

Yesterday, This is How Many Christians Began Preparing for Christmas

In the media and conversation, I'm sure you've already endured the now-tedious discussions about the "War on Christmas" and about being exposed to holiday decorations and music too early.

What you probably didn't hear about is that yesterday, many Christians began quietly preparing for Christmas in their own way – by fasting.

Eastern Christians – both Orthodox and Catholic – prepare for Christmas by undertaking a 40-day fast known as the "Nativity Fast" or "Philip's Fast" (because it begins on November 15, the day after the feast of St. Philip the Apostle).

It is not as strict as the 40-day fast before Easter (a.k.a. Pascha), known as "Great Lent," though it appears very strict to many of us today. According to the [guidelines of the fast](#), one is supposed to abstain from meat, dairy, fish, wine, and oil on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and during the last few days before Christmas. Wine and oil are allowed on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and fish, wine, and oil are allowed on Saturdays and Sundays.

The purpose of the fast is to create space in one's mind and heart to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ and to look forward to his Second Coming. It is a time to become more detached from worldly cares (such as food) in order to become more attached to the otherworldly.

The famous British convert John Henry Newman [said](#) that "None rejoice in Easter less than those who have not grieved in Lent." The same might be said of Christmas and the period preceding it. I don't know about you, but many years, by the

time December 25 arrives, I am so tired of all the month's parties and food that I have a difficult time celebrating Christmas Day itself.

Do you think there's something to be said for going without before partaking of the abundance of celebratory days? Is there wisdom in fasting before feasting?