

The Nativity Icon Explained

"Christ is Born, Glorify Him!" Is something we will be hearing and announcing many times this Advent season. The Icon of The Nativity of Our Lord is one which truly announces this phrase triumphantly!

Often the Icon of Christ's Nativity has a brilliant fully gilded background with many notable figures shining brightly in Technicolor atop it. At the center of this Icon we see Christ and the Theotokos resting while the many other players act around them as they observe in all their Wisdom and Holiness. Christ is looking upward towards the star which is guiding the three Magi and the shepherds towards him. The Theotokos is looking towards the Shepherd as if she has already begun accepting her role as the Holy Spiritual Mother of us all.

At the bottom of the image we see St. Joseph who has left the cave where Christ and his Betrothed lay, as he is filled with doubts. In this particular example we see St. Joseph talking to a young man who has accompanied the midwife and another woman named Salome. These women came to wash and tend to Christ, as he was truly born human. Salome is the mother of two apostles John and James. Near these women an old man approaches with his sights on St. Joseph (in many images this old man is already talking to St. Joseph). This man is Satan in disguise on a mission to tempt the Saint into leaving Christ and the Theotokos, as we all know he does not succeed. The other figures in the Nativity are the three Magi, also known as the Wise men who are following the Star but have not yet arrived to Christ. At the very top of this Nativity scene are angels, some who are singing the Praises of the Birth of our Saviour, and one who is seen announcing the Birth of Christ to the Shepherd.

Aside from all the important players in the Nativity scene we have many important symbols. Some include the trees which point to the Christ's human lineage also known as the 'Jesse Tree' or the 'Root of Jesse', the ox and the donkey of which are another Biblical reference, and even the jagged rocks of the cave which depict the harsh world Christ was born in. There is a wealth of symbolism in this Icon and I encourage you to meditate upon it and allow its mysteries to be revealed to you; After all, Icon is the written Gospel. - Written By Lillian Baron



NATIVITY NOVGOROD ICON
IN PROSOPON SCHOOL STYLE
WRITTEN BY TETYANA ANA GUBENKO

- WHO IS THE "CREEPY" GUY NEXT TO ST. JOSEPH?
Satan disguised as an old man trying to tempt him.
- WHY DO ANGELS WEAR HEADBANDS?
They are actually a part of their "antenna" used to hear God.
- WHAT ARE THE TWO ANIMALS IN THE CAVE?
One is an Ox and one is a donkey from *Isaiah 1:3*.
- WHAT IS THE TREE GROWING IN THE BACKGROUND?
The Jesse Tree from *Isaiah 11:1-2*.
- WHO ARE THE WOMEN?
There is a midwife and one named Salome the mother of two apostles.
They testify to Christ's Human birth.
- WHAT'S WITH THE STRANGE LOOKING ROCKS?
These rocks are jagged to reflect the cruel world Christ was born into.



NATIVITY FAQ

HOLY SUPPER MATCHING GAME

MATCH EACH SYMBOL ON THE LEFT WITH THE EXPLANATION ON THE RIGHT.



LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW
FOR THE FIRST STAR



WHITE TABLECLOTH
ON THE TABLE



A BLESSED CANDLE,
LIT IN THE MIDDLE
OF THE TABLE



STRAW ON OR
UNDER THE TABLE



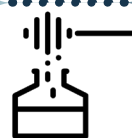
TREATS HIDDEN
UNDER THE STRAW



LOAF OF BREAD



GARLIC FOR
THE BREAD



HONEY
FOR THE BREAD

SYMBOLIZES SWEETNESS
IN LIFE, AND THE
SWEET BABY JESUS!

SYMBOLIZES THE BITTERNESS
OF LIFE, KNOWING THAT JESUS
WILL SUFFER FOR OUR SINS.

SYMBOLIZES THE STAR
OF BETHLEHEM.

SYMBOLIZES THE GIFTS THAT
THE MAGI WILL BRING TO
BABY JESUS.

SYMBOLIZES THE SWADDLING
CLOTHES IN WHICH THE BABY
JESUS WAS WRAPPED.

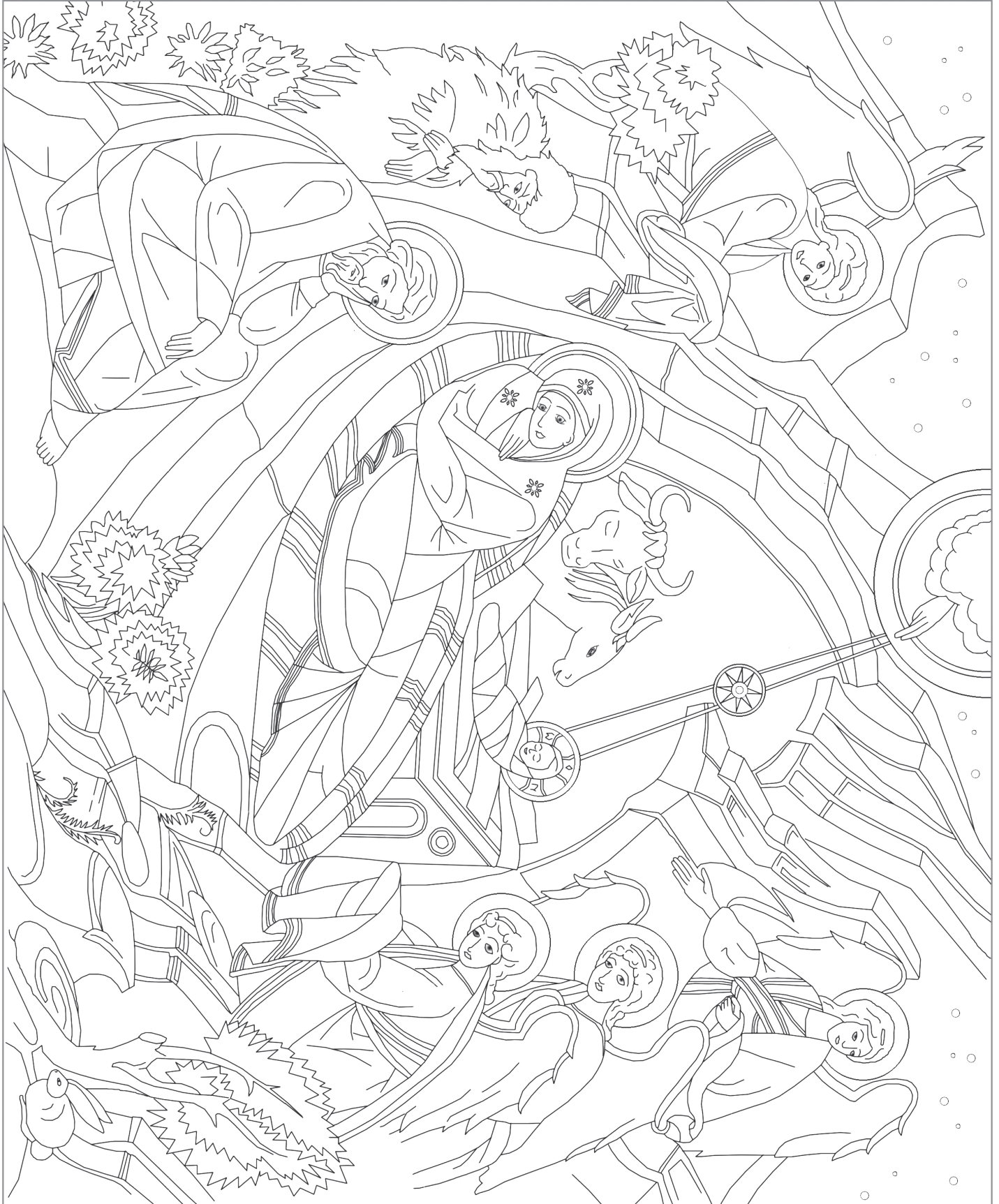
REMINDS US OF THE HUMBLE
STABLE IN WHICH JESUS
WAS BORN.

WHEN YOU SEE THIS, THE MEAL
CAN BEGIN!

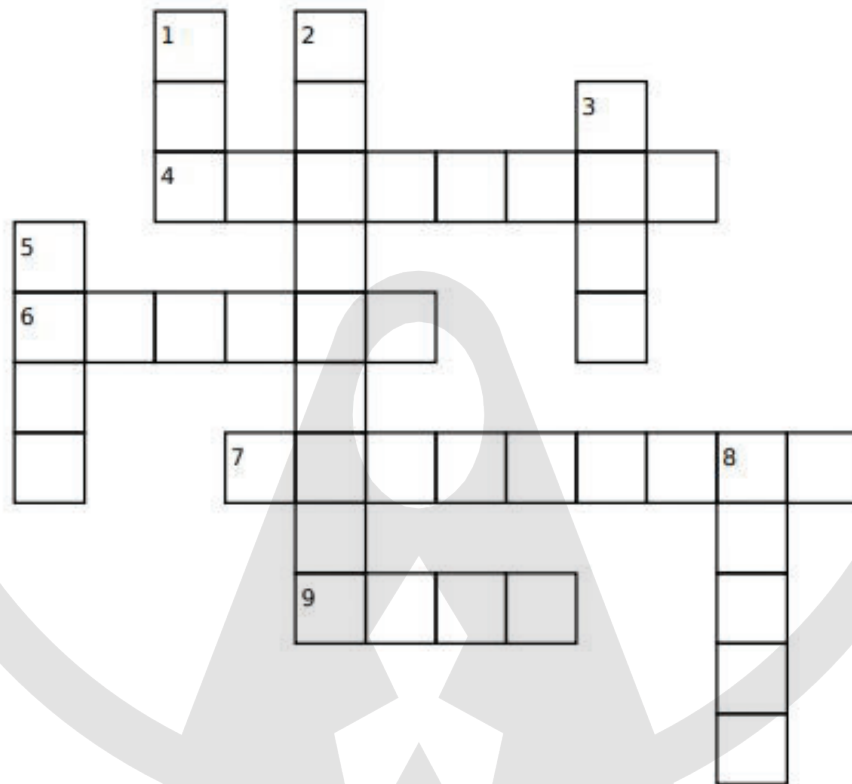
SYMBOLIZES THE BABY JESUS!
HE IS THE BREAD OF LIFE, AND
WILL GIVE HIS BODY AS
FOOD FOR OUR SOULS

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NATIVITY CROSSWORD PUZZLE



Down:

1. There was no room here for the Holy Family.
2. The city where Jesus was born.
3. Shining in the sky to herald the birth of Jesus.
5. The three wise men who followed the Star of Bethlehem to find Jesus.
8. Bethlehem was also known as the City of _____.

Across:

4. The celebration of the birth of Jesus.
6. Sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"
7. Said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."
9. The Mother of God.

Let's Learn a Song for Christmas

GOD IS WITH US

God is with us! Understand, all you nations,
and submit yourselves for God is with us!

Hear all you distant lands, You mighty ones,
submit yourselves, for God is with us!

If you strengthen yourselves again, again you will
be defeated, Form a plan, but the Lord will thwart
it, for God is with us!

Whatever word you speak will not stand even
among yourselves, We will not fear what you fear
nor shall we be dismayed, for God is with us!

Hallow the Lord our God and He will be your fear,
If you trust in Him, He will be your refuge,
for God is with us!

We will hope in Him and by Him will we be saved,
Here am I with the children God has given me
for God is with us!

The people who walked in darkness have seen a
great light, Upon you who dwelt in the shadow of
death a light has shone, for God is with us!

For a child is born to us; a son is given to us,
Upon His shoulder dominion rests,
Of His peace there is no end, for God is with us!

They call Him Angel of Great Counsel, Wonderful
Counselor, Mighty God, Master, Prince of Peace,
Father of the age to come, for God is with us!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy
Spirit, now and ever and forever.

Amen...for God is with us!

God is with us! Understand, all you nations,
and submit yourselves for God is with us!

From the Nativity icon at The Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the
Immaculate Conception, Philadelphia, PA. Photo by Max Luckey

DID YOU KNOW?

When you attend Christmas Compline this Christmas Eve, listen for this hymn. It is known as the Song of the Prophet Isaiah. God told Isaiah that because the Israelites had not lived up to their covenant with Him, God would no longer hold back the might of their dreaded enemy. Those Israelites who had remained faithful and had not forsaken their relationship with God, had nothing to fear. Because they remained with God, God would be with them and protect them from the attacks! - Written By Lynne Wardach

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The Catechism of The Ukrainian Catholic Church

We have already learned something about The Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church: Christ—Our Pascha. We learned that Patriarch Sviatoslav wrote that this book is for everyone, not just bishops, priests, monks and nuns but also for the laity. We learned that laity means all the rest of us, even kids. Today we will learn how this catechism is organized into three main parts. See if you can memorize these three parts.

1. Part one is called "The Faith of the Church."

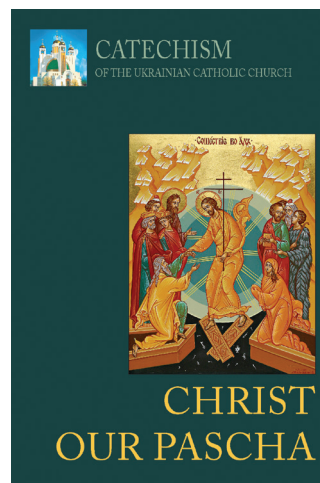
This section explains the creed we say at Divine Liturgy. It also helps us to understand all the events of salvation history found in the Anaphora of the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great. That is the longer prayer our priest says on certain Sundays of the church year including Theophany. It makes Divine Liturgy a little longer but if you follow along with the priest and read or listen to what he is saying, you will learn to love these longer Liturgies.

2. Part two is called "The Prayer of the Church." The section explains our understanding of the Church's liturgical cycle of prayer for every day, every week and every year. It includes all the celebrations of the church. The liturgical life of the church is when we gather together to worship God. This section also teaches us about our own private prayer.

3. Part three is called "The Life of the Church." In this section we learn how to bring this rich life of our faith and our worship into our daily lives. Don't just go to Divine Liturgy on Sunday and forget God for the rest of the week. Always obey God's laws and try to live a life pleasing to God each day of our lives.

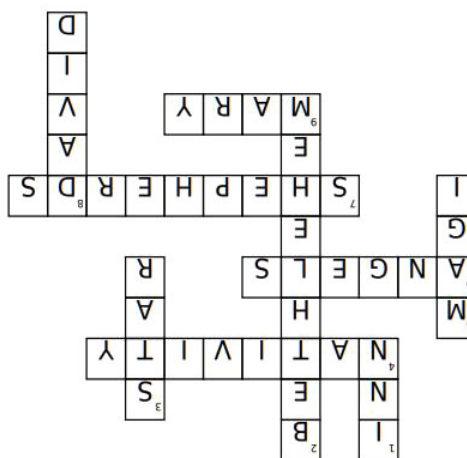
Each small section in the Catechism is numbered. Let's read section 195 to see what it has to say about Christmas. "Creation joyfully welcomes God in the flesh, bearing gifts for the new-born Child: angels—their song; the heavens—a star; the magi—gold, frankincense, and myrrh; the shepherds—their wonder; the earth—a cave; the deserted place—a manger; humankind—the Virgin Mother."

- Written By Julie Luckey



NATIVITY CROSSWORD PUZZLE ANSWER KEY

- Across:
- The celebration of the birth of Jesus.
 - Sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"
 - Said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."
 - The Mother of God.
- Down:
- There was no room here for the Holy Family.
 - The city where Jesus was born.
 - Shining in the sky to herald the birth of Jesus.
 - The three wise men who followed the Star of Bethlehem to find Jesus.
 - Bethlehem was also known as the City of David.



THE HOLY SUPPER

You may have heard about the “Holy Supper” on Christmas Eve. Or maybe you haven’t! It is a special tradition carried on by many families of Eastern European origin. Each region, and sometimes each specific family, has particular traditions and dishes that they serve on this day, but the general idea is the same: since the Nativity Fast comes before Christmas, this is the last meal of the fast, so it’s full of special dishes that are served and lots of symbolism in preparation for the celebration of Jesus’s birth.

Families clean the house in preparation for Christmastime, but they are sure to leave the spider webs alone! There is a traditional story that the spiders helped the Holy Family as they fled into Egypt after Jesus’s birth. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph hid in a cave to escape Herod’s soldiers, and the spiders covered up the entrance with their webs so that the soldiers wouldn’t enter. This is why, in some families, they decorate their Christmas tree with spider web ornaments.



In the evening, the children are to keep watch for the first star in the sky. The supper will start when they have found it! Some hay is put on the table first, to represent the manger where Jesus was laid. The table is set with a white tablecloth, in honor of the swaddling clothes used for baby Jesus. A special kind of braided Christmas bread, called kolach, is put in the middle of the table, to represent Jesus, who is the Bread of Life. The braid on the loaf is made of three pieces of dough, to represent the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The braid is connected in a circle to represent the One God. Then a candle is placed in the middle of the loaf, to represent Jesus, who is the Light of the World, and the Star of Bethlehem, which led the Magi to the Christ Child.

Families will set an extra place at the table in honor of their ancestors who have died. It is also a place for any visitor who may come, because Jesus told us that if we serve others, we are serving Him. Traditionally, the animals are the ones to be fed first, because the animals were the first of creation to see the newborn Jesus! There is also the didukh, which means “grandfather,” a sheaf of wheat which is set on the table or by an icon, to remind the family of their many ancestors who have shared their wisdom and legacy through the years. It is also symbolic of the bread we eat, which sustains our families.

Once the star has been spotted and the supper begins, hymns are sung and prayers are prayed, the candle on the table is lit, and some bread, often prosphora which may have been given to the family from their church at an earlier time, is broken and given to each one present. Everyone then dips their bread in honey, to remind us of the sweetness of God’s gifts and of Christ feeding the multitude. Some families will use garlic and honey, to remind us of the bitterness of life before Christ, and the sweetness of life which comes after Him.

Twelve dishes are then served in honor of the 12 Apostles. Some of those dishes may include kutia, a dish of boiled wheat, honey, and poppy seeds, which represents life and death, and is eaten first at the Holy Supper to represent the life Christ has given to us. Other dishes include vegetables, such as mushrooms, which were often dried because that was the way these foods could be preserved in the winter, and to show the wealth from the earth that God has given to us. The entire meal would have been made of foods that were abundant in the area in which the families lived. The Holy Supper is a wonderful tradition that has been shared among families for generations, and it may be a tradition that your parish shares, or your own family takes part in every Christmas Eve. What a beautiful way to bring families together and help us grow closer to Christ in preparation for His Birth! - *Written By Carrie Chuff*

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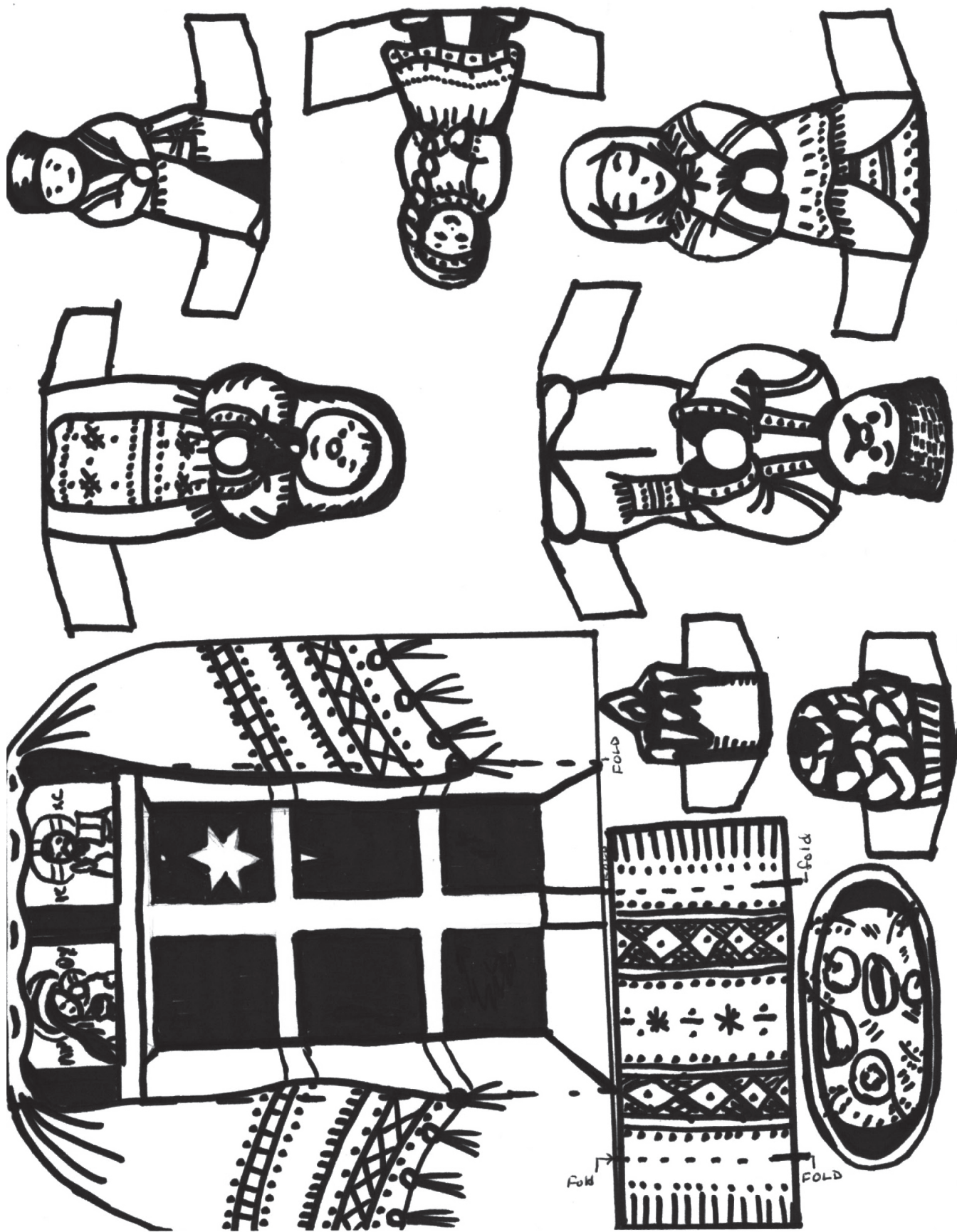
HOLY SUPPER PLAY SET!



Make your very own Holy Supper Play Set! Simply photocopy the templates provided onto some cardstock, cut out each figure, being very careful not to cut off the tabs, and then color and play! Set includes a table with white tablecloth; straw mat with treats to place on top; six plates (an extra for a visitor!); stand up candle and bread; a decorated window at which to find the first star; didukh, the staff of wheat; a side table and a tray of food for the animals; and five family members, Mother, Father, Baba, Sister and Brother!

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