

For the Orthodox Family...

What Makes an Orthodox Home?

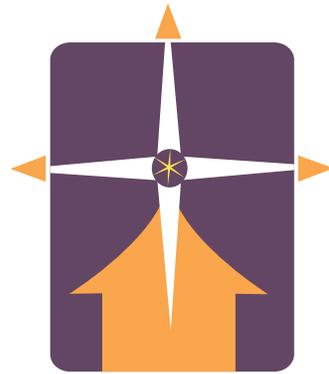
In our lives we have all had the opportunity to visit the homes of friends, family or even co-workers. Although every home reflects the unique culture and personality of the people living in it, there are common elements in all homes - a place to sleep, a place to eat and a place to wash up.

by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M. Div.

Yet even these leave much room for individual expression. As Orthodox Christians, our homes are unique to our own family make up and culture, but whether we are single, married, widowed, divorced or empty nesters, there should be certain things we hold in common in our homes.

St. Paul recognizes the "church of the home" or the *"kat'oikon ekklesia"* as being a critical piece in the life of a Christian. How do we make our home a central part of our Orthodox Christian living? What are the elements that make our homes Orthodox Homes? Where do we begin? It begins with a commitment to center our lives on Jesus Christ and His Church. If the commitment is being made now, then we will gradually begin to refocus our lives on Christ each and every day.

What is important is our choice to know Christ. To know the eternal God, we need to worship, pray, and live a life that offers the fruit of our Christian commitment, regardless of our level of spiritual development. A key element is education, both personal and through group instruction. Our baptism was the beginning of our journey with Christ. On that day, we became members of the Body of Christ and were chrismated to ig-



KAT'OIKON EKKΛHΣΙΑ
Family as Church

nite our Spiritual growth. Even the Saints experienced a spiritual journey and grew in faith and love. Thus the more we experience God, the more we learn about Him and His plan for our salvation. The more we seek to live a godly life, the more our Homes are transformed as well.

It is critical that the rhythm of an Orthodox home be centered on the Liturgical Life of the Church. Everything else, even the extra-curricular activities, should revolve around this priority.

Although this may seem like a radical concept by our society's standards, the Martyrs of the 1st - 3rd centuries, the Neo-Martyrs during the Ottoman occupation, and the Orthodox Christians forbidden to worship for 70 years in

the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia would disagree. In each case, those in political power planned to eradicate Christianity, and in each case, they failed. Today we are free to worship, our children can freely participate in youth activities and Church School, and we are free to express our orthodox faith in our homes. Some of the "Signposts" listed below kept the orthodox christian faith alive during those years of persecution. As we learn more about the orthodox christian church, we can add one or two of the "Signposts" to what we already do - periodically add one or two more.

Talk to your parish priest or spiritual father for guidance. Each day we grow individually and as a family. The lives of our family are spiritually enriched. Then the rhythm of our home takes on more of the attributes of an orthodox home.

Signposts of an Orthodox Home

- Placing Icons in a prayer corner and throughout the house to remind us that God, the Theotokos and the Saints are always with us.
- Placing Icons of the Theotokos at the doorways to remind us to ask for protection for all who leave and give thanks for their safe return.
- Having a daily rule of prayer, both for individuals and the family, no matter how short. Using the Prayer Corner to help keep us focused On Christ.
- Regularly attending the Liturgy and other services of the Church.
- Owning and using prayer books and Service books for Liturgy, Holy Week, and other services.
- Reading Scriptures on a regular basis, individually and as a family, even if for just 15 minutes a day.

Begin with the weekly Sunday Epistle

and Gospel readings.

• Reading the Lives of the Saints who are heroes, models, and guides for our Spiritual life. Go to www.goarch.org and www.abbamoses.com to find specific saints.

• Maintaining the Wednesday and Friday fasts throughout the year (Jesus was betrayed on Wednesday & died on Friday) and the 4 Lenten Fasts as best we can.

• Celebrating the Major Feast & Saints Days by attending services whenever possible, and making the Feast Day a special day in our home.

• Maintaining cultural foods and religious celebrations. In many ways culture assists in transmitting the faith. Regardless of what our family's cultural background, aspects of it relate to how religious holidays are celebrated.

• Having the home blessed each year. The blessings of the church come to our homes with the water of Theophany.

• Incensing the home, at least on Saturdays, as part of the preparation for Sunday's Liturgy.

• Celebrating patron saint's or name days. (See the October issue of the *Orthodox Observer*.)

• Preparing *koliva* (boiled wheat) for memorials and Saturday of the soul liturgies.

• Preparing *prosporo* for the Liturgy.

• Offering *prosporo*, wine and oil to the church and to our monasteries.

• Passing on "faith stories" and the "Stories of our forbearers." Ask, "Where did we come from? How did our family get to America?"

• Carefully choosing godparents who will offer their spiritual gifts and guidance to our children.

• Supporting the church with our time, talent and treasure.

• Supporting the parish's education ministry for children and adults.

• Generously giving to charities and those in need.

• Making sure that the children regularly attend church school, parish youth events, and metropolis events.

• Offering christian hospitality to new parishioners, visitors and college students.

• Visiting our monasteries, our spiritual oases, and getting to know the monastics.

• Living a balanced life, which changes at different stages of our lives.

• Living within our means and being content with what God has given us.

Meshel-Onest is one of the first women graduates of HC School of Theology.



Preparing for Our Lord's Nativity



For the first four centuries of Christian history the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord was not a separate Church feast.

It was celebrated with Epiphany in one great feast of God's appearance on earth in the form of the human Messiah of Israel.

The celebration of the Nativity began to be celebrated on Dec. 25 to offset the pagan festival of the "Invincible Sun" that occurred on that specific day. The Church consciously established it in an attempt to defeat the false religion of the heathens.

The *Troparion* of the Feast calls us to adore Christ, "the True Sun of Righteousness" (Malachi 4:2), who is Himself worshipped by all elements of nature, rather than worshipping the sun and stars. The three Wise Men or Magi (i.e. Sages) were astronomers, people who studied the stars.

Even the Pagan World had a prophecy of the birth of a great king. Saints Gaspar, Melchoir and Balthazar followed the unusual star and became the first non-Jewish people to believe in Christ.

TROPARION/APOLYTIKION
(4th Tone)

Your nativity, O Christ our God, has caused the light of knowledge to rise upon the world. For therein the worshippers of the stars were by a star instructed to worship You, the very Sun of Righteousness, and to know You as Orient from on high. Glory to You, O Lord.

KONTAKION

by *St Romanos the Melodist, 3rd tone*

On this day, the Virgin gives birth unto the super-essential. To the Unapproachable, earth is providing the grotto. Angels sing and with the shepherds offer up glory. Following a star the Magi are still proceeding. He was born for our salvation, a newborn Child, the pre-eternal God.

Translation

by *Hieromonk Seraphim Dedes*

Things To Do as a Family

• Place an Icon of the Nativity of Christ in a special place in your home. Use it with your children to talk about the Nativity Story and each individual or important item in the icon.

For information about the Nativity, go to www.goarch.org/Our Faith/Major Feasts.

• Set up a Nativity scene with your children to keep in their room or the family room. Have a family member tell the Nativity story as the Scene is assembled.

• Use the *Troparion* and *Kontakion* as part of your family's mealtime and bedtime prayers on Christmas Day, and for the eight days following the feast (the Afterfeast).

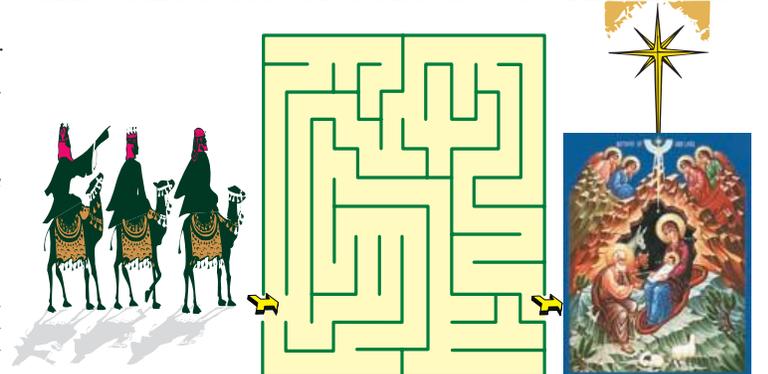
• Read the Nativity Gospel: Luke 2:1-20. Very young children may enjoy a children's version of the Nativity story from a Bible storybook. With younger children, it is best to read the story several times during the week. Consider using the Nativity scene figures to retell the story.

• Attend the Vesper-Liturgy on Christmas Eve or the Liturgy on Christmas Day. This will keep the focus of this Holy Day on Christ's birth and its importance in our life and salvation. Be proactive when making choices.

• Visit a shut-in parishioner or friend. Plan ahead so you can bring *Antidoron*, the Blessed Bread from the Christmas Liturgy and a church bulletin, plus a homemade gift to share along with your Christmas greeting:

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

HELP THE MAGI FIND THEIR WAY TO BETHLEHEM



Start with the Magi and then find the path through the maze that will end at the Cave with the Theotokos, St. Joseph and Jesus.