

# 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



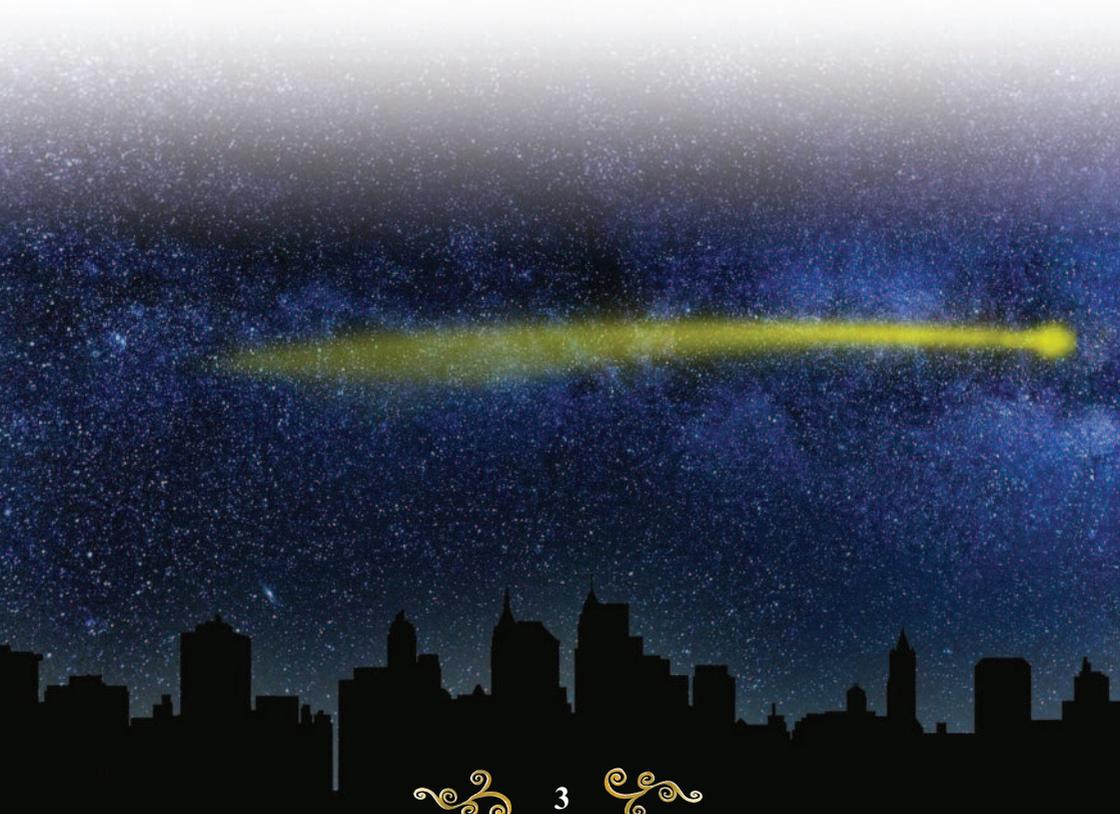
While nothing can substitute for gathering in person, we are blessed to live in an age where the celebration of the Eucharist can be broadcast on radio or television or by means of the internet. This guide is also designed to help deepen your participation in those broadcasts and to assist you in getting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

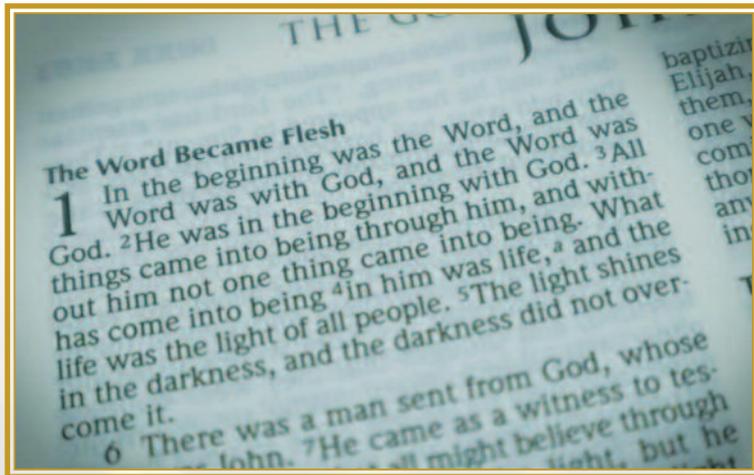
## Safety

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.



# Second Sunday of Christmas

3rd January 2021



The Mystery of Christmas is so profound that we contemplate it for many days. Traditionally the Christmas season lasts for twelve days. Today we celebrate the Second Sunday of Christmas as we continue to meditate on the story of that first Christmas and the meaning it has for our world and for our lives.

## A Prayer Ritual at Home

### As we begin ...

Take out the figures of the three wise men and arrange them in a prominent place somewhere in your house. Get a star or make one and have it to hand. Place an unlit candle before or near the crib. 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, as we bask in the light of this Christmas season, we ask you to enlighten our minds and our hearts to the gift of Jesus and his message. Send your Holy Spirit upon us to form our lives according to his wisdom and to empower us to transform this world of ours. Through Christ, Our Lord. **Amen**

## Let us listen to God's Word ...

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him, to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believed in his name who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will but from God himself. The Word became flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that he has from the Father as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

## Let us reflect ...

“The Word became flesh, he lived among us”. God is not an aloof power but rather a personal loving presence. God is someone who desires to come close to humankind and to arrive at a loving relationship with each one of us. Perhaps the greatest testimony to the desire of God to come close to us is the mystery of his presence in the child of Bethlehem on that first Christmas night.

However, God's coming close to us does not stop there. It is not some once-off event that happened back then. No, God desires to come close to each and every human person in the here and now of our everyday lives. In the beauty and perfection of his creation all around us, he leaves pointers to his presence. In the love and care of family and friends, he reaches out to touch and embraces us. In the silence of our hearts at prayer he speaks to us. When we pick up the Bible or celebrate the Sacraments he is there for us too. Deep down in our hearts, I think we know that if we let God come close to us, the goodness of his presence will show up our faults and failings. It will bring to the fore the areas in our lives that we need to leave behind or change. Out of fear of such change, we tend to keep God at a distance and postpone responding to his desire to be close to us. Could this year be the year, when for once, we will be brave enough to let God come close and experience the difference such closeness can bring to our lives? (*Aileen Cawley, 2020*)

Pause for a few moments of silent reflection.

## Children's Activity

Begin to draw gifts that you think the wise men might have brought to the baby Jesus along with Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh – also draw gifts you think they might bring today.

## Ritual Action

Light a candle before the crib and place the star near the crib.

## Intercessions

We take a moment to bring before God our needs and the needs of the world during this Christmas Season:

We pray for all those who are searching for meaning and purpose in their lives. May the star of faith direct them to find in Jesus the answer to their questions.

(pause)

**Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.**

Lord increase our faith and love of you and help us, with your wisdom, to become better people. (pause)

**Lord, in your mercy. Hear our prayer.**

We pray for our world in this time of Pandemic; we pray for those who are sick because of Covid-19, those who have died and their families. We entrust our worries and our fears to you the “light that darkness cannot overpower.” (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)

Heavenly Father, God now has a face, God now has a voice – that face is the face of Jesus, that voice is the voice of Jesus. Help us to turn to his presence and listen to his voice. Help us to find in friendship that true peace and contentment that we so dearly long for. 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

Take some time to read quietly the beginning of the Gospel of John.

# 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 your crib and place a star over it.

During the broadcast look out for the following:

- The priest will wear **white or gold vestments today**
- In the **First Reading** from the book of Sirach the idea of wisdom as something divine comes centre stage. The response to the **Psalm** returns to the central Christmas idea that the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. The **Second Reading** from the Letter to the Ephesians blesses God for revealing his wisdom to us in Jesus Christ. Wisdom which will enlighten the eyes of our minds so that we will see what hope responding to Jesus' call holds for us. The **Gospel** returns once again to the words of John and affirms the Christian belief that in Jesus, God himself with all his knowledge and wisdom, has come among us as a light to enlighten the darkness of our lives.
- The Eucharist will be celebrated as normal. At communion time make an Act of **Spiritual Communion**. Invite Jesus to visit your heart, take some time to truly welcome his presence.

Take away ...

If God is to be a part of my life – what parts of my life must I change? Will this be difficult? Am I really willing once and for all to make room at my inn for God?



Prepared by the Dioceses of Clonfert and Elphin  
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