



THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS

information sheet featuring prayers, readings, reflections, activities and songs

A PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS

God, our Father,
our human nature is the
wonderful work of your hands,
made still more wonderful by
your work of redemption.
Your Son took to himself our
manhood:
grant us a share in the godhead
of Jesus Christ,
Who lives and reigns with you in
the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

*Evening Prayer from the Office of
Readings, Christmas Day*



JOY TO THE WORLD, THE LORD IS COME!

In the Old Testament we read of several special births: Sarah, the wife of Abraham, gave birth to Isaac in her old age; the wife of Manoah was sterile yet gave birth to Samson; and Elizabeth, Mary's cousin, despite her barrenness brought John the Baptist into the world. These special births point us to the most special birth of all, the faith of these parents and their children point us, to Jesus Christ whose nativity we celebrate at Christmas. The Nativity of the Lord, Jesus' birth, was the turning point of all of history, everything before lead to it and all that follows is to be seen in its light.

Christmas Day in the Western Church includes both Christmas Eve (after sunset on 24 Dec) and Christmas Day (25 Dec). The season of Christmas, though, can last for the twelve days of the famous song or even for 40 days depending on your tradition. Eastern Churches, such as the Russian Orthodox, and some Churches in Communion with Rome, such as the Eritreans, celebrate the Lord's Nativity on 7 January. Indeed in some parishes, where two Rites are celebrated, will have two Christmas Masses, twelve days apart!

While Easter is the most important feast in the Christian calendar, many people celebrate Christmas (a combination of the words 'Christ' and 'Mass') as the most important. In the Early Church, birthdays were not ordinarily celebrated and instead the deaths of saints were honoured. It is not, therefore, surprising

THE THREE WISE MEN AND THEIR GIFTS

The Twelve Days of Christmas last from Christmas Eve to the Epiphany (6 Jan). It is on the Epiphany that we recall the three wise men and their worship of Jesus, tradition calls them:

Melchior a **Persian scholar**;

Caspar an **Indian scholar**;

Balthazar an **Arabian scholar**.

The gifts they brought have great meaning:

Gold a **symbol of earthly kingship**;

Frankincense a **symbol of deity**;

Myrrh a **symbol of death**.



*Poinsettia, red:
Christ's blood*



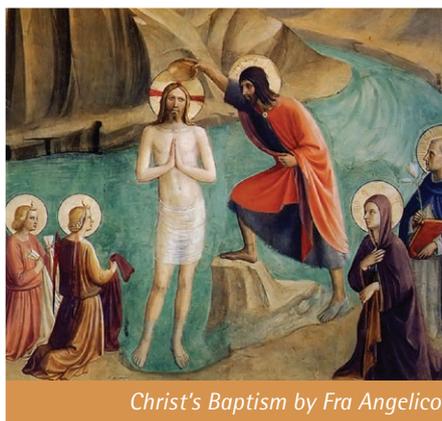
*Gold, Myrrh &
Frankincense*



*The completed
crib scene*

GOD IS WITH US

that we do not know the exact date on which Jesus was born. Jesus' birth has been celebrated on 25 December since the early fourth century when the Church received official status in the Roman Empire. In the Church's year Christmas is one of only three birthdays we celebrate (along with the Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Baptist).



Christ's Baptism by Fra Angelico

Of all the traditions associated with Christmas one of the most popular is the crib (or crèche). The practice of setting up a manger scene did not arise until the mid-12th century and is attributed to St Francis of Assisi, who wanted to emphasize the poor and humble circumstances in which Jesus was born.

Other feasts in the Christmas season include: St Stephen, the first Christian martyr (26 Dec) St John, Apostle and Evangelist (27 Dec); Holy Innocents (28 Dec); Sunday after 25 Dec is The Holy Family; Mary, Mother of God (1 Jan); the Epiphany (6 Jan) and on the Sunday after 6 Jan, The Baptism of the Lord.

HAVE A SING!

Could there be a better time in the Church's year than Christmas in which to indulge a passion for singing! Songs about the birth of Christ such as Away in a Manger and God Rest You Merry Gentlemen are firm favourites. That said, the Christmas season lasts for weeks - perhaps pick a tune a week and sing a verse a day for night prayer.

HAVE A GO!

There are so many particular traditions for Christmas and each family will likely have their own too. One way of extending the season would be to open a small gift each day of the season rather than all gifts at once. Perhaps too you can make room for those without friends and family in your prayers and at your table?

READINGS FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

Christmas Vigil
celebrated during the afternoon or evening before Christmas Day
Isaiah 62:1-5; Acts 13:16-17, 22-25;
either Matthew 1:1-25 or 1:18-25

Midnight Mass
celebrated during the night before Christmas day
Isaiah 9:1-7; Titus 2:11-14;
Luke 2:1-14

Dawn Mass
celebrated at dawn on Christmas Day
Isaiah 62:11-12; Titus 3:4-7;
Luke 2:15-20

Daytime Mass
celebrated on Christmas Day
Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6;
either John 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14

Holy Family
either Ecclesiasticus 3:3-7, 14-17
or Genesis 15:1-6, 21:1-3;
Colossians 3:12-21 or 3:12-17 or
Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19;
either Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22, 39-40

Mary, Mother of God (1 Jan)
Numbers 6:22-27; Galatians 4:4-7;
Luke 2:16-21

Epiphany
Isaiah 60:1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6;
Matthew 2:1-12

Baptism of the Lord
either Isaiah 55:1-11
or Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; either 1 John 5:1-9
or Acts 10:34-38; Mark 1:7-11

Gregory Nazianzen (d.390) The Wonder of the Incarnation

The very Son of God, older than the ages, the invisible, the incomprehensible, the light of light, the fountain of life and immortality: he takes our nature for the good of our nature, an intelligent soul for the good of my soul. He takes to himself all that is human, except for sin. He was conceived by the Virgin Mary, who had been first prepared in soul and body by the Spirit. He who makes rich is made poor; he takes on the poverty of my flesh, that I may gain the riches of his divinity. He who is full is made empty; he is emptied for a brief space of his glory, that I may share in his fullness. We have died with him, that we may be purified. We have risen again with him, because we have died with him. We have been glorified with him, because we have risen again with him.



The liturgical colour for Christmas is white (or gold)

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