature sing." We are to keep the joy of Jesus in our **hearts** forever. "And the angel said to them, 'Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people.'" (Luke 2:10).

Nov.24/Dec.7: The Green Wreath

is a sign of victory. To Christians it represents Christ's victory over sin and death. The color green means life. The circle of green reminds us of eternal life that is ours in Jesus Christ.

Nov.25/Dec.8: St. Katherine

was a kind and wise daughter of a king. After she became a Christian, she led many others to Christ. She was tortured and died, but she never lost her faith in our Lord.

Nov.26/Dec.9: St. Stylianos

was a rich man who gave away his wealth to the poor. He became a monk, cured many sick people, and is known as the protector of children.

Nov.27/Dec.10: The Poinsettia

reminds us of Christ's suffering for us. Its center is like the crown of thorns He wore when He was mocked. Red leaves remind us of the blood Jesus shed for us. Its use at Christmas

comes from Mexico where it was traditional to leave gifts on the altar for Jesus on Christmas eve. One night a poor boy, who had no present, knelt outside the church window and prayed. In the spot where he knelt grew the poinsettia, also called "the Flower of the Holy Night".

Nov.28/Dec.11: The Candle

reminds us that Jesus is the "Light of the World" and that we are to live as followers of the Light. "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." (John 8:12).

Nov.29/Dec.12: The Fish

was a secret sign used by Christians to let others know that they believed that Jesus was the Son of God. The Greek letters for fish - ICHTHYS - stand for "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior". Jesus told His disciples that He would make them "Fishers of Men" (see Matthew 4:19).

Nov.30/Dec.13: St. Andrew

was a fisherman and the first disciple called to follow Christ. He had the courage to give up everything he owned to preach the Gospel in other countries. "He found his brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (the Christ)."

Dec.1/14: St. Romanos

had a terrible singing voice. He prayed that his voice would improve. One night in his sleep the Virgin Mary came to him. When he awoke he could sing beautifully! He ran to the church to chant the hymns of Christmas. He later wrote over 1000 hymns!

Dec.2/15: The Candy Cane

looks like the staff that the shepherd uses to bring his sheep back into the flock. Jesus is our Good Shepherd who brings us back to God. The white stripe reminds us of Jesus' innocence. The red stripe reminds us of the blood he shed for us. John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

Dec.3/16: The Moon

shone brightly on the night Jesus was born. "When I look at the heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You established; what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?" (Psalm 8:3,4).

Dec.4/17: St. Barbara

was the daughter of a pagan. When her father found out about her faith in Jesus, he turned her over to the authorities to be punished. She would not give up her faith, so she was tortured and killed. She is the patron saint of fire and sudden death.

Dec.5/18: St. Savas

dedicated his life to Jesus and at a very early age decided to become a monk. He founded many monasteries in Palestine

Before we go to bed tonight we need to hang our Stockings or put our shoes outside our door for St. Nicholas to fill. The traditional gifts given on the feast of St. Nicholas have a special message for us: Oranges are green in color until the nip of the frost when they turn orange, a sign of the Resurrection. Apples: The red

peel reminds us of the blood of Jesus shed for our sins and the white pulp reminds us of the innocence of the Virgin Mary, His Mother. Nuts: Squirrels "wisely" store these for the winter months. Nuts remind us of St. Nicholas' wisdom. Candy: In days of old, sugar was an expensive food item. It reminds us of the "treasure" that St. Nicholas shared with those less fortunate.

Dec.6/19: St. Nicholas the Wonderworker was a warm and generous man who gave many gifts to the poor and the sick. He showed God's love by making others happy. He also worked many miracles, wonders. In the midst of the fast we have the feast for one of the most beloved saints of our Church. It reminds us that we are almost to Christmas. St. Nicholas is the patron of children, sailors, travelers, pawnbrokers, and more.

Dec.7/20: The Bells will chime and remind us that soon it will be Jesus' birthday. The bell has a tongue. We, too, have a tongue. Just as the bells "sing" out, we are to preach the Gospel to all nations. "And He said to them, 'Go unto all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned.'" (Mark 16:15-16).

Dec.8/21: The Stable Animals rejoiced and bowed down to worship the Baby Jesus when He was born. The prophet Isaiah (1:3) wrote, "The ox knows his

owner and the ass [donkey] his master's crib."

Dec.9/22: Rudolph felt sad and unloved because he had an unusual, shiny nose. Since everyone is given gifts from God that we are to share with others, Rudolph's nose was his gift because it turned out to be a way that he could help others.

Dec.10/23: The Anchor. Saint Paul refers to the anchor and adopts it as a symbol of hope, when he writes this about Jesus, "We have this [our faith in God] as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul..." (Hebrews 6:19). The anchor also gives the appearance of a cross.

Dec.11/24: Angels played three important roles in the Christmas story. [1] The Angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she was chosen to give birth to the Messiah (Luke 1:26), [2] An angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream to tell him that this baby was special (Matthew 1:20). [3] A choir of angels came to the shepherds to announce the good news of our Saviour's birth. We, too, should go out to tell the joyful news of Jesus Christ to all people. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men.'" (Luke 2:13-14).

Dec.12/25: St. Spyridon was a peasant who became a bishop. He is one of the most miraculous saints in the Orthodox Church. To this day,

many people are healed when they visit his tomb/remains.

Dec.13/26: St. Herman of Alaska was a Russian missionary monk who spread the Gospel in North America. He loved the native peoples of Alaska and taught them about Jesus. He is the first North American saint.

Dec.14/27: The Magi/Wise Men were the first non-Jewish people to believe in Christ. They were guided to Bethlehem by a bright Eastern star. They brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Baby Jesus. They welcomed Jesus into the world. Let us welcome Him into our hearts with song and prayer. "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem..." (Matthew 2:1).

Dec.15/28: Shepherds take care of the sheep in the fields, protecting them from wild animals like lions and wolves. They were surprised and excited to have the angels give them the message of the birth of the Saviour, Jesus. They knelt and worshipped Jesus, then went to tell other people the good news. "And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear." (Luke 2:8-9). Jesus is our Shepherd.

Dec.16/29: Sheep are gentle animals that are especially

useful to people: wool, milk, meat. Sheep need to be cared for by shepherds or else they wander off and get eaten by wild animals. We are like the sheep, and Jesus is our Shepherd. Also, we read in John 1:29, "And the next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.'"

Dec.17/30: The Prophet Daniel refused to give up his faith in God and worship the idol god of King Nebuchadnezzar. He and his three brave friends - Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - were thrown into a furnace to be burned. They sang and danced in the flames along with the Angel of the Lord, Jesus Christ Himself. Just as they knew their God would deliver them from the fiery furnace, we know God will take care of us too. Daniel also foretold the coming of the Messiah, Jesus.

Dec.18/31: The Camels were created by God especially to work and live in the desert. The three Wise Men rode on camels to follow the Star and find the newborn Jesus. The camels quietly praised Jesus, too. "And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening..." (Genesis 24:11).

Dec.19/Jan.1: The Donkey was commonly used for transportation in Bible times. Although the donkey is not noted in the Nativity story, the icon of the flight into Egypt shows Mary and Jesus on a

donkey. Most pictures of Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem include a donkey. The prophet Isaiah (1:3) wrote, "The ox knows his owner and the ass [donkey] his master's crib."

Dec.20/Jan.2: St. Ignatius was given the name "God-Bearer" because he always had the name of Jesus in his heart and on his lips. He encouraged many people and built many churches. We, too, are called to be "God-Bearers".

Dec.21/Jan.3: St. Joseph was the guardian of the Virgin Mary and Jesus. Even though Joseph was a much older man, it was God's plan for Joseph to be betrothed to Mary and to become Jesus' guardian. After they were betrothed, Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant. The Bible says that he was a just man and unwilling to shame her, so he planned to dissolve the betrothal and send her away secretly. After an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and explained all that was to happen, Joseph did what God asked of him (Matthew 1:18-25). He taught Jesus the trade of carpentry.

Dec.22/Jan.4: St. Anastasia was born in Rome to a very wealthy family. She loved Jesus and helped Christian martyrs. She used her money to help the poor and the sick. We should follow St. Anastasia's example.

Dec.23/Jan.5: The Virgin Mary/Theotokos. When Elizabeth greeted Mary she said, "Hail Mary, full of grace!

Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" We know that Mary gave birth to Jesus, the Saviour and deliverer of our souls. Orthodox Christians call the Virgin Mary, Theotokos -"Mother of God" or "Bearer of God".

Dec.24/Jan.6: The Baby Jesus. "Away in the manger, no crib for a bed. The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head. The stars in the sky looked down where He lay. The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay." When the shepherds heard the angel's message of the Baby Jesus' birth, they quickly went, "and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." (see Luke 2:16).

Dec.25/Jan.7: The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. "Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One! Angels, with shepherds, glorify Him! The wise men journey with the star! Since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child!" Nativity Kontakion of St. Romanos the Melodist

Christmas Greeting:

**Christ is Born!
Glorify Him!**