

Growing in FAITH™

Discovering hope and joy in the Catholic faith.

December 2021

St Mark Church - St James Church

Emporium - Driftwood Pennsylvania

One Minute Meditations

The gift of Advent

The season of Advent began on November 28 and continues until

Christmas Eve. The Church offers us this time as a gift to slow down, quiet down, and reflect on God's love for us. Consider setting aside quiet time each day to be with Him.



Celebrate birth

December is the month in which we celebrate the birth of the infant King. This has become a time to reaffirm our respect for life from conception to natural death. We pray that all babies are given the gift of life.

"Let not your heart be disturbed. Do not fear that sickness, nor any other sickness or anguish. Am I not here, who is your Mother? Are you not under my protection? Am I not your health? Are you not happily within my fold? What else do you wish? Do not grieve nor be disturbed by anything."

(Our Lady to St. Juan Diego, December 9, 1531)



Make this Christmas your own

Each year at Christmas, we celebrate an amazing truth. God came to Earth, in person, to be with us and, hopefully, bring us to Heaven. Think of it – the Creator of the universe came to be with you and me and promised to remain with us. Try these ways to keep the wonder of Christmas alive the whole year round:

Receive Him with Mary's open heart.

When the angel Gabriel delivered God's stunning message, Mary accepted God's will completely. She kept her heart open to His will throughout her life. We can imitate her by letting nothing come between us and God. Go to



Confession regularly. Pray daily. Attend Mass at least weekly. Receive Jesus in your heart.

Adore Him like the Magi.

After receiving Communion, you are literally heart-to-heart with Jesus. Thank Him, praise Him, or just rest in Him. Give Him the gift of your full attention. Receive the graces of His love.

Proclaim Him like the Angels.

Just as the heavenly host announced Christ's birth to the shepherds with gladness, so we are to proclaim Jesus to those around us. We do this when we join in worship at Mass each Sunday, and give Him credit for our blessings and gifts. His presence in our hearts becomes evident when we live with love and Christmas joy.

Why Do Catholics Do That?

Why do Catholics believe Jesus really came?

That Jesus lived in first century Israel is well documented by both Christian sources and non-Christian sources. The Old Testament, which was known to Jews many years before Christ's birth, predicted the coming of the Messiah.



Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection fulfilled those prophecies. The Gospels name eyewitnesses as sources for the miracles Jesus worked. Another compelling argument for Jesus' reality, however, is the witness of the martyrs through the centuries, who remained faithful to Christ even to death.

Develop an Advent frame of mind

The holiday season can seem more like a test of endurance than preparation for a celebration. In the midst of the seasonal stress, we are asked to reach into ourselves and bring out only what is kind, generous, and loving. It may help to remember that the real reason for the season is the celebration of unimaginable Love.

Try to see with a Father's eye. Our Heavenly Father delights in our creation and loves us for exactly who we are. During Advent, try to see yourself through His eyes. Not the flawed human visible to



humanity, but the spectacular product of God's divine love and the reflection of His glory.

Prepare your gift. Make your gift to Jesus an open heart, ready to receive the love He has for you. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

Anticipating an eternity of unimaginable love is absolutely the right Advent frame of mind.

from Scripture

Luke 2:41-52, Finding in the Temple

The Feast of the Holy Family (December 26) includes the story of finding Jesus in the Temple, a story of love and obedience. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover, as was the custom for Jews of that time. They traveled in a large group for protection against bandits who infested the hill country. So it wasn't surprising that His parents didn't miss Jesus as they started the return trip. Upon discovering Him missing, they hurried back to Jerusalem.

On the third day of searching, they found Jesus in the Temple. He was



questioning the priests and amazing them with his understanding. However, Mary asked how He could have caused

His parents so much worry and Jesus replied, "Did you not know I must be in my Father's house?"

Though they were puzzled by His answer, Mary and Joseph took Jesus back to Nazareth. He

remained there in obedience to His parents until it was time for his public ministry. We learn from this story to obey not only God but also those in authority over us.

Q & A Do we have to return to Mass in person?

When we love someone, we don't want to just call or send an email. We want to be together in person, growing in love and friendship. Then, too, when we love Jesus, we want to be with Him



in body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharist. "It is a substantial presence by which Christ...makes

himself wholly and entirely present" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1374).

The Eucharist is a gift we can only fully receive in person. It is spiritual food for the journey. In it we receive not just graces, but Jesus, Himself. Nowhere else on Earth and in no other way can we be so closely united to Him who loves us most.

It is possible – and required – to attend Mass in person unless there is a grave reason to stay away. Still, let nothing keep you from Jesus in the Eucharist. Go to Confession regularly and never miss Mass. Do whatever you can to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. Remember, God is never outdone in generosity.

Feasts & Celebrations

December 2 – St. Bibiana (363). Virgin and martyr, St. Bibiana was the daughter of a Roman official who converted to Christianity and was martyred for his faith. Bibiana was tortured and executed for her Christianity, as well.

December 8 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On this day we commemorate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne's womb without Original Sin. In addition to attending Mass for this Holy Day of Obligation, praying a joyful Rosary is a wonderful way

to celebrate.

December 12 – Gaudete Sunday. This Sunday marks the halfway point of Advent. We light the rose candle in the Advent wreath for joy. During the last two weeks of Advent, the Church prepares to celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas.

December 29 – St. Thomas Becket (1170). As Archbishop of Canterbury, King Henry II tried to pressure him and the other bishops into agreeing to unjust laws, but St. Thomas refused to sign his approval for them. He was eventually martyred for his faith.



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