

The Liturgical Seasons of the Catholic Church

CHRISTMAS



Celebration

Christmas is not just a day, it is an entire Season in the Church's Year! The Christmas Season begins at midnight on December 24th and continues well into January. While the rest of the world are often winding down their Christmas celebrations after Christmas Day, Catholics are just gearing up for theirs. Although there are some who celebrate 'the 12 days of Christmas,' or the entire Season, many miss out on the feasts and festivities that come after Christmas Day that are still part of the Christmas Season. They all have such deep meaning and are so rich with tradition. Although, they can be celebrated slightly differently in different parts of the world.

Christ. He is the reason for the season!

Christmas traditionally celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ over 2000 years ago.

The reason we have Christmas at all is because we are grateful and filled with joy that the God-Man has come to Earth to bring salvation to all of mankind. He was and is the promised Messiah ... and that's worth celebrating for a good long time.

Most people know the story of Joseph and a heavily pregnant Mary arriving in Bethlehem only to find that there was nowhere for them to stay. Eventually, an inn keeper gave them shelter in a stable at the back of his inn. This is where Jesus was born and placed in a manger, then angels told the shepherds who came to visit with gifts, also 3 Wise Men followed a star to come and adore and worship too.



First, the Church celebrates the Messiah's Birth with the Christmas Octave. The Church has observed octaves since the eighth century – eight days of celebration following a feast or solemnity.

We start the Christmas Octave, on Christmas Eve / Day, when we celebrate the Birth of the Baby Jesus and the visits of the shepherds and angels and end on January 1st, with the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, (New Years Day), then the season continues with other feasts being celebrated to commemorate different parts of the story.

According to the Church, the Christmas season officially ends with the Baptism of the Lord, *although some say that they follow the traditional and official end of the Christmas Season with the feast of Candlemas February 2nd, 40 days after Christmas, which is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord or Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*



Timeline of Feasts and Solemnities of the Christmas Season



December 24th / 25th (Christmas Eve / Day) – The Birth of Christ and visit of shepherds and angels

December 26th (Boxing Day) – St. Stephen
(the first martyr)

December 27th – The Holy Family

December 28th – Holy Innocents

(children murdered by Herod's soldiers in the effort to destroy the Christ Child, after the 3 Kings had visited Herod's Palace looking for the newborn King.)

January 1st – Holy Mary, Mother of God

then

January 6th – The Epiphany of the Lord – Visit of the Magi

The first Sunday in January after the Epiphany – The Baptism of the Lord

Throughout these days, we hear in the daily readings the stories of the Nativity, but also of the prophecies of Simeon and Anna at the presentation and the finding of Jesus in the temple, as well as the initiation of St. John the Baptist's ministry.



The Christmas season is filled with exciting scenes and happenings, all pointing to Jesus as the Christ. They all tell us about the magnificence and mission of the Infant born in Bethlehem that one day would be King.



Unfortunately, today many are only concerned with the material side of Christmas. They get caught up in the hustle and bustle of sales and deadlines and so forget why it is so important.

So remember to stop, take time and think about what God wants from us during Christmas.

God intended us to celebrate: the birth of His Son.

Love, togetherness, and rejoicing are the things He wants from us!

Family, friends, and neighbours should be welcomed into our homes.

Find out about and celebrate traditions in the Community – How did they come about? What do they commemorate?

Slow down and take in what is around you ... plants, food, symbols ... and their meaning.

Help the strangers, the homeless and refugees or those in need, for that is how Jesus entered the world at His Birth.

Read the Bible.

Pray.

Attend Mass and rediscover the glory of the season.

Open your heart to possibility... Let Christ enter in.



Isaiah 9: 6-7

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.

Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Adapted from *The Real Meaning of Christmas* (Author Unknown)

One week before Christmas, a well-known visitor made a surprise appearance. . .

I had just finished the household chores and was preparing for bed when a noise startled me. Cautiously, I opened the door to the front room. To my amazement, Santa Claus stepped from behind the Christmas tree! He placed one finger over his mouth so I would not cry out.

"What are you doing here?" I exclaimed.



Then, I realized that Santa had tears in his eyes. His usual jolly manner was gone. The eager, boisterous soul we all know was very sad. Santa offered one, simple statement, **"TEACH THE CHILDREN!"** I was puzzled - what did he mean?

Anticipating my question, with one quick movement he brought forth a great bag from behind the tree.



I stood there bewildered. Santa explained, **"Teach the Children! Teach them the old meaning of Christmas. So many people today have forgotten what Christmas is really about!"**

Santa then reached into his bag, pulled out a small **FIR TREE**, and placed it on the mantle. **"Teach the Children that the stately fir tree remains green all year round, showing the everlasting hope of mankind. The needles point heavenward, making it a symbol of our prayers that always reach God."**

Santa again reached into his sack and pulled out a brilliant **STAR**, which he hung on the tree. **"Teach the Children that the Bethlehem star was the sign of promises long ago. God promised to send a Saviour to deliver the world. The bright star pointed to the fulfillment of that promise—God's only Son had been born!"**

Next, Santa pulled a **CANDLE** from his bag to add to the tree decoration. **"Teach the Children that the candle symbolizes that Jesus, God's Son, is the Light of the World. When we see this light remember the One who overcomes the darkness."**

Once again, Santa reached into his sack. This time he brought forth a **WREATH** and placed it on the tree. **"Teach the Children that the wreath reveals the endless nature of God's love. Real love never ceases. Nothing can stop God's amazing love."**

Santa then pulled from his bag an ornament of **HIMSELF!** **"Teach the Children that Santa Claus symbolizes the generosity and good will we show to others because God has given us His very special Son. But don't forget to tell the Children that Saint Nicholas was not part of the first Christmas in Bethlehem."**

Santa then reached into his sack and carefully placed a **CANDY CANE** on the tree. **"Teach the Children that the candy cane represents the shepherd's staff. The crook on the staff rescues sheep who have strayed from the flock. God never gives up on people who wander from Him."**

Next, He removed a delicate **ANGEL** and lifted it to the very top of the tree. **"Teach the Children that angels shouted the glorious news of the Saviour's birth. These heavenly messengers sang 'Glory to God in the highest! Peace and good will to everyone on earth!'"**

Finally, Santa pulled out a beautifully wrapped **GIFT**. He said, **"Teach the Children that God deeply loves people, so He gave them His most precious gift—Jesus, His only Son. When the Wise Men arrived in Bethlehem, they bowed before the Child and presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This is why we give gifts to others each Christmas. But these gifts should be for everyone, not just our family and friends: the Wise Men didn't know the Holy Family, yet they travelled from afar and brought expensive gifts to give to celebrate the Birth of a long awaited newborn king. They opened their hearts and minds and understood the message of the star they followed."**

Then Santa paused. He stared at the tree and seemed to be pleased. I saw that the twinkle had returned to his eyes. He turned, looked at me, and smiled. Santa offered these final words, **"Remember to teach the Children the true meaning of Christmas. Please don't put me in the center, for I am but a humble servant. Jesus Christ is the real reason for the Christmas season. I am glad to join all others who bow down and worship Him, our Lord and God."**

TEACH THE CHILDREN



OF GOD'S LOVE!