

Eastern Orthodox Great Feast Days

Great Feast Days in the Eastern Orthodox church are twelve of the most important days in the Eastern Orthodox liturgical (meaning church calendar) year. While Easter, commonly referred to as Pascha, is considered the most important of all the feast days, all twelve are considered important events throughout the year. While the exact ways these feast days are celebrated varies, attending services on these days is a common practice. Given that Eastern Orthodoxy is practiced throughout the world, there may be other cultural traditions that followers practice.

Employees may choose to request time off or to change their working hours on these days to focus on the day and its spiritual significance, while others may choose to fast or adopt other spiritual practices in preparation for a Feast Day. Great Feast Days may also see employees utilizing Icons (specific images with religious significance) corresponding to that feast day as part of their spiritual practice. This may include displaying them within their personal workspaces. Managers should be mindful of what days Great Feasts occur in preparation for time off requests or schedule changes, dietary considerations, or make accommodations for religious icons and images within the workplace.

Nativity of the Theotokos (Virgin Mary)

The Nativity of the Theotokos, meaning Mother of God and attributed to the Virgin Mary, honors the birth of Mary the mother of Jesus. It is celebrated on **September 8th** of the Gregorian Calendar and **September 21st** of the Julian Calendar. This feast may be celebrated with a Great Vespers service (a special form of worship service) the evening before.

If this feast falls on a Wednesday or Friday on the Gregorian calendar, employees may partake in a fast from meat and food that uses animals or animal parts. This includes products like egg, cheese, oils and wines (which were historically stored in containers made of animal skin).

The Exaltation of the Cross (When St. Helen, mother of Constantine, found the cross Christ died on)

The Exaltation of the Cross celebrates where St. Helen (mother of Emperor Constantine) found and identified the cross Christ was crucified on with the help of Patriarch Macarius. This feast occurs on **September 14th** of the Gregorian Calendar and **September 27th** of the Julian Calendar.

A Great Vesper may be held the evening before the feast, and special services are held on the day of the Feast itself. A fast from meat and animal products occurs on this day, but wine and oils may be consumed.

The Presentation of the Theotokos (When Mary entered the Temple of Jerusalem as a child)

The Presentation of the Theotokos is celebrated on **November 21st** of the Gregorian Calendar and **December 4th** in the Julian Calendar. This day honors when the Virgin Mary was brought to the Temple in Jerusalem by her parents so her life could be dedicated to God; a path the young Mary joyfully accepted as her own.

A Great Vesper may be held the evening before the Feast Day, and a Martins or Orthros service (a morning service) may be held on this Feast Day. Practitioners may request scheduling accommodations or time off to attend services.

The Nativity of Christ (Christmas)

The Nativity of Christ, commonly known as Christmas, is celebrated on **December 25th** of the Gregorian Calendar and **January 7th** of the Julian Calendar. For more information on Christmas, please see Tanenbaum's [Christmas Fact Sheet](#). It is important to note that some Orthodox Christians will celebrate Christmas on December 25th, others may celebrate on January 7th, and some may celebrate on both dates.

Prior to Christmas is a time commonly referred to as Advent. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, this begins on **November 15th** in the Gregorian Calendar, and **November 28th** in the Julian Calendar. Advent is a season of spiritual preparation for the birth of Jesus, and many may choose to fast, adopt additional spiritual practices, or strengthen already existing ones to prepare for the occasion. While how people fast may differ from person to person based on their own practices and bodies, fasting during Advent often asks Eastern Orthodox Christians to refrain from eating animal meat or animal products, with the exception of fish, oil, and wine. However, as Christmas approaches, Eastern Orthodox Christians may refrain from fish, and finally from all meat, animal products, wine, and oil.

The Epiphany (Baptism of Christ)

The Epiphany, also known as The Theophany, celebrates when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. This feast is celebrated on **January 6th** in the Julian Calendar and **January 19th** in the Gregorian Calendar.

A special service to bless the waters may be held on the day before or the day of the feast, or potentially on both the day before and day of depending on the community. Practitioners may request scheduling accommodations or time off to attend services.

Presentation of Christ in the Temple (when Jesus was presented at the Temple and dedicated to God)

On **February 2nd** of the Julian Calendar and **February 15th** in the Gregorian Calendar is The Presentation of Christ at the Temple, or the Meeting of the Lord. This Feast commemorates when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple to be dedicated to God.

A Great Vesper service may be held the evening before this feast, and special services may be held the day of the feast. Practitioners may request scheduling accommodations or time off to attend services.

The Annunciation (When Gabriel announced the coming of Jesus to Mary)

The Feast of the Annunciation celebrates when Mary was told by the archangel Gabriel that she would give birth to Jesus. This Feast is celebrated on **March 25th** in the Gregorian Calendar, and **March 7th** in the Julian Calendar.

A Great Vesper service may be held the evening before this feast, and special services the day of

the feast. Practitioners may request scheduling accommodations or time off to attend services. During this Feast Day, Eastern Orthodox Christians may also choose to refrain from consuming all meat except fish and all animal products excluding wine and oils.

March 25th is also Greek Independence day, so some Greek Orthodox Christians may be celebrating this day as a national holiday. Businesses may be closed that day.

The Entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday)

The Entry Into Jerusalem, also called Palm Sunday, begins Holy Week (the week before Easter/Pascha) by commemorate Jesus riding into Jerusalem. During this special Sunday service, palm fronds are often blessed and distributed to people in attendance to honor the scene of Jesus being ushered into Jerusalem by people waving and laying palm fronds in welcome at his feet.

A Great Vesper service is also held the evening before Palm Sunday, and special services are held on the feast day. Practitioners may request scheduling accommodations or time off to attend services.

Great and Holy Pascha, Lent, and Holy Week

Pascha, also referred to as Easter, is a major event in the Orthodox year and celebrates Jesus' resurrection after dying on the cross. For more information on Great and Holy Pascha, please see our [Easter Factsheet](#).

Prior to Pascha are several periods of spiritual preparation. The week before Pascha is referred to as Holy Week and journeys through the events leading up to Jesus' Resurrection. Special services may be held throughout Holy Week, and managers should be aware and prepared for scheduling accommodations for practitioners to attend these services.

Forty seven days before Pascha is a period known as Great Lent in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Great Let is a period of spiritual preparation for Pascha, and for many involves fasting throughout those forty days. What foods are being fasted from may change depending on the day according to tradition and the liturgical calendar.

Three weeks before Great Lent is a period of preparation sometimes called Pre-Lent. Fasting may be practiced during this time, and people may either adjust current spiritual practices or adopt new ones throughout this time period of Pre-Lent, Great Lent, and Holy Week in preparation of Pascha.

The Ascension of Christ

The feast of the Ascension of Christ celebrates Jesus' ascension to heaven after being resurrected on earth. This feast occurs forty days after Easter in the Orthodox Calendar, so this year it takes place on **May 16th** of the Gregorian Calendar, and **May 29th** of the Julian Calendar.

A Great Vespers service may be held the evening before, with a morning service on the day called a Matins service, as well as a service in the evening. Practitioners may request accommodations or time off to attend one or multiple of these services.

Pentecost

Pentecost celebrates when the Holy Spirit (one of the parts of the Holy Trinity in Christian theology) descended upon Jesus' disciples, also called the Apostles, to go out and establish The Church. This feast is celebrated fifty days after Pascha. This year, that corresponds to **May 26th** of the Gregorian Calendar, and **June 8th** of the Julian Calendar.

A Great Vespers service may be held the evening before, and a Matins service may be held the morning of. Practitioners may ask for accommodations or time off to attend services.

The Transfiguration of Jesus

The feast of the Transfiguration celebrates Jesus appearing in his divine form before a few of his apostles. This feast occurs on **August 6th** in the Gregorian Calendar and **August 19th** in the Julian Calendar.

A Great Vespers service is held the evening before, and a Matins service is held the morning of. Practitioners may ask for accommodations or time off to attend services.

The Dormition of the Theotokos (The day the Virgin Mary was taken up into Heaven)

The Feast of the Dormition celebrates when the Virgin Mary was taken up into Heaven. This feast is celebrated on **August 15th** of the Gregorian Calendar, and **August 28th** of the Julian Calendar.

To prepare for this feast, practitioners may fast from all meats, animal products, wine, and oils during the weekdays, and fast from meat and animal products during weekends. This fast may start on **August 1st** of the Gregorian Calendar, **August 14th** of the Julian Calendar, and last until the feast day.

A Great Vesper service may be held the evening before, with a Matins service and Divine Liturgy (a form of worship service) the morning of. Practitioners may request time off or scheduling accommodations to attend one or multiple services for the feast.

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