

21 Απριλίου 2016

## Traditions: remembering St. Lazarus (Sylvia Leontaritis)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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I can remember jumping off the front porch steps in excitement as I hurried into the car to get to the church as quickly as possible to find out which group I was in. Every year the Jr. Choir of Archangel Michael Church in Campbell, Ohio would split into groups and go to all the Orthodox homes in town to sing the *kalanta* or carols. We did this three times a year, Christmas, St. Basil's and Lazarus Saturday. I can remember the smiles on the faces of the people we sang for and the lingering aroma of the freshly baked cookies many of the *yiayias* baked and stuffed into our pockets. We'd collect money for the church in our neatly decorated coffee cans. Afterwards, we all headed to the church hall where we handed in our earnings and were spoiled with a delicious pancake breakfast. When we were finished we headed to my grandmother's house where we would bake Lazarakia, little loaves of bread that look like St. Lazarus. We would all sing the *kalanta* as we folded arms across his chest, cut two legs and put cloves in for eyes. My great-grandmother

would always read the story of Lazarus from the Bible, being sure to point out at the end that he went on to become the first bishop of Cyprus.

As an adult, there are many traditions I'm just not willing to part with. Our Lazarus Saturday tradition is one of them. So every year on the last Saturday before Holy Week I gather Angelo, Panteleimon, and my godson Nikita, into the kitchen and we continue that tradition (except so far I'm the only one singing). As they color the icon of the feast, I read the story from the Bible and we talk about things the people who witnessed this miracle might have been thinking and what we might have thought if we were there. Then we put on our aprons and bake the *Lazarakia*. While the children knead and shape their dough I sing the kalanta, remembering all the spring afternoons I spent singing about this awesome miracle of Christ. I think about all of the girls that I caroled with and pray that St. Lazarus blesses them on his blessed feast.

At the beginning of each new Ecclesiastical year, I set goals for my home, my family and myself. Like a New Year's resolution I start off strong, checking my list daily and making sure I'm doing all the things that I promised myself I'd do. However, before I know it I'm only doing a few of the things on the list, then almost none. So when Great Lent rolls around, my soul is ready to start anew. I'm ready to re-evaluate those goals and get back on track; to begin fighting the good fight once again.

I don't think it is coincidence that this time of year coincides with Spring. It's so beautiful to watch the world around us "rise from the dead" as we celebrate the Holy and Glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. During this time we are able to intimately participate in the most significant events of Christ's life. What an incredible blessing for us!

You know traditions are a funny thing; many of them happen without intent or even realization. When I think back upon all the memories that were made running and jumping over the cracks in the old, crooked streets of my small hometown, I am reminded again of our Lord's love for us. He not only gave us our beloved Orthodoxy

rich in symbolism and supported with dogma but he intertwined so much of it with beautiful traditions.

While I make every effort to teach my children the how's and why's of our Faith I take special care to express the importance of traditions to them. St. Paul tells us, «Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught,

whether by word or our epistle.» (2 Thessalonians 2:15). I think that should apply not only to Church life but to family life as well. Many people think that if their grandmother or mother didn't hand something down, it's not a tradition. Or if your children are older, it's too late. This simply isn't true; anyone can start a tradition and it is *never* too late. Remember, a tradition doesn't mean creating something tangible, it can be something as simple as reading the Bible as a family every night or saying a special prayer together.



Here are five simple activities that I hope you will find encouraging as you create new traditions for your family this Lenten season.

1. **Bake Lazarus Bread and sing the kalanta.** This is sure to become a favorite tradition in your home. You're sure to feel the blessing of St. Lazarus by honoring his memory on his feast! The recipe and lyrics can be found my blog <http://orthodoxmom.blogspot.com> under the recipe label.

2. **Decorate a Pascha basket.** Some churches bless the baskets after the Resurrection Liturgy, but if yours doesn't that's ok. It's still fun to decorate and fill with eggs, cheeses and breads for after church. Give each child a "job" (i.e. arrange items in basket, help wrap them, etc).
3. **Read the Gospel lesson.** Go to [www.orthodoxonline.com](http://www.orthodoxonline.com) and print out the coloring page for each Sunday during Lent and let your child color while you read. Make it fun; bake some Lenten cookies to enjoy while doing this.
4. **Make a Pascha candle.** You can purchase a large candle (some churches sell them) and use ribbons and puffy paint to decorate them. Some people cut out little paper icons and glue them to the candle. To help the icon stay on, add a puffy paint border to it.
5. **Bake Resurrection cookies.** This is so much fun and is very educational. Each ingredient has a corresponding scripture verse to the story of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. I was amazed at how much my son remembered from this activity! (The recipe can be found on my blog under the recipe label as well.)

Having family traditions that incorporate our Orthodox faith assists us in teaching our children that Orthodoxy is a way of life, not just something we take part in during services or sacraments. It combines the two most important elements in life- Faith and family. Faith related traditions help children feel like Orthodoxy is everywhere, not just at Church and helps them develop a closer relationship to Christ and His saints as well.

The older I get the more important traditions become to me. I become more appreciative of the traditions that have been passed on to me, to us, by our holy saints and martyrs who have preserved them through much blood and many tears. May we give

thanks to God for making us mothers of a family and giving us the opportunity to pass on His traditions.

*Through the prayers of St. Lazarus, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us.*

*By Sylvia Leontaritis*

*This article was first posted at [Adventures of an OrthodoxMom](http://Adventures of an OrthodoxMom) on April 11, 2009 and was posted here with permission.*

*Sylvia (Sevasti) Leontaritis is the author of the Orthodox children's book, A POCKETFUL OF SEEDS. She lives on a small farm in Florida with her husband and their three adventurous little boys. They attend services at the two monasteries nearby their home. She is also the creator of the blog, [Adventures of an Orthodox Mom](http://Adventures of an Orthodox Mom), where she and a terrific network of moms share in the triumphs and mishaps*

*of raising children within the Orthodox Faith. Share in the adventures at  
[www.orthodoxmom.com](http://www.orthodoxmom.com).*