

ethiopian orthodox fasting calendar

Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar plays a vital role in the spiritual life of millions, dictating periods of abstention from certain foods and sometimes all food and drink. Understanding this intricate calendar is essential for adherents and those curious about the rich traditions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. This comprehensive guide will delve into the historical roots, the types of fasts observed, the specific periods outlined in the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar, and the spiritual significance behind these practices. We will explore how the calendar aligns with the liturgical year and the blessings derived from dedicated periods of fasting and prayer.

Understanding the Ethiopian Orthodox Fasting Calendar: A Spiritual Framework

The Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar is a deeply ingrained aspect of the faith, guiding believers through numerous periods of spiritual discipline and devotion throughout the year. Far more than just dietary restrictions, these fasts are seen as a means of spiritual purification, a way to draw closer to God, and an expression of love and obedience. The calendar itself is a complex interplay of solar and lunar cycles, a testament to the Church's ancient origins and its unique theological development. Understanding its structure and meaning offers a profound insight into the spiritual life of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians.

Theological and Historical Roots of Ethiopian Orthodox Fasting

The practice of fasting within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church is rooted in ancient biblical traditions and has been shaped by centuries of theological development and monastic influence. The Old Testament provides numerous examples of prophets and righteous individuals fasting to seek

God's favor, repent, or prepare for significant spiritual encounters. Jesus Christ Himself fasted for forty days and forty nights in the desert, setting a powerful precedent for His followers.

Biblical Foundations of Fasting

The Bible frequently mentions fasting as a spiritual discipline. In the Old Testament, figures like Moses, Elijah, and David engaged in fasting. Moses fasted for forty days on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28), and Elijah also fasted for forty days in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:8). The prophet Daniel fasted and prayed for an extended period to understand visions and seek divine revelation (Daniel 9:3). These instances highlight fasting as a means of seeking divine guidance, demonstrating humility, and expressing deep contrition.

Jesus' Example and Apostolic Tradition

Jesus' forty-day fast in the wilderness, as recorded in the Gospels (Matthew 4:2, Mark 1:13, Luke 4:2), is a cornerstone of Christian fasting. He used fasting to overcome temptation and prepare for His ministry. The early Church continued the tradition of fasting, as evidenced by the Apostle Paul's references to enduring hardships, including fasting (2 Corinthians 11:27). This apostolic tradition was passed down through the generations, forming the basis for the structured fasting observed today.

Monastic Influence and Spiritual Discipline

Monasticism has played a significant role in shaping the rigor and structure of the **Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar**. Early monks and ascetics embraced fasting as a primary tool for spiritual discipline, seeking to subdue the flesh and elevate the spirit. Their commitment to strict abstinence and prayerful contemplation influenced the Church's teachings on fasting, emphasizing its role in achieving spiritual maturity and inner peace. The monastic communities in Ethiopia, such as the famous monasteries of

the Lake Tana region, have historically been custodians of these fasting traditions.

Types of Fasts Observed in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church observes various types of fasts, each with its unique duration, rules, and spiritual emphasis. These fasts are not uniform; some are more stringent than others, reflecting different levels of devotion and preparation for specific liturgical seasons or feast days.

Strict Fasting (Fasts of Abstinence)

The most common and widely observed type of fast in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is the strict fast, often referred to as the "fast of abstinence" or "water-only fast" on certain days. This type of fast involves abstaining from all animal products: meat, poultry, fish, dairy products (milk, cheese, butter), and eggs. Additionally, during many of these fasts, adherents also abstain from all forms of oil, including vegetable oil, olive oil, and butter. This makes the diet consist primarily of grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruits, prepared without oil or animal fats.

Days of Partial Abstinence

While strict fasting is prevalent, there are also periods or specific days where the fasting rules might be slightly less rigorous, though still involving significant abstention. For instance, some fasts might permit oil or certain types of grains. However, the core principle of abstaining from animal products remains consistent across most fasting periods.

Days of Total Abstinence (Fasting from Food and Drink)

Certain significant days in the **Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar** are observed with a complete fast from both food and drink from sunrise to the time of the evening prayer (Vespers) or even until the following morning, after receiving Holy Communion. These are typically days of profound spiritual importance, such as the eve of major feasts or specific penitential days. This form of fasting is considered a high level of spiritual discipline and is undertaken with great reverence and prayer.

Key Periods in the Ethiopian Orthodox Fasting Calendar

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's liturgical year is structured around a series of fasts, with specific periods designated for abstinence and spiritual reflection. These fasts are integral to the rhythm of worship and devotion, leading up to and following major feast days. The calendar is a testament to the Church's rich spiritual heritage.

The Great Fast (Abiy Tsom)

The most significant and longest fasting period is the Great Fast, known as "Abiy Tsom" in Amharic. This fast precedes Easter (Fasika) and lasts for 55 days. It is a period of intense spiritual preparation, marked by strict adherence to the fasting rules, including the abstinence from all animal products and often oil. The faithful engage in increased prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during this time, mirroring Christ's forty days in the wilderness and His subsequent suffering and resurrection.

The Seven Weeks of Lent

The Great Fast is divided into seven weeks, each with its own thematic focus or observance. These

weeks build upon each other, guiding the faithful through a spiritual journey of repentance, contemplation of Christ's passion, and anticipation of His resurrection. The Church often reads specific scriptures and conducts special services during each week to enhance the spiritual experience.

The Fast of the Prophets (Tsomä Hǎbabät)

This fast commemorates the prophecies concerning the coming of Christ. It begins on the first day of the Ethiopian month of Hedar (around November 15th) and lasts until Christmas Eve (Gena), approximately 40 days. During this period, believers abstain from animal products, often with oil being permitted on most days, but strict adherence to the absence of animal products is maintained. It is a time of anticipation and reflection on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the birth of Jesus.

The Fast of the Nativity

Often synonymous with the Fast of the Prophets, this period is specifically focused on preparing for the celebration of Christmas (Gena). The fasting practices are similar, emphasizing a period of spiritual readiness to celebrate the Incarnation of Christ.

The Fast of the Assumption (Fasika Seyum)

This fast, observed in honor of the Dormition of the Theotokos (Virgin Mary), occurs in the first two weeks of the Ethiopian month of Tahsas, leading up to the Feast of the Assumption on August 16th (or August 15th, depending on the calendar calculation). It is a period of abstaining from animal products, a time to reflect on Mary's role in salvation history and her heavenly glorification.

The Fast of Nineveh

A significant and ancient fast, the Fast of Nineveh is observed for three days before the start of the Great Fast. It commemorates the repentance of the people of Nineveh after the prophet Jonah's preaching (Jonah 3:5-10). This fast is particularly strict, often involving fasting from food and drink from sunrise to sunset, and is a powerful call to repentance and seeking God's mercy.

Other Fasts

Beyond these major periods, the **Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar** includes numerous other shorter fasts throughout the year. These include:

- The fast of Wednesdays and Fridays: These are weekly fasts, observing abstention from animal products, often fasting from food and drink until the evening or noon, except on specific feast days that fall on these days.
- The fast of the Epiphany (Tsomä T፲፱፻፲፱) prelude: A short fast observed for one or two days before the Feast of the Epiphany (T፲፱፻፲፱).
- Fasts related to saints' days: Certain days dedicated to specific saints or events in the lives of saints are also observed as fasting days.

Spiritual Significance and Benefits of Fasting

Fasting in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition is understood not merely as a physical act but as a spiritual

discipline with profound implications for the believer's relationship with God. It is a means of purification, self-control, and a deeper communion with the divine.

Spiritual Purification and Renewal

By abstaining from food, particularly rich foods and animal products, believers aim to "cleanse" their bodies and minds, making them more receptive to the Holy Spirit. This process of self-denial helps to detach from worldly desires and cultivate inner purity, preparing the soul for spiritual growth and renewal. The physical act of fasting is seen as a parallel to the spiritual purging of sin and worldly attachments.

Developing Self-Control and Discipline

The ability to control one's physical appetites is considered a fundamental aspect of spiritual discipline. Fasting cultivates self-control, patience, and resilience. By overcoming the urge to eat, especially when hungry, believers strengthen their will and learn to master their carnal desires, which can be a significant obstacle in spiritual progress. This discipline extends beyond the mealtime, influencing one's thoughts and actions.

Deepening the Prayer Life

Periods of fasting are often accompanied by increased prayer and meditation. With less time and focus spent on preparing and consuming meals, believers can dedicate more time to seeking God through prayer, reading scriptures, and attending church services. This intensified prayer life leads to a closer relationship with God and a greater understanding of His will.

Fasting as an Act of Penance and Obedience

Fasting is also viewed as an act of penance, a way to atone for sins and demonstrate remorse. It is an expression of obedience to the teachings and traditions of the Church. By voluntarily submitting to the disciplines of fasting, believers acknowledge their dependence on God and their commitment to living a life that is pleasing to Him.

Communion with Christ and the Saints

The fasts are often linked to the commemoration of Christ's life, suffering, and resurrection, or the lives of the saints. By participating in these fasting periods, believers seek to draw closer to Christ and to emulate the spiritual devotion of the saints. This communal aspect of fasting strengthens the bonds of faith within the Church community.

Navigating the Ethiopian Orthodox Fasting Calendar

Successfully observing the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar requires understanding its nuances and preparing oneself spiritually and practically. It is a journey that is undertaken with intention and faith.

Understanding the Ethiopian Calendar System

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church uses its own unique calendar system, which is solar-based but has some differences from the Julian or Gregorian calendars. The Ethiopian calendar has 13 months: 12 months of 30 days each, and a short 13th month called Pagume, which has 5 days in normal years and 6 days in leap years. The year begins on September 11th (or September 12th in the year preceding a Gregorian leap year). This distinct calendar system dictates the timing of all feasts and

fasts. Knowing how to convert dates between the Ethiopian and Gregorian calendars is often helpful for those who are not fully immersed in the Ethiopian system.

Practical Tips for Observing Fasts

Observing strict fasts can be challenging, but with proper preparation and a faithful mindset, it is manageable. Here are some practical tips:

- **Plan your meals:** Focus on nutrient-dense, plant-based foods like lentils, beans, various vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Prepare meals that are filling and provide sustained energy.
- **Stay hydrated:** Drink plenty of water throughout the day, especially during longer fasts or periods of hot weather.
- **Listen to your body:** While the goal is discipline, it's important to be mindful of your health. For individuals with existing health conditions, it is advisable to consult with a healthcare professional and their spiritual father regarding the appropriateness and modifications of fasting.
- **Focus on the spiritual purpose:** Remind yourself why you are fasting. Keep prayer, Bible study, and spiritual reflection at the forefront of your activities.
- **Seek guidance:** Consult with your priest or spiritual father for advice and clarification on fasting rules and practices.
- **Break the fast gradually:** When a fast concludes, especially after extended periods, it is customary to reintroduce foods gradually to avoid digestive discomfort.

Exceptions and Considerations

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church recognizes that not everyone can observe fasts with the same rigor due to age, health, pregnancy, or other circumstances. The Church teaches that fasting is a spiritual tool, and its application should be guided by love, mercy, and pastoral wisdom. Therefore, exceptions are made, and individuals are encouraged to fast according to their ability and with the guidance of their spiritual leaders. The intention and spirit behind the fast are paramount.

Conclusion

The Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar is a rich tapestry of spiritual discipline woven into the fabric of daily life and the liturgical year. From the rigorous 55-day Great Fast to the weekly fasts of Wednesdays and Fridays, these periods of abstinence are opportunities for profound spiritual growth, repentance, and deeper communion with God. Understanding the historical roots, the types of fasts, and their significance allows for a more meaningful engagement with this ancient and vibrant Christian tradition. The practice of fasting, when undertaken with a sincere heart and guided by the Church's teachings, offers a path to spiritual purification, self-mastery, and a closer walk with the divine.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the significance of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church fasting calendar?

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church fasting calendar is deeply significant as it outlines periods of abstaining from animal products (meat, dairy, eggs) and sometimes fish, as a spiritual discipline. These fasts are observed to draw closer to God, cultivate self-control, and commemorate significant events in the lives of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. It's a cornerstone of spiritual life for

adherents.

How does the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar differ from other Christian fasting traditions?

A key difference is the strictness and duration of fasting in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition. Many fasts are more comprehensive, often excluding all animal products, including dairy and eggs, unlike some other denominations that may permit fish or dairy. Furthermore, the Ethiopian calendar follows its own unique liturgical calendar, which impacts the timing and observance of fasting periods.

When are the major fasting periods in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church?

The major fasting periods include the Great Fast (Abiy Tsom), which lasts 50 days before Easter (Hidar 24 to Megabit 23 on the Ge'ez calendar), the Fast of the Nativity (Ledet Tsom) for 40 days before Christmas, the Fast of the Apostles (Tsom Hiyab/Tsom Hadt) after Pentecost, and the Fast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Tsom Fikre Tsega) in August. There are also many other shorter fasts throughout the year.

Is fish permitted during Ethiopian Orthodox fasts?

Generally, fish is not permitted during most of the major fasting periods in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, particularly during the Great Fast. However, there are specific days and shorter fasts where the consumption of fish is permitted, marking exceptions to the strict vegan fasting rule. It's important to consult the specific day's observance for clarity.

Where can I find an accurate and up-to-date Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar?

Accurate and up-to-date Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendars can be found through various sources. Official dioceses and churches often publish them. Many Ethiopian Orthodox churches have websites or social media pages where they share the calendar. Additionally, dedicated apps and religious

websites specializing in Orthodox Christianity often provide reliable Ethiopian Orthodox fasting schedules.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to the Ethiopian Orthodox fasting calendar, each beginning with *and followed by a short description*:

1. *The Sacred Lenten Journey of the Tewahedo Church*

This book delves into the profound spiritual significance of the Great Fast (Abiy Tsom) within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo tradition. It explores the theological underpinnings of fasting, its connection to repentance and spiritual renewal, and the historical development of these practices. Readers will gain an understanding of the strict discipline involved and the communal aspect of this extended period of devotion.

2. *Fasting and Feasting: A Year in the Ethiopian Orthodox Calendar*

This title offers a comprehensive overview of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo liturgical year, highlighting the cyclical nature of fasting and feasting. It details the various fasting periods, their durations, and the specific types of food permitted or abstained from. The book also examines the celebrations that punctuate the fasts, illustrating how fasting ultimately leads to joyous observance.

3. *The Spirituality of Abstinence: Understanding Ethiopian Orthodox Fasting Rules*

This work focuses on the spiritual motivations behind the detailed fasting rules of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It dissects the rationale for abstaining from certain foods, not merely as a physical discipline, but as a means to purify the body and mind. The book provides guidance on how to approach fasting with intentionality and a focus on cultivating inner holiness.

4. *A Pilgrim's Guide to the Ethiopian Fasting Seasons*

Designed as a practical resource for believers, this book serves as a guide for navigating the various fasting periods throughout the Ethiopian Orthodox year. It offers devotional reflections, prayers, and practical tips for observing the fasts with faithfulness and joy. The guide aims to equip individuals with

the knowledge and spiritual tools needed to make the most of these times of disciplined devotion.

5. The Unseen Battle: Fasting as Spiritual Warfare in Ethiopian Orthodoxy

This title frames fasting within the context of spiritual warfare, a concept central to many Orthodox traditions, including the Ethiopian. It explores how fasting strengthens the believer against temptations and demonic influences, drawing on patristic teachings and the lived experience of the faithful. The book emphasizes the power of fasting to fortify the spirit and deepen one's reliance on God.

6. The Joy of Lent: Ethiopian Orthodox Perspectives on the Great Fast

Contrary to the idea that fasting is solely about deprivation, this book highlights the profound joy and spiritual enrichment that the Great Fast brings to adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It examines the celebratory aspects of this period, such as the increased participation in liturgical services and communal prayer. The book aims to shift the perception of Lent towards one of hopeful anticipation and spiritual growth.

7. The Roots of Abstinence: Historical and Theological Foundations of Ethiopian Orthodox Fasting

This scholarly work traces the historical and theological roots of fasting practices within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. It delves into the Old and New Testament injunctions for fasting, as well as the early Church Fathers' contributions to its development. The book provides a robust academic understanding of why and how fasting has been integral to Ethiopian Christian identity for centuries.

8. A Taste of Devotion: Fasting Foods and Their Spiritual Significance in Ethiopia

This unique book explores the specific foods that are permitted and abstained from during Ethiopian Orthodox fasts and explains their symbolic and spiritual significance. It examines how these dietary choices are intertwined with the overarching goal of spiritual purification and deeper connection with God. Readers will discover the thoughtful design behind the fasting diet and its role in communal worship.

9. The Rhythm of Prayer and Fasting: Navigating the Ethiopian Orthodox Liturgical Year

This title focuses on the interconnectedness of prayer and fasting within the rhythmic flow of the Ethiopian Orthodox liturgical year. It illustrates how fasting periods are accompanied by heightened

prayer life, increased attendance at services, and a general intensification of spiritual discipline. The book provides a framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between these two essential components of Orthodox Christian life.

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