

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



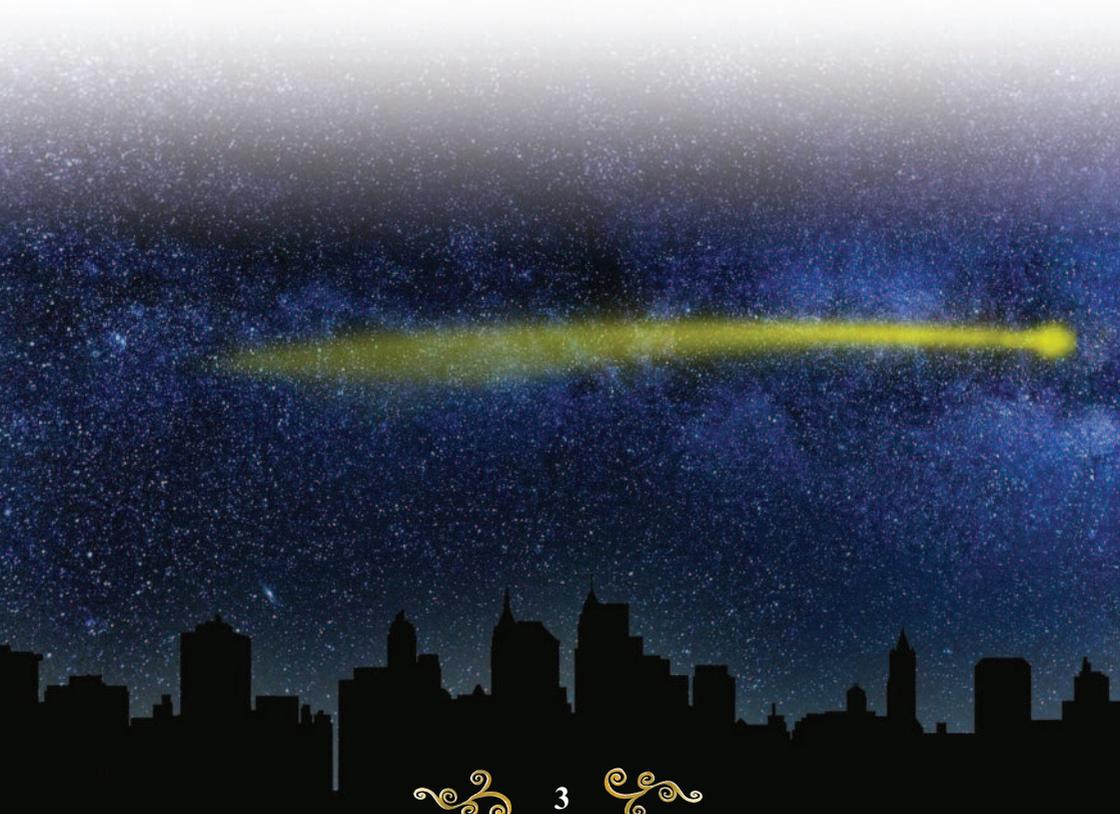
While nothing can substitute for gathering in person, we are blessed to live in an age where the celebration of the Eucharist can be broadcast on radio or television or by means of the internet. This guide is also designed to help deepen your participation in those broadcasts and to assist you in getting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

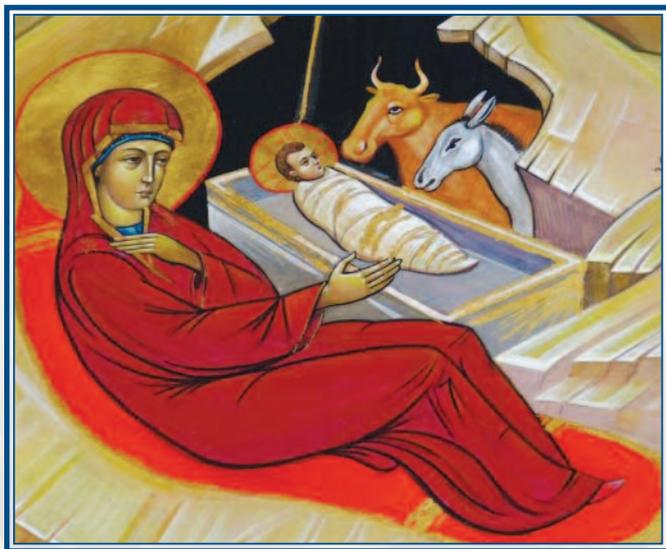
Safety

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.



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 Numbers 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?



Prepared by the Dioceses of Clonfert and Elphin
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