

GOD WITH US

A Prayer Guide for the Season of Christmas
in a Time of Pandemic



2020

What is Christmas?

Christmas has become one of the most important feasts in the Christian calendar. The New Testament gives no date or year for the birth of Jesus. In fact, for the first three centuries there is very little evidence of Christians celebrating the nativity of Jesus. The first Christmas celebrations seem to begin around the beginning of the fourth century. In an effort to Christianise the Roman winter festival of light, Christians began to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Jesus, whom the author of the Gospel of John describes as “a light that shines in the dark...” (Jn: 1:4) on the 25th of December. The English word, ‘Christmas’, first appears around the tenth century as *Cristes-messe*, or literally ‘Christ’s Mass’ celebrated on the day of his birth.

A Spiritual Opportunity

The contemporary celebration of Christmas is a mix of religious and cultural traditions and customs. While modern times have seen the feast take on commercial and secular tones, at its heart, it still remains for many the celebration of the Birth of Jesus Christ. Retelling the story of the first Christmas has the innate power to inspire moments of spiritual reflection and renewal along with the practice of charity and outreach to those who are in need. It has become an important time to gather as a family and indeed to gather as a Christian community. This year, the restrictions in place because of the Coronavirus mean that we may not be in a position to gather as usual for our religious services. This situation challenges us to find new ways of reflecting on our faith and praying in our homes. It is hoped that this guide will assist you in doing just that.

Christmas Traditions

Christmas is a season rich in traditions from the lighting of lights to the decoration of trees - from the giving of gifts to the magic of Santa, from gathering for midnight Mass to the customary meals together. The singing of carols and the construction of the nativity scene or crib, all help to make the season special and to bring the birth of Jesus to life in our day.

For Younger Family Members

At various points throughout this guide there are places for the younger members of a household to get involved. Art materials – paper, pens, and paints would be helpful at these times. So too would a guiding hand from an adult.

Broadcast Masses

While nothing can substitute for gathering in person, we are blessed to live in an age where the celebration of the Eucharist can be broadcast on radio or television or by means of the internet. This guide is also designed to help deepen your participation in those broadcasts and to assist you in getting the most out of them spiritually.

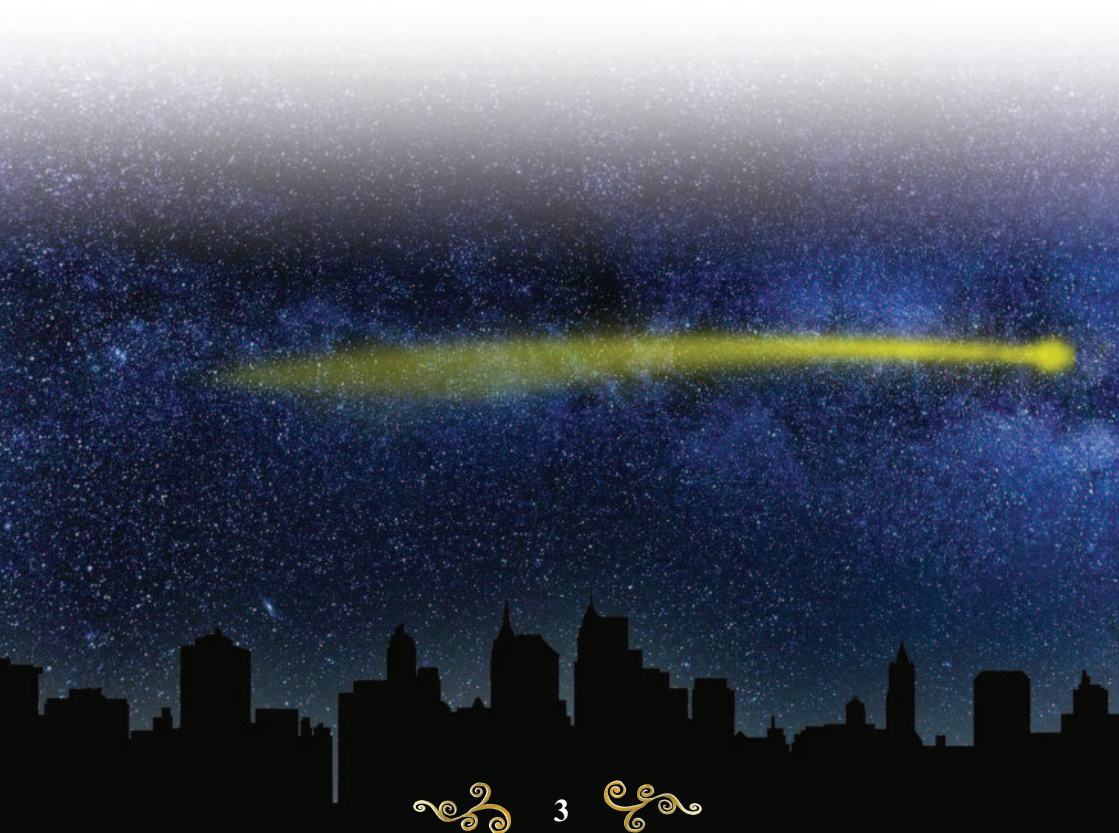


Call to Action

Followers of Jesus are called to be people of action. During each of our days of prayer there will be a call to action. To do something different or significant that puts the message of that particular day into practice.

Safety

This guide is designed for use by a single household. All health and safety advice should be adhered to. When using candles, please do so safely.



A Time of Reconciliation with God and with One Another

21st December 2020

(or on any day before Christmas)



Christmas can be a time for new beginnings. As this year's celebrations approach let us open our lives to God's healing and transforming presence and let us be reconciled with God and with one another. One of the ways of bringing this reconciliation about is by celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). Check out the times of a Service of Reconciliation or Confession at a church near you. Plan a time to attend, perhaps with your family. Celebrating this short service beforehand may help you to prepare.

This service may also be of help to those who are vulnerable and who, this year, cannot go out to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) or those who may be joining an online reconciliation service. In such cases Pope Francis gives the following advice: "If you cannot find a priest to confess to, speak directly with God, your Father, and tell him the truth. Say, 'Lord, I did this, this, this. Forgive me,' and ask for pardon with all your heart". Make an act of contrition, the Pope said, and promise God, 'I will go to confession afterward, but forgive me now. And immediately you will return to a state of grace with God.' (*Pope Francis, 2020*)

Gather alone or with your household before your advent wreath or crib. Light the candles on the wreath or a candle near the crib. Focus on the empty manger – it stands ready to receive Jesus. Bring before the scene your own life – how open and how ready are you to welcome the presence of God into your heart and your home this Christmas? How willing are you to allow God's presence to shape and mould your life in love towards others?

This ritual should be celebrated quietly and slowly giving time to reflect on one's life and to open your heart to receive the forgiving and healing love of God.

As we begin ...

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Let us listen to God's Word ...

Luke 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was going through the town and suddenly a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance; he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He kept trying to see where Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today.' And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully. They all complained when they saw what was happening. 'He has gone to stay at a sinner's house,' they said. But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the Lord, 'Look, sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody, I will pay him back four times the amount.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham; for the Son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost.'

Let us reflect ...

"Zacchaeus welcomed him gladly" ... How lovely it is to receive an invitation from a friend or family member to visit and perhaps to share a meal with them. The current Covid-19 restrictions and the necessity of "being apart" has heightened our consciousness of how enriching it is to reach out and spend time in the company of other people. We are told that Zacchaeus was a rather greedy man. Greed causes us to focus on ourselves and to exclude others from our lives. In the process we are both impoverished and diminished as human beings.

Jesus senses Zacchaeus' greed-induced isolation and the hurt and harm it was causing him. He wants to break through the barriers Zacchaeus' greed had erected.

Instead of waiting for Zacchaeus to invite him to visit, Jesus reaches out and boldly invites him himself. In a certain sense we expect Zacchaeus – true to form – to refuse. However, he does not. The Gospel states that Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus gladly and as the saying goes, the rest is history. That outreach from Jesus and that acceptance from Zacchaeus meant the walls of greed and isolation came tumbling down. Zacchaeus began to change. To be less self-obsessed and more other orientated. It was this change that was to make all the difference to the quality of his life.

At Christmas time – God says to each of us “come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today.” If we “welcome him gladly” it can begin a process of profound renewal in our lives. In time, it can make all the difference! *(Aileen Cawley, 2020)*

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection

Children's Activity

During the reflection time children in the house might be invited to draw a picture of Jesus speaking with Zacchaeus – include speech bubbles to bring that conversation to life.

Examination of Conscience

Let us pause, deep down in the silence of our heart, to examine our conscience.

(pause – and take your time)

How have I failed to love God, failed to do what is right, failed to love others?

Confession of Sin

Using your own words, in the silence of your heart, speak directly to God about your sins.

(Pause – and take your time)

‘Lord, I did this ..., this ..., this ... Forgive me!’ and ask for pardon with all your heart.

Act of Contrition

Then say: O my God, I thank you for loving me, I am sorry for all my sins, help me to live like Jesus and not to sin again. **Amen**

Commitment to Celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Dear Lord, I firmly resolve, once I can, to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but good Lord forgive me now. **Amen**

Prayer of St Francis (pause)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light
And where there is sadness, joy. **Amen**

Blessing

The Lord bless us and keep us; The Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us; The Lord turn his face toward us and give us his peace both now and forever. **Amen**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Call to Action

Be reconciled with someone. Volunteer to help out in your local parish over the Christmas period. Make a donation to St Vincent de Paul or Trócaire. Help someone in need.



Christmas Eve

24th December 2020



In many places, Christmas Eve is a day of fasting in preparation for the celebration of the great feast that marks the birth of Jesus. Traditionally, Christians have gathered deep in the night to celebrate the Mass of Midnight. There, the story of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and the particular circumstances of the birth of Jesus are retold and relived so as to enrich our present. This is indeed a holy night!

O Holy night! The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
'Til He appears and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn
Fall on your knees; O hear the Angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born
O night divine, O night, O night divine!



A Prayer Ritual at Home

Wrap the figure of Jesus and place it underneath your Christmas tree or with your other gifts. Place an unlit candle before or beside the crib. Have some Holy Water to hand to bless the crib. Pause to still your life and become aware of God's presence with you.

As we begin ...

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Let us pray (pause)

Father, you make this holy night radiant with the splendour of Jesus Christ, our light. We welcome him as Lord, the true light of the world. Bring us to eternal joy in the kingdom of heaven where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

Let us listen to God's Word ...

Luke 2:1-14

In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today, in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.'

Let us reflect ...

What joy the news of a new-born baby brings for families, relatives and friends. The lowly and humble shepherds spent day after day tending to their flock – caring and protecting their sheep. These committed carers were the first to receive the news of the nearby birth of a baby. Unknown to themselves, they were invited to be part of that first Christmas story. They were to be caught up in the single most important event in the history of humanity. For in that baby “wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger”, God himself had come to visit. Not in the power of his deity but rather in the meekness of a tiny child and in the poverty of a stable in a far off corner of the world.

It seemed God was a carer too. In that new-born baby, he was to reveal that he cared for each and every human person. His loving gaze fell most of all upon those who found themselves lost or on the margins of life.

There, in that place, began a new and definitive stage of the story of God's loving outreach to this world of ours. This divine outreach has within it the power to change everyone and everything for the best. This Christmas night 2020, after the year we have had, let us like the shepherds journey in our hearts to that stable. Let us wonder before the new-born baby. Let us become part of the story which, although it began those many years ago, continues today. A story which has the power, now as it did then, to change and transform our lives for the better. Let us go and see! (Aileen Cawley, 2020)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection

Children's Activity

Make a birthday card for Jesus – include your own birthday message to him.

Ritual Action

Take the wrapped figure of Jesus from under the tree and open it. If there are children present, have one of them place the baby Jesus in the crib. Sing together:

*Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
'Round yon virgin Mother and Child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace
Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight!
Glories stream from heaven afar;
Heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!
Christ the Saviour is born!
Christ the Saviour is born!*

Blessing of the Crib

God of every nation and people, from the very beginning of creation you have made manifest your love: when our need for a Saviour was great, you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. To our lives he brings joy and peace, justice, mercy and love. Lord, bless all who look upon this manger; may it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus, and raise up our thoughts to him, who is God-with-us and Saviour of all, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. **Amen**

The crib may be sprinkled with some Holy Water

Intercessions

We take a moment to bring before God our needs and the needs of the world on this special night:

Lord Jesus, help us create a manger in our hearts this Christmas, where you and your message may find a true home. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for our families – those who are here with us, those who cannot be with us and those who have gone home to God. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for those who are homeless or hungry, sick or sad, in poverty or at war this night. May we be generous and supportive in our response to others need. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Add your own intercessions here. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Our Father ...

Prayer (pause)

“What can I give him, Poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb,

If I were a wise man, I would do my part,

Yet what I can I give Him - Give my heart.” (Christina Rosetti)

Amen

Blessing

The Lord bless us and keep us; The Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us; The Lord turn his face toward us and give us his peace both now and forever. **Amen**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Call to Action

Write a blessing for Santa and put it with his treat. Spend some time in prayer before the crib – take each character and try to see the scene through their eyes.

Online Celebration of the Eucharist

Before the broadcast begins:

- Gather with other members of your household, if you can.
- Light all the candles on your Advent wreath including the white one.
Place the figure of the Baby Jesus in your crib and light a candle near it.

During the broadcast look out for the following:

- While this Mass was traditionally celebrated **at midnight**, it is now celebrated in many places once the sun has set.
- The priest will wear **white or gold vestments this evening, a symbol of celebration.**
- Normally at the beginning of the service, the **figure of the Baby Jesus is placed in the crib** and the crib is blessed.
- The **white candle is lit on the advent wreath** symbolising that Advent is now over and the Christmas season has begun.
- The **Readings** focus on the arrival in Jesus of the Messiah longed for by the people of Israel. In the **First Reading**, the Prophet Isaiah speaks of a time when a child is born for us, a son given to us who will be called “Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace.” The **Psalms** proclaims “Today a saviour has been born to us; he is Christ the Lord.” In the **Second Reading**, from the Letter to Titus, we hear that God’s grace has been revealed and has made salvation possible for all of humanity. In the **Gospel** – the familiar story is told of how Jesus came to be born at Bethlehem in Judea at the time of Cesar Augustus.
- The Eucharist will be celebrated as normal. At communion time make an Act of **Spiritual Communion**. Place yourself among the shepherds before the crib – look upon the scene and savour the presence of the Christ Child.

Take away ...

What does living out Christmas mean for a Christian? Is Jesus just some famous person from the past or is he really God come among us to make a difference to our lives?

Christmas Day

25th December 2020



Today we contemplate the significance of what happened the night before. In the Child of Bethlehem, God himself has reached out of his mystery towards this world of ours. In the person of Jesus Christ, God's eternal Word has entered time and come to live with us. We no longer walk alone. God now walks with us: a light in the darkness and a guide for life's journey. His presence turns hearts to thoughts of good rather than bad, love instead of hatred, peace rather than war. "Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation; Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above! Glory to God, Glory in the highest."

A Prayer Ritual at Home

Gather around the crib and place an unlit candle before or beside it. Pause to still your life and become aware of God's presence with you.

As we begin ...

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Let us pray (pause)

Oh, come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant! Oh, come ye, oh come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold him, born the King of angels; Oh Come let us adore him, Oh Come let us adore him, Christ the Lord. **Amen**

Let us listen to God's Word ...

John 1:1-18

What has come into being in him was life, life that was the light of men; and light shines in darkness, and darkness could not overpower it. The Word was the real light that gives light to everyone; he was coming into the world. [...] The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory.

Let us reflect ...

In these winter months with their short days, we find ourselves waking up in darkness and returning home from work or school in darkness too. It seems that darkness is almost overpowering us. We dream of and long for the brighter evenings, the warmer days, where there is more light than darkness, more warmth than cold. We look forward to spring where new life begins to grow. Seeds come to life and bare branches sprout green shoots.

In the Gospel of John, light and darkness become powerful symbols. Light points to goodness while darkness conjures up images of all that is bad. From the beginning, Christians have been adamant that in Jesus, God had sent a ray of goodness into the world that darkness could never overpower. God himself had come to live among us to begin a revolution of love, a time of renewal and transformation of our entire world. This is the invitation that each year the celebration of Christmas holds out to us – the real possibility of change and renewal for ourselves and our world. Change where we allow the dark areas of our lives to be lit by the light of Jesus' wisdom. Change where we bring that wisdom, gained to enlighten the darkened areas of our families, our communities and our world. (*Aileen Cawley, 2020*)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

Children's Activity

Draw a picture of your favourite character from the nativity scene – use a thought or speech bubble to record what they might be thinking or saying.

Ritual Action

Light the candle before the crib and pray or sing:

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus, laid down his sweet head. The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay. The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay. The cattle are lowing. The Baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes. I love you, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky and stay by my side until morning is nigh. Be near me, Lord Jesus. I ask you to stay close by me forever and love me I pray. Bless all the dear children, in your tender care and fit us for heaven to live with you there. (*William J. Kirkpatrick*)

Intercessions

We take a moment to bring before God our needs and the needs of the world on this special day.

We pray for Christians throughout the world who hold these days sacred. We remember especially those who are persecuted because of their faith. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for our families – those who are here with us, those who cannot be with us and those who have gone home to God. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for an increase in faith – that God has truly reached out to us in Jesus and that he walks with us in the good and bad times of life's journey. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Add your own intercessions here. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Our Father ...

Prayer (pause)

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold. In that hour vouchsafe, I beseech Thee, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires, through the merits of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of His blessed Mother. **Amen**

Blessing

The Lord bless us and keep us; The Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us; The Lord turn his face toward us and give us his peace both now and forever. **Amen**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Call to Action

Make a point this day of praying before and after Christmas dinner. Call or text someone whom you have not been in contact with for a while, to wish them a happy Christmas.

For the Christmas Season a Prayer at Mealtime

Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the gift of family and friends.

We give you thanks for gathering us around this table today.

Bless our time together. We remember those who are absent from our company: those who cannot be with us* and those who now feast at your table in heaven.*

We pray for the lonely and the sad, the homeless and the hungry.

Give us a loving heart and a generous spirit to make our world a better place.

For those who prepared this food and for what we are about to receive, we give you thanks, O loving Father, through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**here you may wish to wish then a Happy Christmas*



Online Celebration of the Eucharist

Before the broadcast begins:

- Gather with other members of your household, if you can.
- Light all the candles on your Advent wreath including the white one or light a candle before your crib.

During the broadcast look out for the following:

- The priest will wear **white or gold vestments this evening, a symbol of celebration.**
- The **white candle is lit on the Advent wreath** symbolising that Advent is now over and the Christmas season has begun.
- The **First Reading** from the Prophet Isaiah speaks of the coming of one who brings good news, heralds peace, brings happiness and proclaims salvation. The **Psalms** proclaims “All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.” In the **Second Reading**, the letter to the Hebrews states the early Christian belief that God has spoken to us through his son – the Son who is the “radiant light of God’s glory.” The **Gospel** from the Prologue of John, recounts the early belief that Jesus was indeed God who had come to live among us as a light in the darkness – a light that darkness cannot overpower.
- At communion time, make an Act of **Spiritual Communion**. Place yourself before the crib – wonder at how in this Child the eternal God has entered time. Bow down before his presence.

Take away ...

What does it really mean to me that God has reached out to us in Jesus Christ? What is my response to be?

Feast of the Holy Family

27th December 2020



“Today our gaze on the Holy Family lets us also be drawn into the simplicity of the life they led in Nazareth. It is an example that does our families great good, helping them increasingly to become communities of love and reconciliation, in which tenderness, mutual help, and mutual forgiveness is experienced. Let us remember the three key words for living in peace and joy in the family: “may I”, “thank you” and “sorry”. In our family, when we are not intrusive and ask “may I”, in our family when we are not selfish and learn to say “thank you”, and when in a family one realises he has done something wrong and knows how to say “sorry”, in that family there is peace and joy. Let us remember these three words. Can we repeat them all together: may I, thank you, sorry. (Everyone: may I, thank you, sorry!) I would also like to encourage families to become aware of the importance they have in the Church and in society. The proclamation of the Gospel, in fact, first passes through the family to reach the various spheres of daily life. Let us fervently call upon Mary Most Holy, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, and St Joseph her spouse. Let us ask them to enlighten, comfort and guide every family in the world, so that they may fulfil with dignity and peace the mission which God has entrusted to them. (Pope Francis, 2013)

A Prayer Ritual at Home

Gather around the crib. Have an unlit candle before or near it. Have to hand a family picture or pictures of your family members nearby. Pause to still your life and become aware of God's presence with you.

As we begin ...

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Let us pray (pause)

Eternal Father, we want to live as Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in peace with you and one another. May this communion strengthen us to face the troubles of life. We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. **Amen**

Let us listen to God's Word ...

Luke 2:22, 39-40

When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And as the child grew to maturity, he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

Let us reflect ...

Jesus grew up in a family! Today's Feast of the Holy Family reminds us of the importance of family and family life. Amid the ever changing tides of our contemporary world – Christian wisdom, over and over again, points to the family as of key importance not only for the church, but also for our local communities and for society in general. Pope Francis speaks of the Family as “a good that society cannot do without” and he insists that “it ought to be protected.” (*AL*, 44) Over and over again, contemporary Catholic wisdom draws our attention to the importance of family and invites people of faith to intentionally work to promote, care for, and support all that is good in family life.

Family is where we start out life, family is where we are nourished on the road of life, and family is where we learn the basics of what it is to be a person and how to love and live life with other people. The family is where our God-given spiritual and religious openness is nurtured and grows. Family can bring us the greatest of happiness in life and because of its unique importance to us, family can also at times cause us the greatest pain in life. (*Aileen Cawley, 2020*)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

Children's Activity

Draw a picture of the Holy Family or make up a prayer for your own family.

Ritual Action

Light the candle before the crib and place the picture of your family or pictures of your family members nearby. You may wish to pray as follows.

God our Father, You sent your only son, Jesus, as a little child to love us and to be our Saviour. Your Holy Spirit came down on Mary and gave wisdom to Joseph so that they could prepare for His birth. As we pray here around the crib, open our hearts to His love and to His gentle care. Take away our fears and fill our hearts with joy. Guide and care for our families and help us to care for one another so that we can live as the people of God. May we know His presence with us and find deep peace in our lives during these days of Christmas and in the year ahead. **Amen**

Intercessions

We take a moment to bring before God our needs and the needs of the world at this time:

We pray for families throughout the world. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for our families – those who are here with us, those who cannot be with us and those who have gone home to God. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for a renewed sense of the importance of families and family life. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Add your own intercessions here. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Our Father ...

Prayer (pause)

God our Father, we are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son, one family, in the Spirit of your love. Bless us with the joy of love. Make us patient and kind, gentle and generous, welcoming to those in need. Help us to live your forgiveness and peace. Protect all families with your loving care. Increase our faith. Strengthen our hope. Keep us safe in your love. Make us always grateful for the gift of life that we share. This we ask, through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

The Lord bless us and keep us; The Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us; The Lord turn his face toward us and give us his peace both now and forever. **Amen**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Call to Action

Tell everyone in your family what they mean to you. Make a new year's resolution to pray grace before and grace after meals.



Online Celebration of the Eucharist

Before the broadcast begins:

- Gather with other members of your household, if you can.
- Light all the candles on your Advent wreath including the white one or light a candle before your crib. Place a picture of your family or of family members in your sacred space.

During the broadcast look out for the following:

- The priest will wear **white or gold vestments** today, a symbol of celebration.
- Churches may have present in the sanctuary a picture or an icon of the **Holy Family** – Mary, Joseph and Jesus.
- The **Readings** focus on the theme of Family. In the **First Reading**, the writer of the Book of Ecclesiasticus reflects on the role of a father. The **Psalms** muse on the harmony of family life when God is part of it. Saint Paul in the **Second Reading** encourages a profound mutual respect among family members. In the **Gospel** the story of the ritual of Jesus' consecration in the Temple in Jerusalem is told. A holy man there, Simeon, and a holy woman, Anna, recognise in him "a light to enlighten the pagans and the Glory of God's people Israel." It ends with Joseph, Mary and Jesus making their home in Nazareth.
- At communion time, make an Act of **Spiritual Communion**. Invite Jesus to visit your heart, take some time to truly welcome his presence. Bring to him by name all your family members - those who have died and those who still live.

Take away ...

What does family mean to me? What do I need to do to nourish my family life?

New Year's Day Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

1st January 2021



Today we turn a new page on time and begin a new year – 2021. As we do so, the Church focuses on Mary and on her role as Mother of God. While this may be a somewhat strange title for a mere human being, it points to the key Christian belief that in Jesus, God himself has entered time and walked among humanity. As we begin a new year, it proclaims that God walks with us and that he will walk with us in the year to come.

“And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: “Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.” And he replied: “Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.” So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.” (Minnie Louise Haskins)

A Prayer Ritual at Home

As we begin ...

Pause for a moment of silent reflection to become aware of God's presence. Place an unlit candle near the Crib. Have a pen and paper ready. Pause for a moment to become aware of God's presence.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Let us pray (pause)

Heavenly Father, as the dawn breaks on a new year, thank you for all we hold dear: our health, our family and our friends. Thank you for the year gone by with its particular joys and challenges. Walk with us in the year to come. May it bring with it many blessings for us and our entire world. Through, Christ Our Lord. **Amen**

Let us listen to God's Word ...

Luke 2: 12-21

When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

Let us reflect ...

"And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart." I often think that New Year's Day is a good day for reflecting. As one year concludes and another year begins, we are presented with that unique annual opportunity to take some time to look back in thanksgiving for what has been and to look forward in hope to the year to come. As we do so, we can be filled with a variety of emotions from sadness to satisfaction, regret to expectation or thankfulness to fear.

Looking back we can see our triumphs and our failures, our losses and our gains. There are people who will have come and gone from our lives. Situations that will have arisen and changes that will have been made. This New Year's day let us place all that has been in the hands of God. As we do so let us look to the future – the unknown horizon ahead – full of promise and opportunity – who knows what. Let us also place the future twelve months in the hands of God. For God is the master of time and all time is in his hands. (*Aileen Cawley, 2020*)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

Children's Activity

Draw a picture or write a list of all the things you would like to do in 2021.

Ritual Action

Light the candle before the crib. Take the paper and write on it some New Year's resolutions. Place them near the Crib and pray:

Lord, You make all things new
You bring hope alive in our hearts
And cause our Spirits to be born again.
Thank you for this new year
For all the potential it holds.
Come and kindle in us
A mighty flame
So that in our time, many will see the wonders of God
And live forever to praise Your glorious name. **Amen**

Intercessions

We take a moment to bring before God our needs and the needs of the world at this time:

We pray in thanksgiving for all the gifts of the year gone by. We recognise that there have been difficult times of sickness, anxiety and loss. In these times we thank you for walking with us. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

As we turn the page on a new year, we ask your blessing, Lord, on ourselves, on those we love and on all our world. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray Lord, that this year may be a year when we will truly strengthen our faith in and love for you and renew our lives. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Add your own intercessions here. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Our Father ...

Prayer (pause)

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided. Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. **Amen**

Blessing

The Lord bless us and keep us; The Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us; The Lord turn his face toward us and give us his peace both now and forever. **Amen**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Call to Action

List your New Year resolutions – any one that focuses on faith? Plan a pilgrimage to a holy site - what about Knock or Croagh Patrick?



Online Celebration of the Eucharist

Before the broadcast begins:

- Gather with other members of your household, if you can.
- Light all the candles on your Advent Wreath or a candle before your crib.

During the broadcast look out for the following:

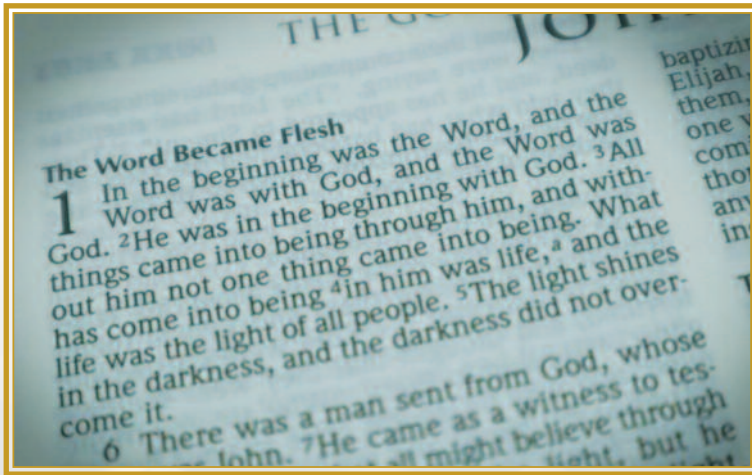
- The priest will wear **white or gold vestments today**
- The **First Reading** from the Book of Number recounts how God blesses the Jewish people – it prays that the “Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace.” The **Psalm** picks up the same theme and prays “O God be gracious and bless us”. The **Second Reading** from the Letter to the Galatians recalls how at the appointed time, God did indeed show his face in his Son “born of a woman”. The **Gospel** recounts the tender encounter between the shepherds, Mary and the baby Jesus. It speaks of Mary treasuring and pondering all these things in her heart.
- The Eucharist will be celebrated as normal. At communion time make an Act of **Spiritual Communion**. Turn to Mary and ask her to hold her son out to you – bow down before him. Bring before him the year gone by and ask him to bless and guide you in the year to come.

Take away ...

Mary treasured and pondered all these things in her heart. She did not know what the future held – are we ready to put our hand in the hand of God and walk into 2021?

Second Sunday of Christmas

3rd January 2021



The Mystery of Christmas is so profound that we contemplate it for many days. Traditionally the Christmas season lasts for twelve days. Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Christmas as we continue to meditate on the story of that first Christmas and the meaning it has for our world and for our lives.

A Prayer Ritual at Home

As we begin ...

Take out the figures of the three wise men and arrange them in a prominent place somewhere in your house. Get a star or make one and have it to hand. Place an unlit candle before or near the crib. Pause for a moment of silent reflection to become aware of God's presence.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Let us pray (pause)

Heavenly Father, as we bask in the light of this Christmas season, we ask you to enlighten our minds and our hearts to the gift of Jesus and his message. Send your Holy Spirit upon us to form our lives according to his wisdom and to empower us to transform this world of ours. Through Christ, Our Lord. **Amen**

Let us listen to God's Word ...

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him, to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself. The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Let us reflect ...

“The Word became flesh, he lived among us”. God is not an aloof power but rather a personal loving presence. God is someone who desires to come close to humankind and to arrive at a loving relationship with each one of us. Perhaps the greatest testimony to the desire of God to come close to us is the mystery of his presence in the child of Bethlehem on that first Christmas night.

However, God's coming close to us does not stop there. It is not some once-off event that happened back then. No, God desires to come close to each and every human person in the here and now of our everyday lives. In the beauty and perfection of his creation all around us, he leaves pointers to his presence. In the love and care of family and friends, he reaches out to touch and embraces us. In the silence of our hearts at prayer he speaks to us. When we pick up the Bible or celebrate the Sacraments he is there for us too. Deep down in our hearts, I think we know that if we let God come close to us, the goodness of his presence will show up our faults and failings. It will bring to the fore the areas in our lives that we need to leave behind or change. Out of fear of such change, we tend to keep God at a distance and postpone responding to his desire to be close to us. Could this year be the year, when for once, we will be brave enough to let God come close and experience the difference such closeness can bring to our lives? (*Aileen Cawley, 2020*)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

Children's Activity

Begin to draw gifts that you think the wise men might have brought to the baby Jesus along with Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh – also draw gifts you think they might bring today.

Ritual Action

Light a candle before the crib and place the star near the crib.

Intercessions

We take a moment to bring before God our needs and the needs of the world during this Christmas Season:

We pray for all those who are searching for meaning and purpose in their lives. May the star of faith direct them to find in Jesus the answer to their questions.

(pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Lord increase our faith and love of you and help us, with your wisdom, to become better people. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for our world in this time of Pandemic; we pray for those who are sick because of Covid-19, those who have died and their families. We entrust our worries and our fears to you the “light that darkness cannot overpower.” (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Add your own intercessions here. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Our Father ...

Prayer (pause)

Heavenly Father, God now has a face, God now has a voice – that face is the face of Jesus, that voice is the voice of Jesus. Help us to turn to his presence and listen to his voice. Help us to find in friendship that true peace and contentment that we so dearly long for. Through Christ Our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

The Lord bless us and keep us; The Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us; The Lord turn his face toward us and give us his peace both now and forever. **Amen**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Call to Action

Take some time to read quietly the beginning of the Gospel of John.

Online Celebration of the Eucharist

Before the broadcast begins:

- Gather with other members of your household, if you can.
- Light a candle before or near your crib and place a star over it.

During the broadcast look out for the following:

- The priest will wear **white or gold vestments today**
- In the **First Reading** from the book of Sirach the idea of wisdom as something divine comes centre stage. The response to the **Psalm** returns to the central Christmas idea that the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. The **Second Reading** from the Letter to the Ephesians blesses God for revealing his wisdom to us in Jesus Christ. Wisdom which will enlighten the eyes of our minds so that we will see what hope responding to Jesus' call holds for us. The **Gospel** returns once again to the words of John and affirms the Christian belief that in Jesus, God himself with all his knowledge and wisdom, has come among us as a light to enlighten the darkness of our lives.
- The Eucharist will be celebrated as normal. At communion time make an Act of **Spiritual Communion**. Invite Jesus to visit your heart, take some time to truly welcome his presence.

Take away ...

If God is to be a part of my life – what parts of my life must I change? Will this be difficult? Am I really willing once and for all to make room at my inn for God?

Feast of the Epiphany

6th January 2021



The Feast of the Epiphany is celebrated twelve days after Christmas. The word Epiphany comes from the Greek word *epipháneia*, which means “manifestation” or “appearance”. It recalls how the three Magi (wise men or Kings) were led by a star to the stable in Bethlehem as told in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 2:1-12). Tradition has it that they were called Kasper, Melchior, and Balthasar. They brought with them gifts of Gold as symbol of Jesus’ kingship, Frankincense as symbol of his divinity and Myrrh an oil used at the time of death, a reminder of the passion to come. They represent the belief that Jesus’ message is not just for the few but rather for every nation and people on the face of the earth.

A Prayer Ritual at Home

As we begin ...

Gather around the crib. Place an unlit candle before the crib or nearby. Have the figures of the three wise men to hand.

Pause for a moment of silent reflection to become aware of God’s presence.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Let us pray (pause)

Heavenly Father, you revealed your Son to the nations by the guidance of a star. Lead us to your glory in heaven by the light of faith. Through Christ Our Lord.
Amen

Let us listen to God's Word ...

Matthew 2:1-12

Having listened to what the king had to say, they set out. And suddenly the star they had seen rising went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Let us reflect ...

On the feast of the Epiphany, as we recall Jesus' manifestation to humanity in the face of a Child, may we sense the Magi at our side, as wise companions on the way. Their example helps us to lift our gaze towards the star and to follow the great desires of our heart. They teach us not to be content with a life of mediocrity, of "playing it safe", but to let ourselves be attracted always by what is good, true and beautiful... by God, who is all of this, and so much more! And they teach us not to be deceived by appearances, by what the world considers great, wise and powerful. We must not stop at that. It is necessary to guard the faith. Today this is of vital importance: to keep the faith. We must press on further, beyond the darkness, beyond the voices that raise alarm, beyond worldliness, beyond so many forms of modernity that exist today. We must press on towards Bethlehem, where, in the simplicity of a dwelling on the outskirts, beside a mother and father full of love and of faith, there shines forth the Sun from on high, the King of the universe. By the example of the Magi, with our little lights, may we seek the Light and keep the faith. (*Pope Francis, 2014*)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

Children's Activity

Make crowns and act the arrival of the three wise men with their gifts at the Crib.

Ritual Action

Light the candle and place the figures of the three Magi in the Crib.
Then pray or sing:

Oh, star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light
We three kings, we three kings

Intercessions

We take a moment to bring before God our needs and the needs of the world at this time:

We pray for people of every race and nation – that guided by the light of their conscience they may search and find God. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray for those in positions of authority in the church and civil society that they may be wise in their words and actions. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

We pray that we may share what we have with those who have less than us. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Add your own intercessions here. (pause)

Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.

Our Father ...

Traditional Epiphany House Blessing

Bless, O Lord,
this household and family,
and allow all of us who live in this home
to find in it a shelter of peace and health.
Inspire each of us to develop
our individual talents
and to contribute wisdom and good works
for the benefit of the whole family.
Make our house a haven for us all,
and a place of warmth and caring
for all our friends who come to visit us.
Enlighten us with the brilliance
of your Epiphany star,
so that, as we go into the world,
we might clearly see our way to You
and discover You in our work and play.
This we ask to your glory
and in the power of your kingship. **Amen**

All: For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory now and forever. **Amen**

Then, bless the house with the sign of the cross. After the blessing, the initials of the Magi (traditional names: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar) are written with chalk over the main doorway of the house, like this:

20 + C + M + B + 21

(the + is a cross; the "21" stands for 2021; change the year accordingly).

The Epiphany Announcement

According to tradition the dates of the major Christian Feasts are announced publically today in what is known as the Epiphany Announcement.

Know, dear brethren (brothers and sisters),
that, as we have rejoiced at the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ,
so by leave of God's mercy
we announce to you also the joy of his Resurrection,
who is our Saviour.

On the seventeenth day of February will fall Ash Wednesday,
and the beginning of the fast of the most sacred Lenten season.
On the fourth day of April, you will celebrate with joy Easter Day,
the Paschal feast of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the sixteenth day of May will be the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the twenty-third day of May, the feast of Pentecost.

On the sixth day of June, the feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

On the twenty-eighth day of November, the First Sunday of the Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is honour and glory for ever and ever.

Amen

Blessing

The Lord bless us and keep us; The Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us; The Lord turn his face toward us and give us his peace both now and forever. **Amen**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Call to Action

Share a picture of the chalked blessing on your door on social media. Arrange to have unwanted gifts redistributed to those who are less well off. Make a point to read about and pray for persecuted Christians.

Online Celebration of the Eucharist

Before the broadcast begins:

- Gather with other members of your household, if you can.
- Light a candle before or near the crib. Place the figures of the three Magi near or in the crib.

During the broadcast look out for the following:

- The priest will wear **white or gold vestments** today.
- The figures of the **three Magi (Kings or Wise Men)** are placed in the crib.
- In the **First Reading**, the Prophet Isaiah speaks of the appearance of the glory of the Lord before all the nations and how people will come before him with God and incense singing his praises. The **Psalm** continues with the same theme proclaiming “All nations shall fall prostrate before you, O Lord.” The **Second Reading** from the Letter to the Ephesians speaks of how in Jesus the pagans now share the same inheritance as the people of Israel. The **Gospel** recounts the visit of those wise men from the east bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christ Child at Bethlehem.
- The Eucharist will be celebrated as normal. At communion time make an Act of **Spiritual Communion**. Spend some time at the crib and wonder at its newest visitors – three wise men from afar. Lay before the Christ child three gifts you would like to give him this day.

Take away ...

Am I really open to God's presence as a guiding star in my life? Would I be prepared to change my life as a consequence?





**Prepared by the Dioceses of Clonfert and Elphin
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