



Advent and Nativity in the Ukrainian Catholic Church

From the beginning of the Nativity Fast in mid-November until the Feast of the Encounter of Our Lord in the Temple in early February, Advent and Nativity season is a special time. Colder weather and earlier evenings makes the warmth of home more welcome, and time is spent with family, making decorations, cleaning, cooking, singing, fasting, and preparing for feasting to come.

A long-out-of-print-book by Mary Ann Woloch Vaughn, *Ukrainian Christmas: Traditions, Folk Customs, and Recipes* (1983), offers many ways of preparing for and celebrating the birth of Christ; some are included here.

Philip's Fast

November 15, the day after the Feast of St. Philip, begins a penitential time of fasting, prayers, and almsgiving in preparation for the feast of the Nativity.

Special Days in the Advent and Nativity Seasons

November 16: St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist.

A tax collector before Jesus called him to become a disciple, Matthew is the patron of men named Matthew, bookkeepers, and civil servants.

November 21: Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple. Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, presented Mary in the Temple in Jerusalem.

November 24: St. Catherine, Great Martyr. Princess, scholar, and martyr, Catherine is the patroness of teachers, students, and women named Catherine in all its variations!

November 30: St. Andrew, Apostle, First-Called. Peter's brother Andrew was called by Jesus from his nets to become a "fisher of men." He is the patron of fishermen, men named Andrew, Ukraine, and Scotland.

December 6: St. Nicholas. Bishop of Myra in the 4th century, Nicholas is the patron of our own Ukrainian Greek Catholic Eparchy of the western United States. He is also beloved by children, because in the Ukrainian tradition, St. Nicholas brings gifts on this day!

December 9: Maternity of the Holy Anna. This holy day is known to Roman Catholics as the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Eastern tradition emphasizes the joy, after years of childlessness, of Anna's maternity.

December 24: Vigil of the Nativity. A day of fasting and preparation for the great feast itself.

December 25: Nativity of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ. Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Troparion of the Feast, Tone 4

Your Nativity, O Christ our God, made the light of knowledge dawn on the world:* through it, those who worshipped the stars were taught by a star* to worship You, the Sun of Righteousness,* and to know You, the Dawn from on high.* Glory to You, O Lord.*

December 26: Synaxis of the Mother of God. This ancient feast honors Mary, the all-pure Virgin Mother of God. The prayers for the day call to mind the visit of the Magi and the Gloria of the angels of Nativity.

Sunday after Nativity: On the Sunday after the Nativity, we commemorate the **Holy and Righteous Joseph, Spouse of the Mother of God; David the King; and James, Brother of the Lord in the Flesh.**

January 1: Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Eight days after the birth of Jesus, and New Year's Day on the civil calendar.

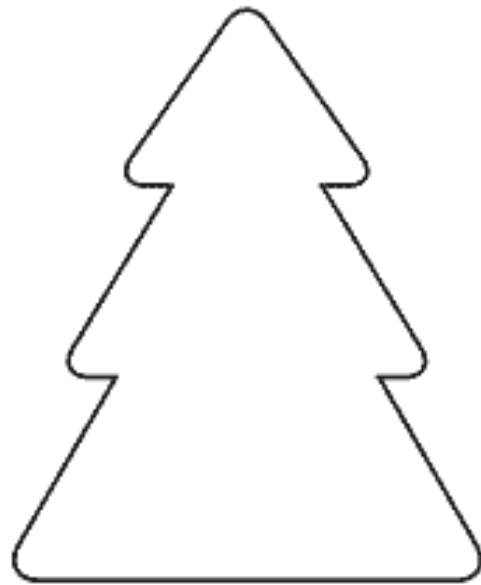
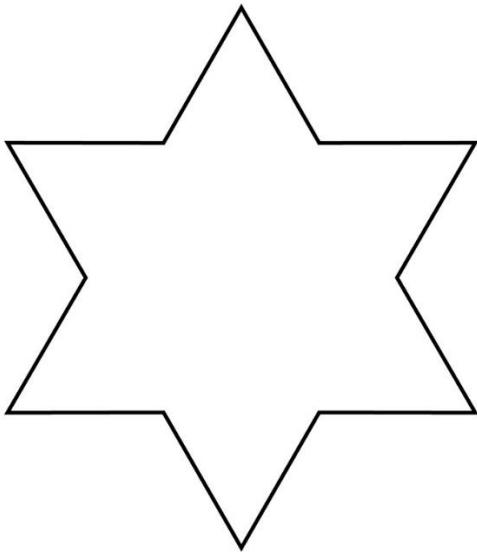
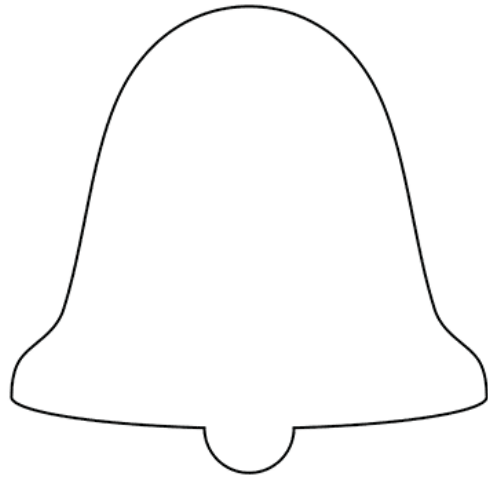
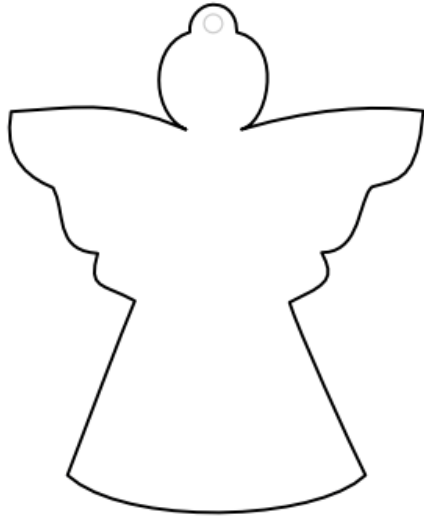
January 6: Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Commemoration of the baptism of Jesus by John the Forerunner, and the Great Blessing of Water. From now until the Feast of the Encounter of Our Lord in the Temple, priests visit parishioners' homes to bless them with prayers and the sprinkling of holy water.

February 2: Encounter of Our Lord in the Temple. The concluding feast of the Nativity season. Forty days after his birth, Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the temple, where he was recognized as the Messiah by the righteous Simeon and the prophetess Anna. Traditionally, candles are blessed and distributed to the faithful.

Traditional Nativity Decorations

Paper decorations are popular in the Ukrainian tradition and require only simple materials and equipment: paper, ruler, pencil, scissors, and glue or tape. Crayons, markers, glitter, and stickers are nice additions. Simple paper chains assembled from paper strips about ½” wide and 3-4” long are a great beginner project!

Paper Stars and Trees. Trace around simple patterns (easily found on the internet) and cut out trees, stars, angels and other shapes for the season. Decorate with crayon, glitter, ribbons, etc.



Didukh



The didukh (“grandfather”) is a sheaf of wheat, placed on the table or near the family’s icons, symbolizing family ancestors and their presence during the season. In the past, didukhs might be very large, braided and decorated—today, families might place a few stalks of wheat in a vase to carry on the tradition.

Easy Ukrainian Recipes

To Accompany the "Holy Supper" on December 24

Baked Fish. Baked salmon, sole, or other fish makes a simple entrée in keeping with the fast.

"Kutia." Basic ingredients are boiled wheat berries, poppy seeds, and honey. Raisins or other dried fruits are sometimes also added. Many recipes can be found online if you would like to try this traditional dish.

Sauerkraut with Rice. Cook chopped onions and minced garlic in a little vegetable broth. Mix with sauerkraut (drained) and cooked rice in desired proportions.

Marinated Mushrooms. Use canned mushrooms, or cook fresh mushrooms in a little water. Drain and mix with equal parts olive oil and vinegar. Add to taste: diced red onion, minced garlic, brown sugar, oregano, ground or whole black peppercorns, bay leaf, red pepper flakes, parsley, salt. Cover and refrigerate for several hours before serving.

Fruit Compote. Simmer dried fruit (apples, apricots, pears, peaches, prunes, raisins, etc.) in water until fruit is just softened, adding a little lemon juice, sugar or honey, cinnamon or cloves, as desired. Chill and serve.

A Simple Dessert for the Feast Day: Apple Cake

1½ c. flour	½ c. butter
¼ c. sugar	1 egg, beaten
¼ tsp. salt	1/3 c. cream
2 tsp. baking powder	4 large apples, sliced

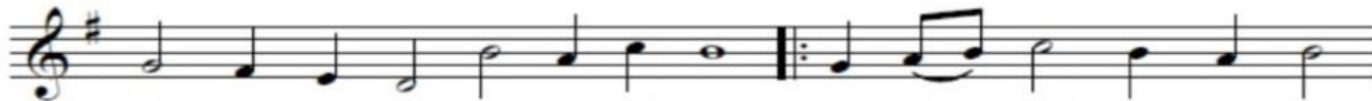
Sift dry ingredients together, cut in butter until crumbly. Mix beaten egg and cream and gently add to dry mixture to form soft dough. Press into greased 8" square baking dish. Layer in sliced apples. Add **topping**:

Mix 2 TBL flour, ½ c. brown sugar, 2 tsp. cinnamon. Cut in 2 TBL butter until crumbly.

Bake at 375° until apples are soft, about 25 minutes.

God Eternal

from The Divine Liturgy: An Anthology for Worship (Sheptytsky Institute)



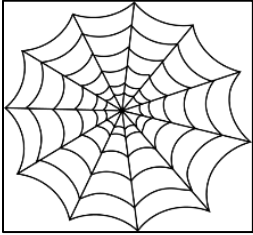
1. God e - ter - nal, rich in His grace, Has come down from a - bove,
2. In Beth-le - hem, this night is born, The Mes - si - ah fore - told
3. An - gels ap - pear, shep - herds be - hold, Mys - tic star shin - ing bright,
4. Three wise men bear pre - sents so fair Gleam - ing gold, frank - in - cense,
5. "Glo - ry to God!" let us sing out! Bend - ing low to the Child



To re - claim us with His love: Christ the Son of God!
By the proph - e - cies of old: Christ the Son of God!
But the manger holds the Light: Christ the Son of God!
And sweet myrrh which thus de - clare: Christ the Son of God!
Born of Vir - gin un - de - filed: Christ the Son of God!

“Little Spider”

A Ukrainian Nativity Story



Once upon a time, a poor mother and her children, two little girls and two little boys, were suffering greatly in the cold and hungry winter. The children’s father was in the army, off to the wars—always there were wars! And the poor family at home had so little! Only a little wheat, a few poppyseeds, and the smallest spoonful of honey to make kutia for the Holy Supper. Only one small fish from the market. Only one beet and one potato and one dried parsley root from the garden for borsch. Only two slices of dried apple to cook and not even a pinch of spice for flavor. But the mother did the best she could, and although there was so little, it was prepared with the greatest love. The daughters spread the white tablecloth, and the sons found a small—a very small—tree, and brought it home. It stood in the corner by the cupboard, but the family had no decorations, not even a scrap of paper to cut links for a paper chain.

And so the family ate their scanty Holy Supper, and said their prayers before the icon of the Blessed Mother of God, thanking God and for what they had, and asking for their father’s safe return. And with a last, sad glance at the bare little tree, the family went to bed.

From the top of the cupboard, the family’s little spider looked down at the poor thin branches of the little tree. “How sad!” thought the little spider. “This family, that I love so much, that has never tried to make me leave my comfortable warm corner or disturbed my web, has so little. What can I do to bring them a little happiness?” The spider let herself down by a silken thread from the top of the cupboard to the top of the little tree. And she began to spin. She spun silken threads all the night long, working by the moonlight that came through the uncurtained windows.

When the children woke in the morning, the sun, just peeping in from the East, enlightened the tree covered now with the most delicate, delightful tracery of stars, and angels, and snowflakes, all made from the spider’s silk! “Mama!” called the children, “see how beautiful the spider has made our tree!” The little spider rested on the very top of the tree, delighting in her work and in the children’s joy.

Before the children had even seen all of the spider’s work, a loud—and beloved—voice sounded at the door. “Tato!” cried the children. “Daddy!” Their father stooped to come in the doorway, brushed the snow from his shoulders, and dropped his heavy knapsack on the table. “The war is over,” he said, “and I have traveled all the night long to see you, my family, and bring you these gifts.” He opened the knapsack and brought out sausages and apples and pastries flavored with almonds, two dolls for the girls, and two small pocketknives for the boys, and for his wife a set of earrings with garnet beads. “From Kiev,” he said to her, and she smiled and put them on.

From that very hour, the family’s fortunes changed. They suffered want and loneliness no more, but had enough for themselves and to share. And always they honored and loved their spider who had decorated their tree and brought them joy.

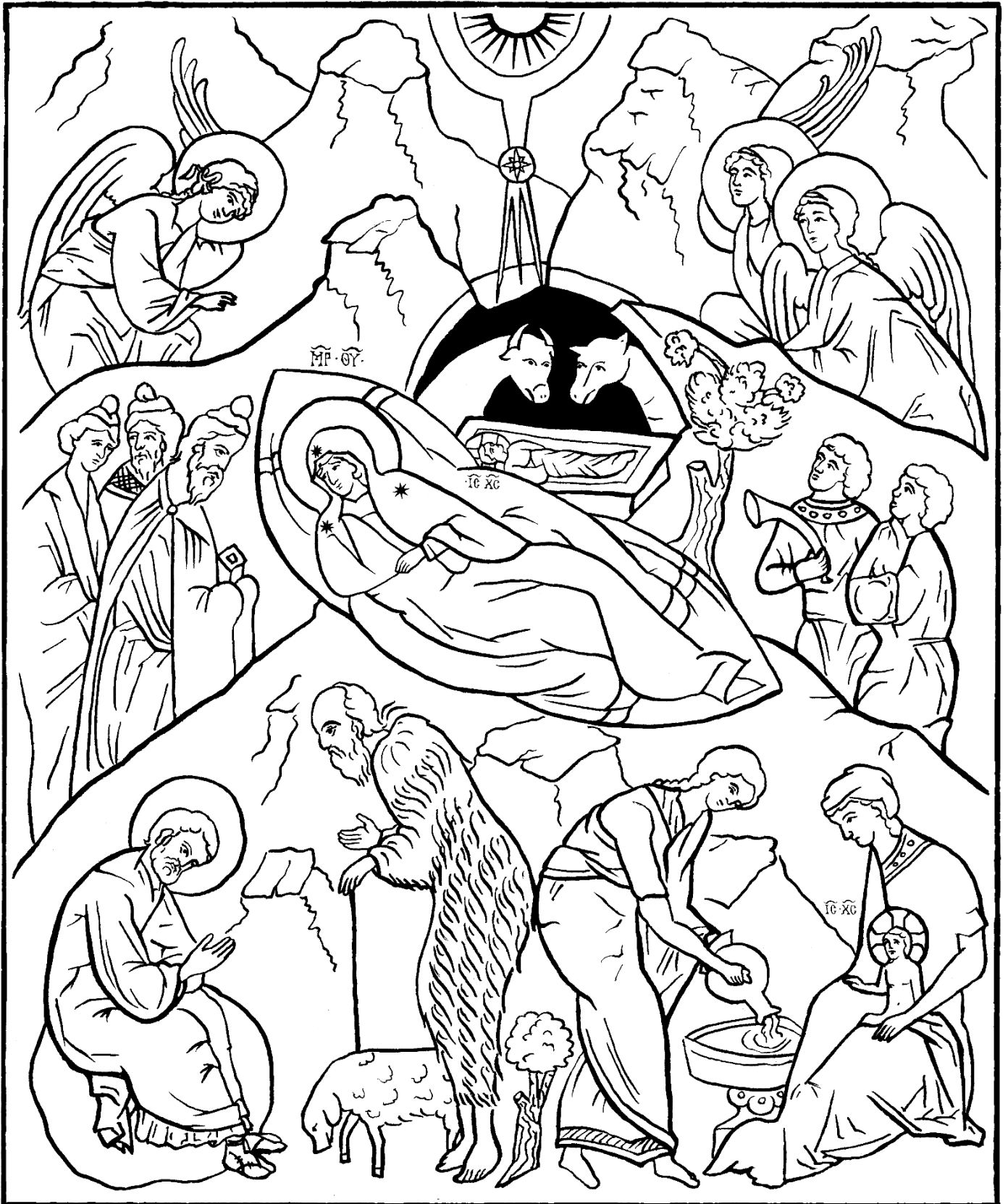
And that is why, to this day, Ukrainians often decorate their trees with little spiders and their webs!

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Icon of St. Nicholas



Icon of the Nativity of Christ



Icon of the Theophany



Icon of the Meeting of the Lord

