

The Return to Tradition

# The Calendar in the Greek Orthodox Church

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## *I. Introduction*

The calendar has always been an important part of Christian worship. Partially inherited from Judaism, religious holidays come from significant events in the religion so that it's believers will remember it in a more immanent way. Like much of Orthodoxy, the calendar heavily uses mysticism; in the same way Icons bring us closer to saints, celebrations and fasting in the calendar bring us closer to those historical events.

## II. *Examples of Fasts and Celebrations*

### a. *Weekly Celebrations*

An obvious celebration is the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, written by St. John Chrysostom, it is celebrated every Sunday to remember Christ's resurrection through the mystery of the Eucharist. The significance of doing so on a Sunday specifically is obviously because Christ rose from the dead on a Sunday. A logical following from this is that we must fast before it (as one must fast before a feast), so we fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, the days of Christ's betrayal and crucifixion. We remember the wrong done to the perfect one, the Son of God in this way, as we must share in his cup of suffering, but also participate in his feast of victory in the Eucharist on Sunday.

### b. *Yearly Celebrations*

There are no monthly celebrations, but there are celebrations every year. The ones in common with most Christians being the Feast of The Nativity of Christ and The Feast of The Great and Holy Pascha. Of course, most modern protestants calling them Christmas and Easter. These also have fasts before them, being 40 days long, Christians are not permitted to consume meat, dairy or eggs. As I write this I have held strictly to this fast for 37 days and am quite frankly looking forward to the Feast of The Nativity of Christ, but at the same time have grown more aware of Christ's coming through it.

A few other celebrations include the feasts of the various saints like Saint John Chrysostom and even a few for Saint Mary. Since tradition is an integral part in the Christian theology and daily walk Orthodoxy wants to celebrate our history as much as it can when appropriate.

### *III. Reform in the Christian Calendar*

In the start of Christianity, the Feast of The Nativity of Our Lord was on the 6<sup>th</sup> January, and to this day is our best guess as to when it happened due to the nature of oral traditions and their reliability. This changed to the now widely used 25<sup>th</sup> December, when Constantine changed it due to him being a pagan. He believed in and worshipped the sun god alongside being a Christian, which was very problematic in the church, but he bought their favour by giving them lots of money and favouring them a lot. The 25<sup>th</sup> December was significant to the pagan religion as it is the first new moon after the winter solstice. The origin of the new date for the celebration caused problems in the more devout or less privileged parts of the church, the Russian church celebrate on the 6<sup>th</sup> January at present.

Some of the Russian church wanted to reform the calendar to a more scientifically accurate and more religiously accurate. However, there was problems with the concept of taking on a new calendar due to problems of unity with the current church. Ultimately due to communication issues the proposal was dropped, so the Russian Church still use the Gregorian calendar.

### *IV. Conclusion*

In my opinion, from the origin of what is now called the new calendar is illegitimate, Orthodoxy being the very traditional, unchanging entity that it is, uninfluenced by paganism and secularism, it is only natural such a calendar would require reformation. However, this would highlight and accentuate the split between Orthodoxy and other Christians and even society at large. I think at this time it is better that we stick to tradition over fitting in in order to demonstrate the necessity for such traditions.