

Orthodox faithful mark Christmas with services, celebration

MOSCOW (AP) — For much of the Orthodox Christian world, Thursday is celebrated as Christmas Day. Believers in Russia, Ukraine, and parts of Eastern Europe and the Middle East flocked to churches for the holiday.

Some Orthodox churches follow the liturgical calendar observed by the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and celebrate Christmas on Dec. 25.

A look at Christmas events throughout the world Thursday:

Russia

As Christmas approached across the sprawling country's nine time zones, Russians flocked to churches for long and solemn Masses. At Moscow's enormous Christ The Savior Cathedral, the service began at 11 p.m. on Wednesday and stretched two and a half hours, led by Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, with the devout standing shoulder-to-shoulder.

President Vladimir Putin attended a midnight service at a church in the village of Turginovo, about 90 miles northwest of Moscow, where his parents were baptized.

Soldiers taking part in Russia's airstrikes in Syria attended a nighttime service in a tent on the Russian air base. The tent's walls were lined with icons and a few strings of purple lights were festooned at its entrance.

In his Christmas greetings to the nation, Putin said: "It is very important in these days that the Russian Orthodox Church and other Christian confessions in Russia continue the traditions of responsible service, help people find belief and give them force in life. They participate actively in upbringing of the growing



Children dressed in national flag costumes take a part in a religious procession to mark Orthodox Christmas in Tbilisi, Georgia, Thursday. Christmas falls on Jan. 7 for Orthodox Christians that use the old Julian calendar.

generations, in development of the institutes of family, maternity and childhood."

Egypt

Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Christians celebrated Christmas Eve across the mainly Muslim country amid tightened security for fear of militant attacks, which have exponentially increased following the military overthrow of an Islamist president.

Roadblocks were set up before churches nationwide and cars and motorcycles were temporarily banned from idling in front of them, police Maj. Gen. Gamal Halawa said. In Cairo alone, police searched over 300 churches for explosives.

Egypt's Orthodox Coptic Christians fervently supported the 2013 ouster of Islamist President Mohammed Morsi. Ever since, Christian homes, businesses and churches have

been more targeted.

"We have been late in restoring and fixing what has been burned... Everything will be fixed... Please accept our apologies for what happened," President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, who as military chief led Morsi's overthrow, told the crowd on Wednesday at Cairo's St. Mark Cathedral, the papal seat, in a rare public apology and acknowledgement of the attacks. Egyptian presidents never attended Christmas masses, making el-Sissi's visit this year, the second of its kind, doubly appreciated.

The heightened security measures were in part a preparation for the Jan. 25 anniversary of the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime autocrat Hosni Mubarak. Officials including el-Sissi have voiced concern about attempts to mark the anniversary of the revolt with

protests in recent weeks.

Egypt's Orthodox Coptic Christians make up about 10 percent of the country's 90 million people.

Georgia

In Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, the main avenue was crowded with colorfully dressed marchers in the traditional Christmas Day procession, collecting gifts and goods to donate to the needy.

The tradition, called "Alilo" (Glory to God), dates back centuries, when people would go out to collect alms for charity after Christmas Mass. It was banned during Soviet times, and restored only in 2000.

The procession included people dressed in robes displaying Georgia's national emblem of a red cross on white background and others in outfits symbolizing scenes



Macedonian Christian Orthodox Archbishop Stefan holds a crucifix during holy Christmas liturgy in St. Clement's Cathedral church in Skopje, Macedonia, Thursday.

of the Nativity. Some rode in carts pulled by donkeys or cattle, and other carried animal mock-ups including a camel and giraffe.

"This procession is an attempt to share the happiness with all those people who could not celebrate Christmas because of illness or poverty. We will go to all of them and bring gifts," said Father Kakhaber Gogotishvili, a priest who took part

Ukraine

President Petro Poroshenko and his family attended Christmas services at a village church in the Ivano-Frankiivsk region in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. According to the presidential press service, Poroshenko and others prayed for peace and reconciliation "on all Ukrainian land."

Conflict between Ukrainian forces and Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine persists, although the intensity has diminished in recent months. Rebels said on Wednesday that they were prepared to release some of the conflict's prisoners on Christmas, but Ukrainian

authorities made no direct public response and there were reports Thursday of a release taking place.

Macedonia

In Macedonia, where about 65 percent of the population identify themselves as Orthodox, people gathered in churches before eating traditional Christmas dinners at home.

The country's church leader, Archbishop Stefan, in a Christmas message urged the faithful to strive to "strengthen spiritual and national unity" — following months of political turmoil that ended with an agreement between the two largest political parties for early elections in the spring.

"As Orthodox Christians we have an opportunity to examine our faith. The Holy Church, invites us, especially on this day, to show goodwill and strive to peace with all nations," Stefan said.

Observing tradition, children around the country went door to door singing carols Thursday, while large bonfires were lit in neighborhoods overnight.

BRIEFLY

Man behind armed Oregon band says he's on mission from God

PORTLAND (AP) — The man behind the armed occupation of a federal wildlife refuge comes from a Mormon family that has been challenging government authority for at least two decades.

Ammon Bundy, like his father in previous confrontations, says he is following directions from God when explaining the anti-government movement he is attempting to lead.

In a statement issued Monday, Mormon leaders said the Oregon land dispute "is not a church matter," but they condemned the seizure and said they were "deeply troubled" by reports that suggest the armed group is acting "based on Scriptural principles."

Cruz likens campaign to religious revival

ONAWA, Iowa (AP) — Texas Sen. Ted Cruz is comparing his GOP presidential campaign to a religious revival and is urging Iowans to pray daily until the Feb. 1 caucuses.

At a campaign stop Tuesday, Cruz quoted a Bible verse he said applies to America today: "If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear their prayer and forgive their sins and I will heal their land."

Cruz asked his supporters to pray "that the awakening, that the revival that is sweeping this country, that it continue and grow."

Otherwise, he said, "the country every one of us loves will be lost."

Former MMA fighter shares faith at Aglow

WALLA WALLA — Doug Murphy will share his testimony about his encounter with Jesus while he was a professional MMA fighter during the upcoming Walla Walla Aglow.

A pastor in Milton-Freewater, Murphy was raised in southern California. His life spiraled out of control after an injury prevented him from playing football for the University of Washington. He later became passionate about God while attending a Bible study at a mixed martial arts gym in Seattle.

Murphy will share his story Saturday at 10 a.m. at Whitman Court, 305 Ash St., Walla Walla. A freewill offering will be taken for the event, which includes lunch. Aglow, which started in 1967, is an international organization that seeks to minister to its members and share God's word in the community. Everyone is welcome to attend.

For more information, call Paula McKee at 509-220-1408 or Darya Tucker at 509-876-1668. For more about Aglow, visit www.aglow.org.

Nazarene church offers marriage class

HERMISTON — A six-week marriage class at Hermiston Church of the Nazarene will help participants learn to grow closer to God.

God's Dream for Your Marriage begins Thursday, Jan. 14 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the church's Ministry Center, 1520 W. Orchard Ave., Hermiston. Childcare and snacks are provided. A small donation is requested to assist with supplies.

For more information, call 541-567-3677.

Clothes Closet needs winter apparel

PENDLETON — Donations of gently used, freshly laundered clothing are being accepted for the Clothes Closet at the First United Methodist Church in Pendleton.

Particular needs include winter apparel. Donations can be dropped off at the church, 352 E. Second St., Pendleton.

For more information, contact 541-276-2616 or preachervet@gmail.com.

Friday's faith page features local, national and international faith-related news. Send information about local faith-related news and events, including concerts, special speakers and activities to community@eastoregonian.com or drop off to the attention of Tammy Malgesini at 333 E. Main St., Hermiston or Renee Struthers at 211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton. Call 541-564-4539 or 541-966-0818 with questions.

Church DIRECTORY

<p>Redeemer Episcopal Church 241 SE Second St. Pendleton (541) 276-3809 www.pendletonepiscopal.org Sunday Morning Worship 9:00 a.m. Wednesday Worship Noon Wednesday Evening Prayer and Pot Luck 6:00 p.m. All Are Welcome</p>	<p>Peace Lutheran Church ELCA 210 NW 9th, Pendleton Join us Sundays 9:30 am Sunday Worship 10:30 am Fellowship 11:00 am Sunday School & Adult Class ~Come and be at Peace~ on 1290 KUMA noon each Sunday</p>	<p>Faith Center Church Worshiping God Loving People 108 S. Main • 276-9569 Sunday Worship 10:30 am Sr. Pastor, Ray O'Grady pendletonfaithcenter.org</p>	<p>NEW HOPE COMMUNITY CHURCH 1350 S. Highway 395, Hermiston Sunday Worship Services English- Pastor Dave Andrus 9:00 & 10:45 am Spanish- Pastor Genaro Loreda 9:00 & 10:15 am <i>Classes for kids during all services</i> For more information call 541-567-8441</p>	<p>Seventh-Day Adventist Church Saturday Services Pendleton 1401 SW Goodwin Place 276-0882 Sabbath School 9:20 am Worship Service 10:45 am</p>
<p>Community Presbyterian Church 14 Martin Drive, Umatilla, OR 922-3250 Worship: 10 AM Sunday School at 11:30</p>	<p>PILOT ROCK BAPTIST CHURCH 585 SW Birch, Pilot Rock, OR 97868 (541) 443-2500 prbconline.blogspot.com Sunday School: 9:30 am Worship Service: 10:45 am Wednesday Services: Kids' Club: 6:00 pm Youth Group: 7:00 pm</p>	<p>GRACE AND MERCY LUTHERAN CHURCH, ELCA OPEN HEARTS - OPEN DOOR www.graceandmercy.lutheran.org Sunday Worship 9:00 a.m. (Nursery Provided) Fellowship, Refreshments & Sunday School Check Out our Facebook Page or Website for More Information 541-289-4535 Tom Inch, Pastor Grace and Mercy Lutheran Church, ELCA 164 E. Main St. / P.O. Box 1108 Hermiston, Oregon 97838</p>	<p>Grace Baptist Church 555 SW 11th, Hermiston 567-9497 <i>Nursery provided for all services</i> Sunday School - 9:30 AM Worship - 10:45 AM 6:00 pm Wed Prayer & Worship - 7:00 PM "Proclaiming God's word, growing in God's grace"</p>	
<p>St. Johns Episcopal Church All People Are Welcome Scripture, Tradition and Reason Family service 9am Sunday Gladys Ave & 7th Hermiston Fr. Dan Lediard, Priest, PH: 567-6672</p>	<p>FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH <i>in Mission for Christ LCMC</i> Bible Study.....9:00 AM Sunday Worship.....10:30 AM Red Lion Hotel (Oregon Trail Room) www.faithpendleton.org</p>	<p>First United Methodist Church 352 SE 2nd Street Pendleton, OR 541-276-2616 Sunday Worship 9am Open Hearts, Open Hands, Open Doors Facebook: www.facebook.com/FUMCPendleton Services are broadcast every Sunday on KUMA-1290 AM @ 11am Rev. Dr. Jim Pierce, pastor</p>	<p>Come meet Jesus at PENDLETON BAPTIST CHURCH 3202 SW Nye Ave Pendleton, OR 541-276-7590 Sunday Morning Worship 11:00 AM Sunday Bible Classes 9:45 AM Sunday Youth Group 6:00 PM Mon. Community Women's Study 9:30 AM & 6 PM Awana Kids Club (K-6th grade) Wed Men's Study 6 PM MOPS meeting the 1st Thur of the Month 6 PM</p>	
<p>FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH -Presbyterian Church (USA)- 201 SW Dorion Ave. Pendleton Service of Worship - 10:00 am Children's Sunday School - 10:20 am Fellowship - 11:00 am www.pendletonpresbyterian.com Open Hearted...Open Minded</p>	<p>PENDLETON FIRST CHURCH OF GOD FIRST SERVICE 8:30 AM SECOND SERVICE 10:30 AM 712 SW 27th ST. 541-276-1894 www.fcogpendleton.com</p>	<p>THE COUNTRY CHURCH Pastor James Becker 32742 Diagonal RD Hermiston OR 97838 Sunday School 10 am Worship 7 am Evening Service 7 pm Bible Study Wednesdays 7 pm Firestarter Youth Ministry (Ages 12-17) Monday @ 6 pm</p>	<p>Living Word Christian Center Sunday Worship 10:00am Wednesday Bible Study 7:00pm Youth Classes - Nursery-6th grade Sun & Wed YOUTH GROUPS: Jr Hi, Wed 7pm Sr Hi, Sun after the service Sharon Miller, Pastor 401 Northgate, Pendleton 541-278-9882 www.livingwordcc.com</p>	
<p>a place to belong Pendleton First INVITING ENRICHING INVOLVING EMPOWERING SUNDAY SERVICES AM Celebration-10:00am AM Kids Place -10:00am The Connection--6:00pm Groups for all ages: Adults, Children, Youth, & College</p>	<p>The Salvation Army Center for Worship & Service Sunday Worship Service 9:30 - Sunday School 10:30 - Worship Service Wednesday Bible Study 5:30 Family Fellowship Meal 6:00 Bible Study COME AS YOU ARE 150 SE EMIGRANT (541) 276-3369</p>	<p>St. Paul Anglican Church, APA Currently Located at 119 SW Quinney Pl., Home Church in Pendleton @ Sunridge Estates 541-303-1261 Holy Communion - 1st & 3rd Sunday Morning Prayer - 2nd, 4th & 5th Sunday All Services - 10:00am Sundays The Rev. Fr. Vincent Varnas facebook.com/stpaulanglicanchurchapa</p>	<p>BAHA'I FAITH "The Unity of All Mankind" Pendleton Baha'i Center at 1015 SE Court Place Devotions Sundays @ 11:00am; Everyone invited! (541) 276-9360 visit us at www.pendletonbahais.org</p>	
<p>FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) 215 N Main • Pendleton Sunday Worship: 10:40a Bible Class: 9:30a Office 276-5358 M-F 8:30-12:30 WWW.FCCPENDLETON.ORG</p>	<p>To share your worship times call Amanda Jacobs 541-278-2683</p>			