

ethiopian orthodox fasting and holidays calendar

ethiopian orthodox fasting and holidays calendar: A Comprehensive Guide

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church observes a rich tapestry of fasting and holiday traditions, deeply intertwined with its ancient faith and unique liturgical calendar. Understanding this calendar is key to appreciating the spiritual rhythm of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. This guide delves into the intricacies of the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting and holidays calendar, offering detailed insights into its core principles, major fasting periods, significant feast days, and the theological significance behind these practices. Whether you are a devout follower seeking clarity or an interested observer, this resource aims to provide a thorough and accessible overview of these vital aspects of Ethiopian Orthodox life. We will explore the specific days designated for fasting, the types of abstention involved, and the joyous celebrations that punctuate the year, all viewed through the lens of this distinct ecclesiastical framework.

Table of Contents

Understanding the Ethiopian Orthodox Calendar

Major Fasting Periods in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tradition

Significant Holidays and Feast Days

Theological Significance of Fasting and Feasts

Observing the Ethiopian Orthodox Fasting and Holidays Calendar

Understanding the Ethiopian Orthodox Calendar

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church utilizes a unique calendar system that differs significantly from the Gregorian calendar used in most of the Western world. This calendar is based on the Coptic calendar, which itself has ancient roots. A fundamental difference lies in the numbering of years; the Ethiopian calendar is about seven to eight years behind the Gregorian calendar. For example, when the world observes the year 2024, the Ethiopian calendar is in the year 2016 or 2017, depending on

the specific date within the year. This temporal difference is a result of variations in calculating the Anno Domini (AD) or the year of Christ's birth.

The Ethiopian calendar also features 13 months instead of the usual 12. The first twelve months have 30 days each, while the thirteenth month, known as Pagumen or Nehase, has 5 days in a common year and 6 days in a leap year. Leap years occur every four years, just as in the Gregorian system, ensuring the calendar remains synchronized with the solar year. This 13-month structure is a distinctive feature that impacts the dating of all religious observances, including both fasting periods and major holidays throughout the year. Understanding this calendrical system is the first step to comprehending the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting and holidays calendar.

Major Fasting Periods in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tradition

Fasting is a cornerstone of spiritual discipline within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, serving as a means of purification, penance, and drawing closer to God. The Church observes numerous fasting days throughout the year, with several extended periods of intense abstinence. These fasts are not merely about abstaining from food but involve a holistic approach to spiritual renewal, including prayer, almsgiving, and refraining from marital relations. The dietary restrictions during fasting periods are often stringent, typically excluding all animal products: meat, dairy, eggs, and fish.

The most significant and longest fasting period is the Great Fast, also known as Abiy Tsom. This fast precedes Easter (Fasika) and lasts for 50 days. It is a period of intense spiritual reflection and self-denial, observed by many devout members of the church. During this time, followers adhere to the strictest form of fasting, consuming only one meal a day, typically in the evening, and eating vegan food. The strictness of the fast can vary, with some elders and monks observing even more rigorous practices, sometimes fasting completely for extended periods within the Great Fast.

Beyond the Great Fast, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church observes several other important fasting periods. These include the Fast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Tsomä Mariam), observed for 15 days leading up to August 15th (according to the Gregorian calendar). There is also the Fast of the Prophet Jonah (Tsomä Yonah), a three-day fast commemorating the repentance of the people of Nineveh after the prophet's message. Additionally, Wednesdays and Fridays are traditionally observed as fasting days throughout the year, except for the fifty days following Easter (a period known as "The

season of the Resurrection" or "Zeweter"), during which fasting is not permitted. These regular fasting days reinforce the spiritual discipline and connection to the divine.

- The Great Fast (Abiy Tsom): 50 days preceding Easter (Fasika).
- The Fast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Tsomä Mariam): 15 days in August.
- The Fast of the Prophet Jonah (Tsomä Yonah): A three-day fast.
- Wednesdays and Fridays: Observed as fasting days throughout the year, with exceptions.

Significant Holidays and Feast Days

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church celebrates a wealth of feast days, each commemorating pivotal events in salvation history and honoring saints. These celebrations are characterized by vibrant liturgical services, processions, chanting, and a spirit of communal joy. The calendar is punctuated by major feasts that are central to the faith and are observed with great solemnity and festivity.

Understanding these holidays is crucial to grasping the full scope of the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting and holidays calendar.

Perhaps the most significant holiday is Gena, celebrated on January 7th (Gregorian calendar), which marks the Nativity of Jesus Christ. This feast is a time of immense joy, with special church services, including midnight masses, and is often celebrated with the traditional Ethiopian game of hockey, also called Gena. Another major feast is Timkat, celebrated on January 19th (Gregorian calendar), which commemorates the Epiphany and the baptism of Jesus Christ in the Jordan River. During Timkat, replicas of the Ark of the Covenant (Tabot) are carried in procession, accompanied by priests and deacons, and are eventually blessed in a body of water, symbolizing the baptism itself. It is a visually stunning and deeply spiritual celebration.

Other important holidays include Meskel, celebrated on September 27th (Gregorian calendar). Meskel commemorates the finding of the True Cross by Empress Helena. The celebration involves the lighting

of a large bonfire, symbolizing the cross of Christ, and is a time of communal gathering and religious observance. The Feast of the Annunciation (Tsomä Kidame), on April 7th, marks the announcement of Jesus' birth to Mary. The Feast of the Transfiguration (Asärä) on August 19th is another significant day. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church also holds numerous feast days honoring the Virgin Mary and various saints throughout the year, often coinciding with specific days within the Ethiopian calendar. These holidays, interwoven with the fasting periods, create a rich spiritual cadence for the faithful.

1. Gena (Nativity): January 7th.
2. Timkat (Epiphany): January 19th.
3. Meskel (Feast of the True Cross): September 27th.
4. The Annunciation: April 7th.
5. The Transfiguration: August 19th.

Theological Significance of Fasting and Feasts

The observance of fasting and holidays within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is deeply rooted in theology, serving as a practical expression of faith and a means of spiritual growth. Fasting is understood not as a mere ritualistic act but as a spiritual discipline that prepares the soul for communion with God. The abstinence from food and other worldly pleasures is intended to curb the flesh, weaken the power of sin, and enhance spiritual receptivity. By denying the body, the spirit is strengthened, allowing for deeper prayer and meditation. It is a spiritual exercise that cultivates self-control, humility, and dependence on divine grace. The fasting periods, particularly the Great Fast, are seen as a time to emulate Christ's own forty-day fast in the wilderness, a period of intense spiritual battle and preparation.

Conversely, the feast days are moments of profound joy and thanksgiving, celebrating God's

redemptive work and the lives of His saints. These holidays serve to remind believers of the core tenets of their faith, the history of salvation, and the ongoing presence of God in their lives. The vibrant celebrations, replete with rich liturgy and communal gatherings, reinforce the unity of the Church and its connection to the divine. Feasts like Gena and Timkat are not just historical commemorations; they are living experiences that bring the mystery of Christ's Incarnation and Baptism into the present moment for the faithful. The cycle of fasting and feasting, therefore, provides a structured rhythm for the spiritual life, allowing for periods of introspection and self-denial followed by seasons of ecstatic celebration and praise.

Observing the Ethiopian Orthodox Fasting and Holidays

Calendar

For those seeking to observe the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting and holidays calendar, careful planning and a commitment to understanding its nuances are essential. The Ethiopian calendar's distinct structure and the Church's specific fasting rules require attention. It is advisable to consult an official Ethiopian Orthodox Church calendar or a reliable online resource that provides the synchronized dates with the Gregorian calendar, as this is how most individuals will track observances in the modern world. Many churches and monasteries provide printed calendars annually, which are invaluable for accurate tracking.

When observing fasts, it is important to approach them with the correct intention and understanding. While dietary restrictions are a significant component, the spiritual aspect—prayer, repentance, almsgiving, and abstention from worldly distractions—is equally, if not more, important. For newcomers or those unfamiliar with the practices, it is beneficial to consult with a priest or a knowledgeable member of the clergy or laity for guidance. They can offer insights into the spiritual significance of each fast and feast, as well as practical advice on how to observe them appropriately. Adhering to the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting and holidays calendar is a journey that enriches the spiritual life, fostering a deeper connection to God and the traditions of this ancient Church.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the primary difference between the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar and the Gregorian calendar?

A: The primary difference lies in the numbering of years and the number of months. The Ethiopian calendar is approximately seven to eight years behind the Gregorian calendar, and it consists of 13 months instead of 12. The first 12 months have 30 days, and the 13th month, Pagumen, has 5 or 6 days.

Q: Are there different levels of fasting observed in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church?

A: Yes, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church recognizes varying degrees of fasting. The most common and strictest form involves abstaining from all animal products (meat, dairy, eggs, fish) and often involves eating only one meal a day, typically vegan. Some individuals, particularly monks and elders, may observe even more rigorous fasts, including complete abstinence from food for certain periods within the longer fasts.

Q: When does the longest fasting period in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church occur?

A: The longest and most significant fasting period is the Great Fast, known as Abiy Tsom. This fast precedes Easter (Fasika) and lasts for 50 days.

Q: What is the significance of Timkat in the Ethiopian Orthodox

tradition?

A: Timkat, celebrated on January 19th (Gregorian calendar), commemorates the Epiphany and the baptism of Jesus Christ in the Jordan River. It is a major feast marked by vibrant processions of the Tabot (Ark of the Covenant replica) and a blessing of water.

Q: Why are Wednesdays and Fridays observed as fasting days?

A: Wednesdays are observed as fast days because they commemorate the day Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus. Fridays are observed as fast days because they commemorate the day of Jesus' crucifixion. These are regular weekly fasts, with exceptions for the 50-day period following Easter.

Q: What is Meskel and when is it celebrated?

A: Meskel is a major feast celebrated on September 27th (Gregorian calendar). It commemorates the finding of the True Cross by Empress Helena and is marked by the lighting of a large bonfire.

Q: Can non-Orthodox individuals participate in Ethiopian Orthodox fasting?

A: While the core principles of fasting are open to anyone seeking spiritual discipline, the strict adherence to the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting rules is typically observed by members of the Church. However, a priest or spiritual elder can provide guidance on how outsiders might respectfully participate or understand the practice.

[Ethiopian Orthodox Fasting And Holidays Calendar](#)

Ethiopian Orthodox Fasting And Holidays Calendar

Related Articles

- [environmental geology lab manual answer key](#)
- [esperanza rising packet answers](#)
- [enlisted surface warfare specialist study guide](#)

[Back to Home](#)