

January - February
2025

Why Is There a “Pre” Lent?



It’s a good question! After all, the Paschal fast in the early days was only three days. After a while, a six-day fast was added, though even then it did not have the same connotations as our present-day holy week. By the mid-third century the idea of a forty-day fast was

firmly entrenched, though there was some debate as to whether Saturday and Sunday should be included in the calculation. Eventually the answer was to be determined as “yes” and it seems everything was in place. Would that liturgical history was so straightforward!

The liturgy of the church is not the result of a direct, sequential process; indeed, there were many *typica*, or order of services, that combined into what we know today. For instance, the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee was once part of the Lenten season proper, not before it, and the daily services of the fourth week of lent reflect this by mentioning this parable many times. The Prodigal Son also found its way into the forty day fast as well, appearing the week before that of the Publican and Pharisee.

As time went on, the Sundays of Great Lent were adduced to the great saints of the church, Gregory Palamas and John of the Ladder, each obviously much later than the early centuries of the church. The effect was to take the early

commemorations and place them on the Sundays before the start of the great fast. Yet even the Publican and Pharisee were not settled in the calendar until the twelfth century.



So why the need for a pre-lenten period? The wisdom of the church has declared several reasons. The seriousness of purpose found in Great Lent is such that our fallen nature needs time

to prepare. Especially in modern times (and this was beginning to happen even a thousand years ago) our laxity has increased so much that the burden of a sudden plunge into rather severe fasting can cause anxiety and floundering in our efforts. We need time to prepare. Slowly introducing us to the fast proves a more efficient and regulated approach to the rigors of the forty days. We have a last week for meat products, and a last week for dairy products to work our way into the ascetical mindset of Great Lent.

Spiritually speaking, the movement of some of the previous Lenten commemorations into pre-lent also provides us with an introductory salvo that tells us to begin to “change our minds” to make the most of the holy season. The Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee (the last to be introduced as “pre-lent”) tells us Changing to a righteous course of life, let us emulate

the wisdom of the Publican and flee from the hateful conceit of the Pharisee; and so let us attain to life. The following Sunday exhorts us to repentance in action, as we say: *Utterly beside myself, I have clung in madness to the sins suggested to me by the passions. But accept me, O Christ, as the Prodigal.*

During the next week we ascend mentally and physically by saying goodbye to meat products, and then entering into spiritual sobriety by reflecting on the Great and Last Judgment of Christ:

Enter not into judgment with me, bringing before me the things I should have done, examining my words and correcting my impulses. But in Thy mercy overlook my sins and save me, O Lord almighty. We then spend our last week with dairy products, and reflecting on our fallen state, we place ourselves in the shoes of Adam cast out of Paradise: O ranks of angels, O beauty of Paradise and all the glory of the garden: weep for me, for in my misery I was led astray and rebelled against God.

On this same day of expulsion from Paradise we also ask forgiveness of one another, the key that unlocks the gift of grace to enable us to once again be worthy of the heavenly kingdom. We finish this remarkable pre-lenten period on a note of light, hope, and anticipation:

Thy grace has shown forth, O Lord. It has shown forth and given light to our souls. Behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the season of repentance. Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, that having sailed across the great sea of the Fast, we may reach the third day Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls.

The pre-lenten period is a time of preparation and reflection, a strategy session for the spiritual battle to come. For without this effort, this battle, we cannot ascend, we cannot achieve any kind of spiritual growth toward God. The powers of darkness are also preparing, ready to devour whom they may; but they find themselves hopelessly outgunned, and will take from us only that which we allow them to have. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Use this time to actively become that which you already proclaim to be—Orthodox Christians! This is a time of great grace and beauty, the time of saints, our common calling.

You will fall—get back up. This is the path of Christian sanctity. ❖

Fr. Steven



Snakes in a Church!

Robert Klein

If you suffer from ophidiophobia, there is one place of pilgrimage and tourism in the Mediterranean that you may not want to visit in late summer.



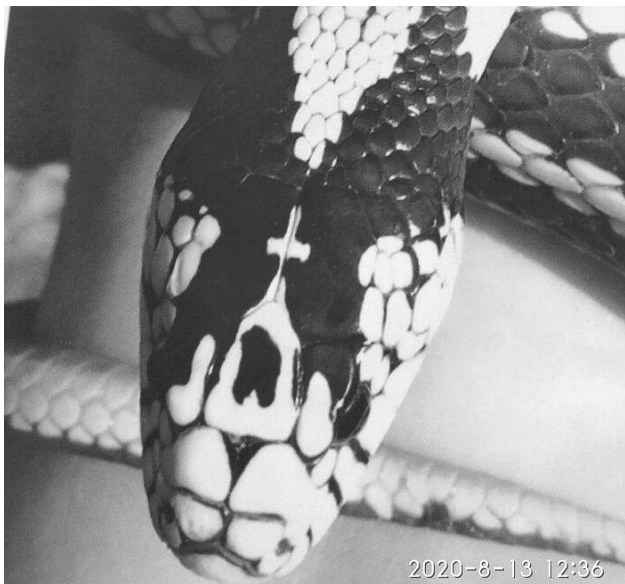
Ophidiophobia is the extreme fear of snakes, and snakes are the stars of an annual miracle that takes place in the villages of Markopoulo and Agrinia every August on the western Greek Ionian island of Kefalonia (*sometimes spelled Cephalonia*).

Each year, between the feast days of the Transfiguration of the Lord and the Dormition of the Theotokas, the two villages are overrun with an infestation of snakes. The snakes seem especially attracted to village chapels dedicated to the Dormition, swarming the churches and slithering across their icons. They are thus known as *The Snakes of the Panagia* (The Snakes of the Virgin Mary),

and thousands of pilgrims come to the island to witness their appearance.



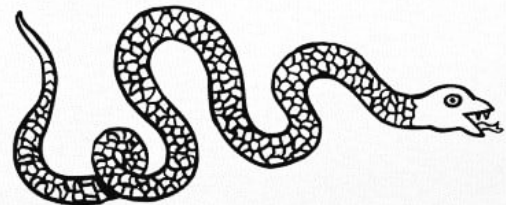
The snakes are harmless and unafraid of people. They are described as being velvety to the touch, either gray or black-and-white in color, and no more than three feet in length. The mark of the Cross can be seen on their heads, and their tongues are said to also be in the form of the Cross. Some of the faithful claim to have been healed of illnesses by touching the snakes.



In addition, the locals allege that the snakes are warm-blooded, an assertion which scientists would contest, because that would make them the only reptiles

in existence that are not cold-blooded. Scientists might also claim that the churches are somehow located on a natural migration route of the snakes.

According to legend, there was a monastery of nuns located on a mountain top overlooking the sea. In the 11th century (some accounts claim the 18th century), pirates landed on the island and began to ascend the mountain so as to raid the monastery. The nuns prayed for the intercession of the Theotokas, and in answer to their prayers, a plague of snakes appeared and drove the pirates away in a panic.



DANGER NOODLE

The snakes have been visiting every year since the pirate raid. As mysteriously as they appear around the feast day of the Transfiguration, they just as mysteriously disappear after the feast day of the Dormition.

Locals claim it is an ill omen if the snakes don't appear. This has happened twice in modern times, once in 1940, just before the island was occupied by the Axis in World War II, and once in 1953, when the island was devastated by a magnitude 6.8 earthquake. Although snakes in Christian symbolism are emblematic of evil, in ancient Greek

mythology they represent healing and medicinal qualities. In the same way, the island of Kefalonia has connections to both the Christian and pagan worlds – a minority of historians claim that Kefalonia and not Malta was the island upon which St. Paul was shipwrecked in The Acts of the Apostles, while a different minority claim the island was the site of Ithaca in Homer’s Odyssey.



Kefalonia has at least two other cultural/literary bragging rights: A Greek researcher has suggested that the island is the site of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, while more recently, Louis de Bernieres’s novel *Captain Corelli’s Violin* is set on the island.

So, if you are interested in witnessing a modern-day miracle, Kefalonia in August may be the pilgrimage for you. But if you harbor a fear of snakes, there are other holy sites where you can pray. ❀

Orthodox Traditions: Koliva

Jessica Green



You may have noticed the sweet treat being offered at the conclusion of memorial services of the Eastern Orthodox Church. This sweet dish is known as **Koliva** (also spelled Kollyva.) It is a solemn and symbolic tradition reaching far back into antiquity.

Put simply: it is a dish of boiled wheat berries sweetened with honey and spices; decorated with nuts, dried fruit, candies and powdered sugar. However, Koliva is not merely a food—it is a profound reminder about life, death, and Resurrection

“It is often formed in the shape of a mound to resemble a grave and decorated with candy in the sign of a cross.” (GOARCH.org)

The roots of Koliva stretch back into ancient times, when wheat offerings were made to the gods in the Greek and Roman traditions. Wheat, as the staple of

life, was often associated with the yearly agricultural cycles of death and rebirth. Early Christians, imbued this practice with deeper meaning by connecting it to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

(John 12:24)

Just as wheat is buried and brings forth new life, so too will the faithful who fall asleep in Christ be raised through His Glorious Resurrection.

The Miracle of St. Theodore the Tyro

One of the earliest documented uses of Koliva in the Christian tradition is linked to St. Theodore the Tyro (the Recruit) in the 4th century. According to tradition, during the reign of Emperor Julian the Apostate, an attempt was made to defile the Christian faithful by contaminating all food in the marketplaces. St. Theodore, who was a Roman military recruit that had been martyred for confessing Christ, appeared in a vision to the Patriarch of Constantinople and instructed him to tell the Christians to abstain from the tainted food and instead prepare Koliva from boiled wheat. This event is commemorated annually on the **first Saturday of Great**

Lent, known as the **Saturday of St. Theodore** or **Saturday of Souls**

Today, Koliva is most commonly associated with **Memorial Services or Panikhida** (*The word comes from the Greek word pannychis, which means "vigil" or "all-nighter"*) and is offered for the departed. It is brought to the church by the family of the departed person and later distributed among the faithful who partake of it as a sign of shared prayer and hope in the Resurrection.

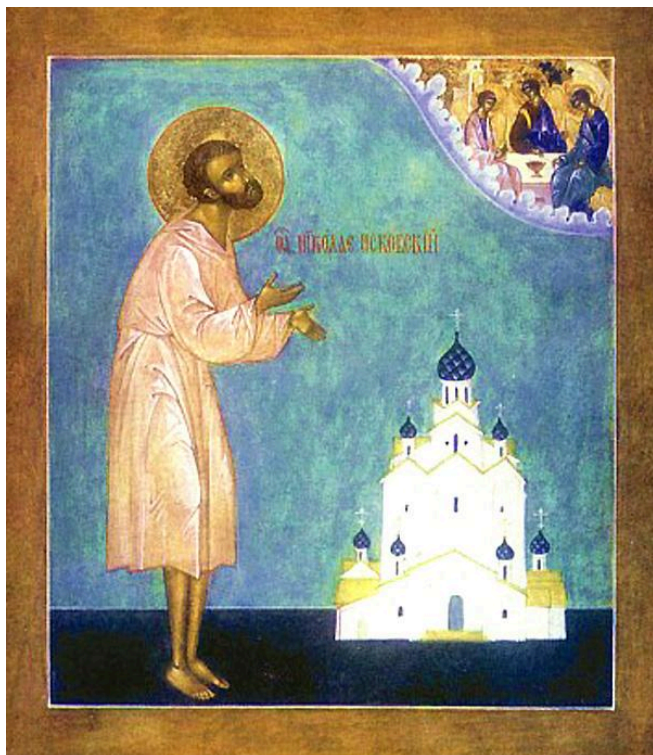
The ingredients themselves hold profound meaning:

- **Wheat** symbolizes the resurrection of the body and eternal life through Christ.
- **Honey or sugar** represents the sweetness of Paradise and the mercy of God.
- **Raisins, nuts, and spices** represent the variety of spiritual gifts and the richness of the Kingdom of Heaven.
- **Powdered or confectioners sugar** represents the purity and brightness of the souls of the departed.

In many Orthodox traditions, the faithful eat the Koliva with the phrase **“Memory Eternal”** (Вечная память, Αἰωνία ἡ μνήμη) proclaiming our faith in the Resurrection and the life of the world to come. **May the memory of our departed loved ones be eternal! ❖**

Blessed Nicholas (Salos) of Pskov the Fool-For-Christ

February 28



Blessed Nicholas of Pskov lived the life of a holy fool for more than three decades. Long before his repose, he acquired the grace of the Holy Spirit and was granted the gifts of wonderworking and of prophecy. During his lifetime, the residents of Pskov called him Mikula [Mikola, Nikola] the Fool, and revered him as a Saint, even calling him Saint Mikula.

In February 1570, after a devastating war against Novgorod, Tsar Ivan the Terrible decided to attack Pskov, suspecting the inhabitants of treason. As the Pskov Chronicle relates,

“the Tsar came ... with great ferocity, like a roaring lion, wanting to tear innocent people apart, and to shed much blood.”

On the first Saturday of Great Lent, the whole city prayed to be delivered from the Tsar’s wrath. Hearing the bell ring for Matins in Pskov, the Tsar’s heart was softened when he read the inscription on the XV century wonderworking Liubyatov Tenderness Icon of the Mother of God (March 19) in the Monastery of Saint Nicholas (the Tsar’s army was at the time). “Be merciful,” he told his soldiers. “Blunt your swords upon the stones, and let there be an end to killing.”

All the inhabitants of Pskov came out upon the streets, and each family knelt at the doors of their houses, holding bread and salt to meet the Tsar. On one of the streets Blessed Nicholas ran toward the Tsar astride a stick as if he were riding a horse, and cried out: *“Ivanushko, Ivanushko, eat our bread and salt, but not the blood of Christians.”*

Blessed Nicholas fell asleep in the Lord on February 28, 1576 and was buried at Holy Trinity Cathedral in the city he had saved. Such honors were granted only to the Pskov Princes, and later on, to Hierarchs. ❖

Read the Full Life of St. Nicholas of Pskov on OCA.org [Blessed Nicholas of Pskov, Fool for Christ](#)

St. James Orthodox Church: How Our Parish Gives Back to the Community



During the Month of February the *St. Maria of Paris Ladies Group* is holding a DONATION DRIVE

We Need: **PEANUT BUTTER, JELLY, and SOUPS**

Donations Collected (Collection Bin located in the **Narthex** of the Church) will be brought our locally sponsored food bank in Gainesville, Georgia



Learn More about [Good Samaritan Food Ministries](http://gsfoodministries.com) on their website at: gsfoodministries.com

AMEN CARE KITS (for the Homeless)



The AMEN (Antiochian Men's Group) Have generously created travel care kits to keep in your car.

(Please Take One or Two!)

In these times of economic hardship we see more and more people who are in desperate need of basic necessities (as well as other forms of assistance) and often in the middle of a crowded rush hour traffic jam. We may only be offered a moment's notice to offer any kind of help at all. And shamefully many of us find ourselves empty handed in an increasingly cashless society.

AMEN Care Kits (which can be kept in your car) are packed with basic necessities, most notably hygiene products, water, food, and socks (which are the most commonly requested item in homeless shelters) and offered to anyone you see who might be in need. AMEN CARE KITS are located in St. Nektarios Hall under the Icon of St. Nektarios. ❀

We Need Volunteers!



Did you know that most of our church community services (such as Coffee Hour) are entirely run by Volunteers?

Have you ever wanted to help out at St. James Orthodox Church? There are so many wonderful ways to get involved!

Coffee Hour (set up, clean up, and bringing food)

AMEN (Antiochian Men's Group) charities

St. Maria of Paris Ladies Group charities

Teen Soyo Fundraisers

Volunteers can Sign-up on the Sheet in St. Nektarios Hall
(or talk directly to a committee head)

★Teamwork Makes the Dream Work★

I WANT YOU

To Return Your Library Books!



St. James Library is Calling Home all checked out books. There are currently over 100 books that need to be returned



Did You Know? that you can Donate to St. James Orthodox Church online via Paypal

Look for the Donate Button:
[St James Orthodox Church.org](https://www.stjamesorthodoxchurch.org)



Kollyva



1. One 2-lb bag of Hard Red Whole Wheat Berries. Place in a large pot and cover with water. Boil until the wheat berries are tender. Drain and let them cool.
2. Soak 1 cup of golden raisins in hot water until plump. Drain and let them cool.
3. Grind fine 2 cups walnuts, almonds and pecans. (You can choose what nuts you want)
4. 1 cup ground graham crackers.
5. Mix all ingredients together. ("Optional": 10oz. Bag of M&M's)
6. Place mixed koliva in a bowl or platter and press into shape. Sprinkle with confectioner's sugar and make a Cross in the center with either candies, jordan almonds, etc.

Place a candle in the koliva.

Order Online: [Organic Whole Hard Red Wheat Berries](#)



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*St. James Orthodox Church belongs to the
Antiochian Orthodox Christian
Archdiocese of North America*

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