

# 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



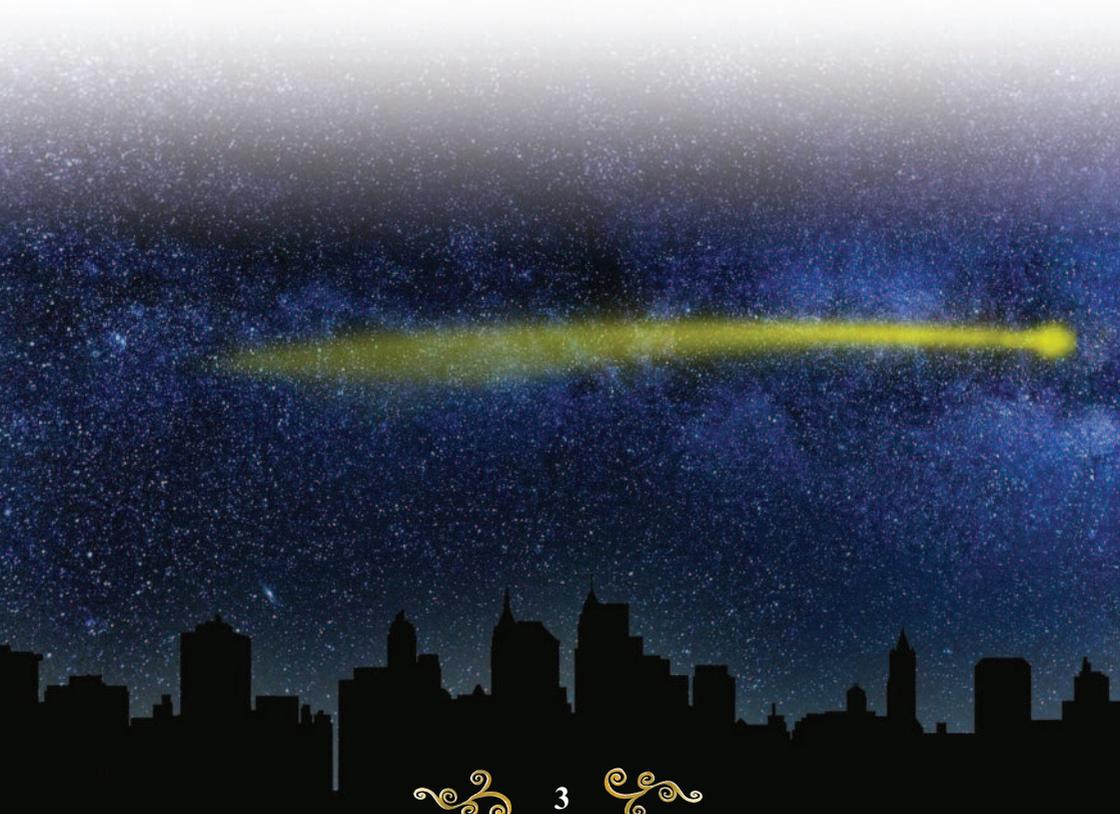
While nothing can substitute for gathering in person, we are blessed to live in an age where the celebration of the Eucharist can be broadcast on radio or television or by means of the internet. This guide is also designed to help deepen your participation in those broadcasts and to assist you in getting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



# 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:

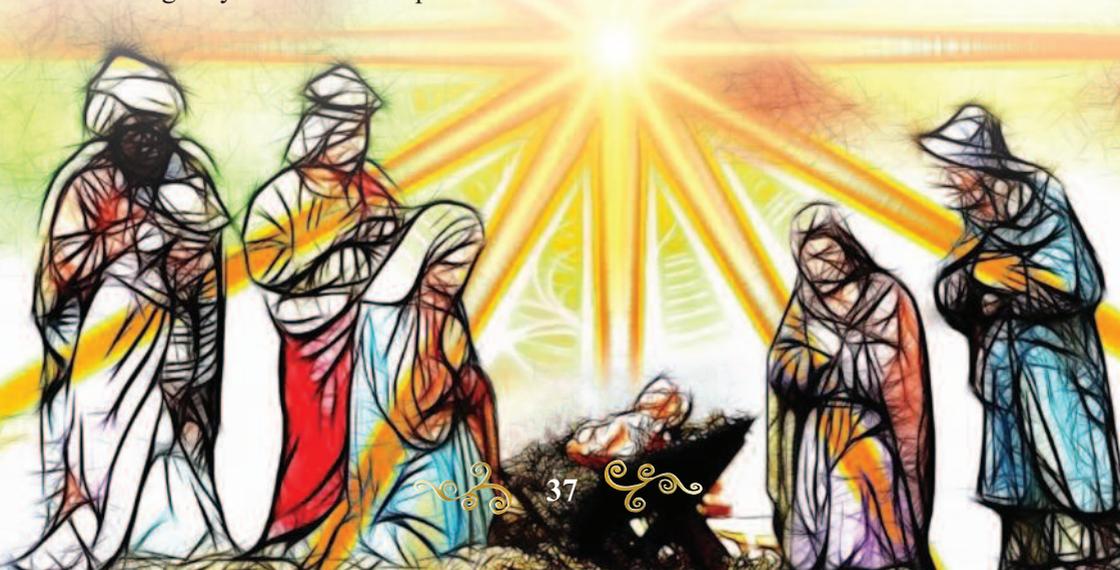
- Gather with other members of your household, if you can.
- Light a candle before or near the crib. Place the figures of the three Magi near or in the crib.

## 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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