

THE FASTS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Fasting is a very ancient spiritual exercise encountered from the beginning in the Old Testament (Exodus) and reaffirmed by Jesus Himself when he fasted for forty days in the desert and was tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:2). The goal of fasting, in combination with repentance and prayer, is to help the human person to subjugate their passions and observe the Commands of God.

According to the Holy Canons of the Church we must fast strictly on all Wednesdays and Fridays of the year, except for the days when there is no fasting (see later “Days of no fasting”), and when a feast of the Lord or the Mother of God falls on Wednesday or Friday when we may eat fish.

We fast on Wednesday in commemoration of the betrayal of our Lord Jesus Christ and on Friday in remembrance of His Passion and Crucifixion.

We should also fast during the following periods:

Great Lent (The Great Fast)

During this entire period only on the weekends (Saturdays and Sundays) is oil and wine allowed. Fish is only allowed on the 25th of March (Feast of the Annunciation) and, according to a more recent tradition, on Palm Sunday as well.

Fast of the Holy Apostles

From the Monday after the Sunday of All Saints until the 28th of June oil and wine is allowed on all days, except Wednesdays and Fridays, while fish is allowed only on the weekends.

Fast of the Dormition of the Theotokos

From the 1st to the 14th of August oil and wine is allowed only on the weekends, except August 6 (The transfiguration of the Lord) when fish is allowed.

The Fast of Christmas (Advent)

From the 15th of November to the 17th of December oil and wine is allowed on all days except Wednesdays and Fridays and fish is allowed on Saturdays and Sundays.

From the 17th to the 24th of December oil and wine is allowed only on Saturdays and Sundays. Fish is not allowed.

Other one-day fasts

On the following feast-days a strict fast is observed unless they occur on a Saturday or a Sunday when oil and wine is allowed:

August 29, The Beheading of John the Baptist

September 14, The Elevation of the Holy Cross

January 5, Eve of Theophany: Fast for the reception of the Holy Water of Theophany.

Days of no fasting even on Wednesdays and Fridays

From the 25th of December to the 4th of January

The week following the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee

The week following the Sunday of Easter (Pascha)

The week following the Sunday of Pentecost