

How to Avoid Christmas Depression

By [Lisa C. DeLuca](#)

The ancient, Orthodox Christian religion celebrates the Christmas holiday in a way that helps people cope with depression and experience the true joy of Christmas.



Much of the post-holiday blues and Christmas depression that occur in the United States may have to do with the way Christmas is celebrated in the U.S.

People often feel deprived and lonely, in stark contrast to all of the pre-Christmas cheer. Others feel let down and weighed down by food and debt after the Christmas holiday. Changing the way the holiday is celebrated can yield completely different results.

An Orthodox Christmas Can be a Remedy for Christmas Depression and Holiday Blues

"The birth of Christ brought joy and hope to those who had been in darkness and the way the Orthodox celebrate Christmas is designed to let

people feel that hope again," states Father Jonathan Ivanoff, an Orthodox Christian Priest and Pastor of St. John the Theologian Orthodox Church in Shirley, New York.

The Orthodox Church (known by some in the west as "Eastern Orthodox") teaches that Advent represents the time before Christ, when God's people were lost and disconnected from God. Instead of "pre-celebrating" the Christmas holiday during Advent, Orthodox Christians participate in a solemn, six-

week Nativity fast during this time. It is a spiritual practice that helps people grieve their losses, endure their sadness, feed their souls, and, ultimately, experience joy on Christmas day.

The Orthodox Christmas Nativity Fast Can Help Those Who Struggle with Depression

During the fast, all meat, cheese, eggs, fish and wine are avoided on most days and a primarily vegetarian diet is kept. The faithful do not get caught up in the “letter of the law” and do not freak out if they have to have a piece of meat in between. There is no eternal damnation involved. The point is to try to re-create, metaphorically, the famine that existed for peoples’ souls before they knew the Savior.

In place of food, drink and partying during Advent, the faithful are asked to nourish their souls with prayer, communion with their fellow parishioners, and drawing closer to God. For those who are struggling with personal problems, this period can give them a spiritual boost. This helps Orthodox Christians prepare to receive the joy that Christmas day brings.

According to Ivanoff, Christmas parties are put off until Christmas day. When Christmas comes it is a time of joy, not blues or post-holiday let down, and the faithful are prepared to receive that joy. In fact, the Orthodox continue to celebrate for 10 days after Christmas.

The Orthodox Nativity Fast Helps People Transcend Worldly Problems

The Orthodox Nativity fast helps people tame their worldly appetites. It is an exercise in being able to transcend the body and not be ruled by impulses. The Orthodox church considers fasting a spiritual benefit, that can help people get through tough times. It helps people experience existence on a more spiritual plane, and teaches that regardless of their worldly limitations, people have spiritual substance that can sustain them in difficult times.

In addition to increased prayer, almsgiving is expected to increase during the Nativity fast. This means, specifically, giving money to relieve poverty and material need. Doing this offers a counterbalance to people’s urges to overspend and over-indulge in material goods during Christmas. It brings the faithful in contact with others who are far worse off financially, quelling feelings of personal deprivation that tend to arise in this culture where so many have so much.

The Orthodox Christmas Nativity Fast Helps People Feed their Souls

These acts of almsgiving restore Orthodox Christian's connection with humanity. They remind the faithful of Jesus’ Great Commandment to love one another, which is the primary act Christians are charged with. It is a reminder that life has more meaning than the consumption of material goods. It helps Orthodox Christians get out of the rut of day to day life and put their spirituality first.

The Orthodox Nativity Fast Provides Physical, Spiritual and Emotional Benefits During the Christmas Holiday

If people stick to the fast, they will find themselves in a type of a famine. They may feel more solemn. They certainly will not feel weighed down by food and they may have even shed excess pounds. They

will feel much more in control of themselves and their appetites. Through this, and prayer and almsgiving they may feel closer to God - certainly this is the main goal. They may feel more love and compassion towards self and others.

Orthodox Christmas is the Opposite of Depression

The faithful are prepared to experience true joy on the Christmas Day. Toward the end of the fast, people feel like they have accomplished something difficult. On Christmas day they break the fast, exit the period of darkness and celebrate the light. The feast is that much sweeter because of the famine which preceded it.

Because they have done the work of nourishing the soul they are now free to indulge in the God-given blessings of food, drink, material things, family, friends and fun. Orthodox Christians believe that God wants people to be joyful.

Even those who are lonely or poor, having had their souls filled, may see a path to a more satisfying life, or a way to comfort their pain and experience joy in small things after breaking the fast.

Orthodox Christmas Trees

The Orthodox faithful tend to put up their Christmas trees later – some don't do it until Christmas Eve – and to keep them up longer. Because the faithful took time to connect with God and humanity during Advent, these connections sustain them, even as the joy of new "toys" wears off and family and friends go home. For the Orthodox faithful, the hard work is behind them and the joy of Christmas lifts them up.

And just as a little baby in a manger offered hope to the world, Christians are called to follow in His footsteps and to be the light of the world. No person is too faulted or too ordinary to make a difference, according to Orthodox teaching. Each person is called by God to do good in the world.