

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



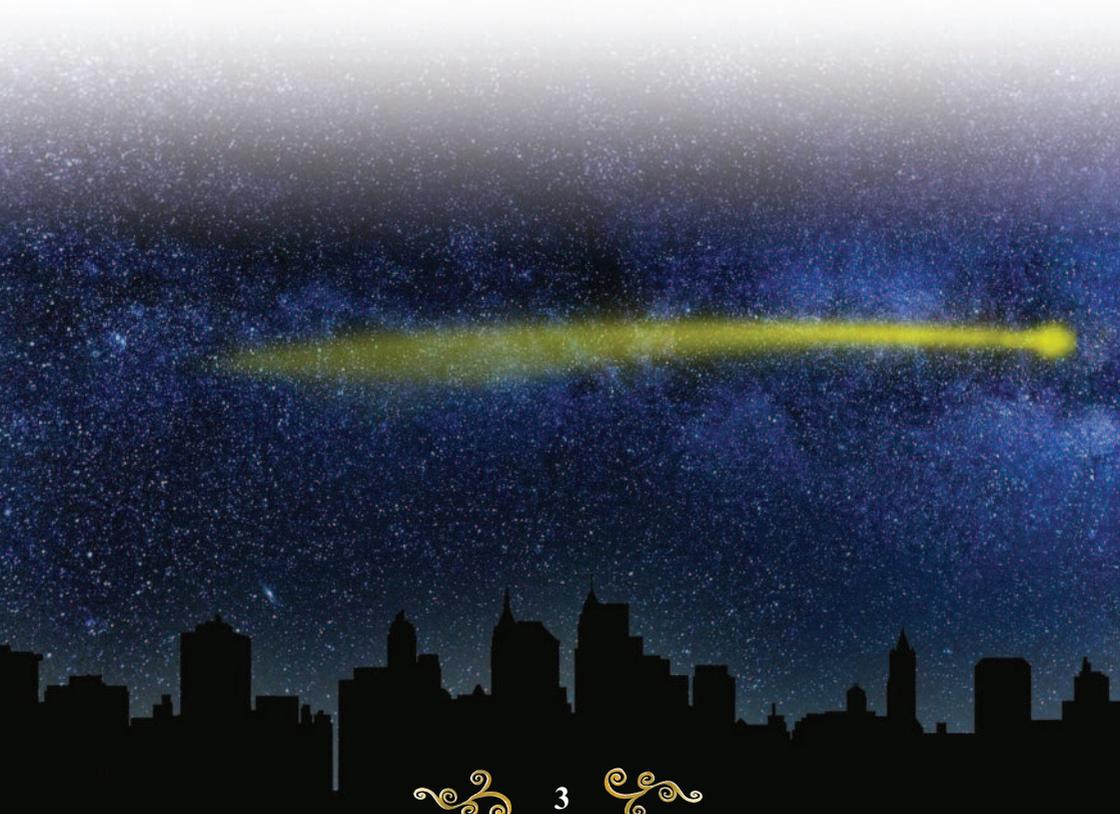
While nothing can substitute for gathering in person, we are blessed to live in an age where the celebration of the Eucharist can be broadcast on radio or television or by means of the internet. This guide is also designed to help deepen your participation in those broadcasts and to assist you in getting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



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