

## ANTICIPATION

This article is not an advertisement for Heinz ketchup or about the commercial's actor in 1987 who was later a Friend and is now a Man with a Plan. It is about Anticipation. When this author was in Ukraine, he had the opportunity to talk with a man selling strawberries. They were beautiful and tasty. He told me that he was sorry for me because in the United States I could have strawberries from different countries all year around and I could have frozen American strawberries all year round. Asking why then he felt sorry for me, he told me that I never had the opportunity to anticipate that first fresh strawberry.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *anticipation* as "a feeling of excitement about something that is going to happen, the act of preparing for something." Remember how as a child there was excitement in young hearts in anticipation of the arrival of St. Nicholas. See the excitement on the faces of a young couple waiting for the birth of a child. Anticipation is filled with positive energy. We also call divine grace, "energy" and since it is of God, it is positive.

The Old Testament is filled with the Jew's anticipation of the coming of the Christ, the Messiah. During the month of December, we commemorate several of the Old Testament prophets: Nahum (December 1), Habakkuk (December 2), Zephaniah (December 3), and Haggai (December 16). All of these prophets preached repentance, and the coming of the Messiah in great glory. The prophets and kings spoke of Him. On the Second Sunday before the Nativity, the Sunday of the Forefathers, we remember the holy men and women from the writings of the Old Testament who looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. At the same time, in the Gospel (Luke 14:16-24), we hear our Lord tell the parable of a feast to which those who were first invited, did not come—and how the master ordered



the house to be filled with those who were not, at first invited." On the Sunday before the Nativity, the Sunday of the Ancestors, the genealogy of Jesus is read (Matthew 1:1-25); the Epistle, from the Letter to the Hebrews, praises the saints of the Old Testament for their faith, but says that in spite of that faith, they did not receive the promised Messiah. Instead, "God had foreseen something better for us, so that without us they should not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:40)." We remember those who waited by waiting.

Phillip's Fast is the time that the Church is in expectant waiting for the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord. It is a difficult time to have prayerful expectation because the culture in which we live here in the United States is filled with the commercialism of an expectant waiting for Santa Claus and the celebration of a secular Christmas in which we send Seasons Greetings.

Phillip's Fast is counter-cultural. We are called to resist our culture by waiting. To slow down and to pause in the hustle and bustle and focus on our actively waiting to celebrate the Birth of our Savior and our Lord. We resist the culture by remembering that fast is a time to prepare not to celebrate.

The time for Christmas parties is following the Nativity. Do we celebrate a marriage before it comes or after with the reception? The time to celebrate is the 12 days *after* Christmas. This is counter-cultural. In America the culture celebrates Christmas seemingly from Halloween to Christmas and the day after Christmas, decorations come down. The celebration should be from Christmas to the Epiphany. (And beyond!)

Phillip's Fast is just that—a Fast. It is a time of repentance. As we fast during the Great Fast with greater intensity, this is a time to have a little fast incorporating the same elements of abstinence, fasting, almsgiving (kindness to neighbor) and prayer. Like the Great Fast, it is forty days, which is how it got its name. Counting backward from the Eve of the Nativity we come to the day after the feast of St. Phillip. The period of fasting begins with Vespers on November 15th and ends just before Vespers on December 24th, the eve before the Great

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Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord. We know from the writings of St. John Chrysostom and St Gregory of Nazianzus that the Fast was celebrated in the fourth century. The Fathers wrote that every Christian should go to the Church every day. Because of the different days on which the Nativity was celebrated the days of the Fast varied meaning that some Churches practiced the fast from December 17th to the

Theophany. It was the Council of Constantinople (1166) that fixed the dates that we use today from November 15th until December 24th inclusive.

As the Great Fast ends with joyous gatherings and abundant meals, so too does this Little Fast end with gatherings and meals to celebrate our Lord's birth.

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