

## **THE NEW LITURGICAL YEAR**

An integral part of our Church and one of its most beautiful expressions is the liturgical year. It resembles a grand panorama in which we find painted in radiant and vivid colors the whole history of man's redemption. During the liturgical year, we have the opportunity to meditate upon, and participate in, the glorious mysteries and events in the life of Jesus Christ. The liturgical year places before us the heroic deeds and virtues of our venerated saints and martyrs, giving us the opportunity to share in their spiritual joy, along with opportunity of days of fasting and penance.

### **WHAT IS THE LITURGICAL YEAR?**

In the Eastern Church, the liturgical calendar differs from the civil calendar, in that it does not begin the new year with January 1st, as does the civil year, but it begins on the September 1st, which on the Julian calendar corresponds with September 14th. Accordingly, the entire cycle of our Church year begins with the first day of the month of September and does not end until the last day of August the following year.

### **WHAT IS MEANT BY THE WORD INDICTION?**

The word "indiction" comes from the Latin word *indictio*, which means "institution, proclamation, appeal, announcement." The "indiction" was the edict by the Roman emperors used to determine the land tax throughout the Roman Empire. Such edicts began to appear during the

reign of Diocletian in the year 297 AD, at first, issued every five years, and later every 15 years. Gradually the word *indiction* came to denote not only an imperial proclamation, but also a 15 year cycle, as well as the first day of that cycle. Originally, the *indictions* were used exclusively for fiscal and tax purposes; eventually, however, they also were applied in determining the various states of civil life. The initial application of the *indiction* was September 23rd which coincided with the birthday of Caesar Augustus was born, but was changed to September 1st by Constantine the Great.

### **THE ADOPTION OF THE INDICTION AS THE NEW LITURGICAL YEAR**

In the year 325AD, the fathers of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea adopted the first day of September as the opening of the new church year, and this day has been observed in the Eastern Orthodox Church until the present time. The Latin Church, on the other hand, opens its liturgical year on the first day of Advent, i.e. the preparation for Christmas.

### **THE INDICTION AS A CHURCH FEAST**

Once established as the beginning of the liturgical year, September 1st assumed a religious character and became a feast of the church, a day which had its own special liturgical service. On this day, our Church commemorates the day on which Christ entered the synagogue in Nazareth and read from the scrolls the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me ...to proclaim the

Lord's year of favor" (Luke 4: 18-19). Although we have no reliable evidence as to when the beginning of the indiction became a feast of the Church, we do know that this was already in practice by the eighth century.

#### THE CHARACTER AND CONTENT OF THE LITURGICAL YEAR

The liturgical year is arranged in such a way that its central place is occupied by our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. Around Him are gathered the Mother of God and all the saints and angels. The Church has always been aware that She must celebrate this saving work of our Savior Jesus Christ by remembering Him on certain days throughout the year. The Church keeps alive the memory of His Resurrection every week on Sundays, as well celebrating it in a special way once a year, together with his blessed passion, on the most holy day of Pascha. Within the annual cycle, the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from his Incarnation in the womb of the Most Holy Birthgiver of God and Ever Virgin Mary until His Ascension into heaven, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of His return in glory.

The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, who occupies the most prominent place after Christ, also figures large in the liturgical year, which is evidenced by the various feasts celebrated in her honor. The Holy Church venerates her with a special love, for she is joined in an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son. In her, the Church joyfully contemplates the faultless Image of Christian life.

Surrounding our Lord Jesus Christ and his Most Holy Mother, we see the grand choir of the Church triumphant in heaven; that is, all the saints of the Old and New Testaments. This is evident in the various feast days devoted to the memory of the Martyrs and the Saints. Every day of the year is dedicated to one or more of the Saints. There are also five special Memorial Saturdays on which the Church offers prayers and special memorial services for the faithful departed, when we are encouraged to pray for our loved ones who have gone before us in the hope of the Resurrection. However, we can pray for our departed loved ones on any day of the year.

Finally, the Church also dedicates special times during the year when we are asked to engage in works of prayer, fasting and penance in order to develop a deeper spiritual life. These occasions would be the penitential times of Great Lent, the Christmas Fast, the Dormition Fast, and the Apostles' Fast.

In short, through the cycle of the liturgical year, with its various seasons and feasts, and in accord with Her traditional discipline, Holy Mother Church completes the formation of Her faithful children defining practices for soul and body, through instruction, prayer, and works of penance and mercy.