

Growing in FAITH™

Discovering **hope and joy** in the Catholic faith.

December 2007

One Minute Meditations

Anticipate Advent

A rich Advent makes a joyous Christmas. Use the four weeks before Christmas to prepare for Christ's coming. Offer extra prayers, perform penance, and receive the sacrament of Reconciliation.

Wise gifts

In honor of the Wise Men who gave gifts to a stranger, make a donation to charity or give gifts to the poor. Offer your version of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Christmas candy canes

This familiar candy became a symbol of the season in fairly recent times. Shaped like a shepherd's crook, it reminds us of the first witnesses of Jesus' birth. The pattern of red and white stripes represents the purity and sacrifice of our Lord.

"Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel"

(Luke 2:29-32).



Greet Christmas like a child

There is no greater miracle than the gift of love Christmas represents. Yet, we get so harried with the holiday rush that we may miss the wonder of it. Ever notice how children never do? This year, slow down and look at Christmas like a child.

Tie gifts with heartstrings. Keep what you give simple, meaningful, and from the heart. For example, give a coupon for babysitting to friends with children. Prepare a meal for someone who needs a break from cooking. (It's okay to give fewer gifts.)

Offer your hearth. The holidays can be so lonely for people separated from their loved ones by distance, death, or circumstance. Watch for anyone who

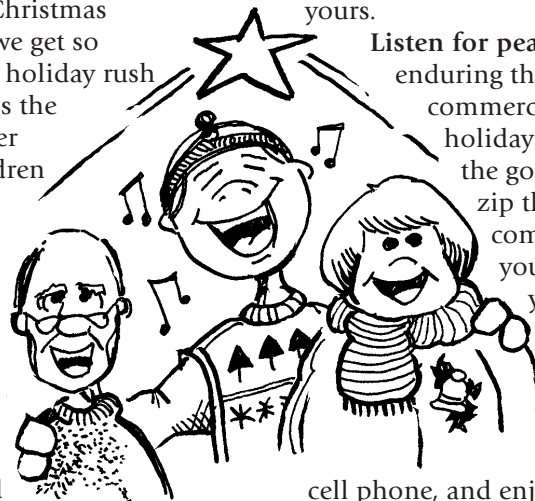
needs a "home" and invite them to yours.

Listen for peace. Instead of enduring the Christmas commercials and bad holiday specials, tape the good shows and zip through the commercials when you watch. Or rent your favorite spiritual movies. Better still, turn off the television, computer, and

cell phone, and enjoy the silence.

Greet the Babe. Spend time before the Eucharist as often as you can before Christmas.

Sing like an angel. Check your local listings for Christmas concerts, Messiah sing-a-longs, or other spiritual songfests. Host a caroling party in your home and sing loud with Christmas joy.



Why Do Catholics Do That?

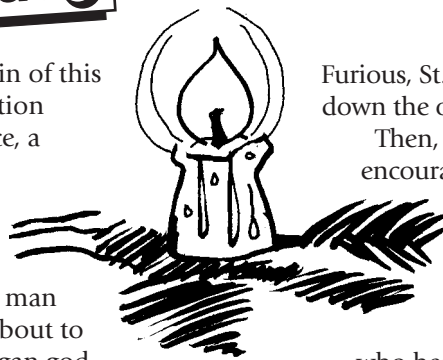
One reported origin of this now-Christian tradition concerns St. Boniface, a missionary fighting paganism.

One Christmas Eve, St. Boniface came upon a young man tied to an oak tree about to be sacrificed to a pagan god.

Why do Catholics decorate Christmas trees?

Furious, St. Boniface chopped down the oak.

Then, St. Boniface encouraged the townspeople to bring a fir tree into town, place candles on its branches, and listen to the story of the Nativity. Many who heard were converted.



The spirit of St. Nick

St. Nicholas is one icon of the holiday season that has meaning in both the secular and spiritual celebrations of Christmas.

We know that St. Nicholas was born at the end of the third century in Asia Minor. His parents died when he was young and left him well off. His uncle, the archbishop of Myra (southeast of Turkey), ordained him and upon his uncle's death, Nicholas served as bishop until his own death. Throughout he suffered imprisonment and persecution.



One legend involving St. Nicholas concerns a desperate man on the verge of selling his daughters into slavery to pay his debts. Nicholas secretly threw a bag of gold into an open window (some say down the chimney) in the man's house to stop him.

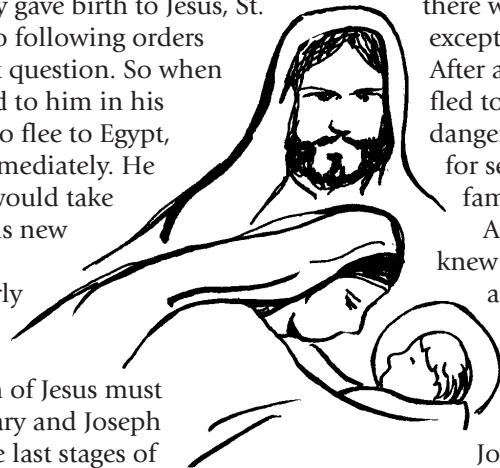
Our present-day Santa Claus stems from the legends of St. Nicholas, but in the Church he is a saint, a confessor of the faith, and a holy bishop. We can learn from his generosity to the poor, and imitate his acts of kindness to others.

from Scripture

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23, God protects the family.

By the time Mary gave birth to Jesus, St. Joseph was used to following orders from God without question. So when the angel appeared to him in his sleep urging him to flee to Egypt, Joseph obeyed immediately. He trusted that God would take care of him and his new family.

This is particularly remarkable when we think about what the real birth of Jesus must have been like. Mary and Joseph had traveled in the last stages of her pregnancy from Nazareth to Bethlehem. On foot or donkey, it was a dirty, exhausting journey. Once there,



there was nowhere to stay except with the animals. After a short time, they fled to Egypt to escape danger, and stayed there for several years without family or friend.

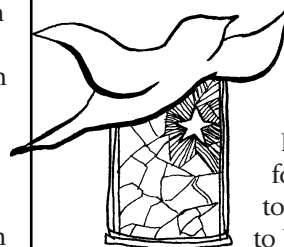
As a father, St. Joseph knew his share of pain and difficulties much like our own experience. Yet Scripture tells us that Mary and

Joseph found strength from their faith in God and were guided by his Word. We can do the same.

Q & A What is the significance of Midnight Mass on Christmas?

Like many of our traditions, the practice of attending Mass at 12:00 am on Christmas has several origins.

By the time December 25th was designated as the observance of Christ's birth (around 330 A.D.), there was already



a tradition in Jerusalem of a midnight vigil the night before in Bethlehem. This was followed by a torchlight procession to Jerusalem arriving at

dawn to the Church of the Resurrection. It is thought that the Church in Rome adopted this practice at that time.

Midnight Mass also has roots in the early monasteries. People from the surrounding area gathered in the monasteries to join the monks in their midnight Mass, and to feast together afterwards.

Attending Mass at midnight is our first opportunity to gather together and greet the newborn child Jesus as the shepherds did so long ago. The readings for the liturgy of Midnight Mass not only proclaim the birth of Christ but also remind us of the miracle of God on earth, come to save all people.

Feasts & Celebrations

December is the month in which we anticipate the coming of Christ and begin the celebration of his birth. It has become a time to reaffirm our respect for life from conception to natural death.

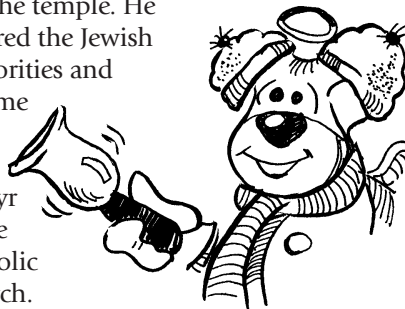
Dec. 2 – First Day of Advent. The new Church year begins this day.

December 8 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is a Holy Day of Obligation when we celebrate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne's womb without original sin.

December 21 – St. Peter Canisius (1597). Born in Holland, he was

ordained into the Society of Jesus and worked strenuously through his writings and teachings to safeguard the Catholic faith. His work, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, is still used today.

December 26 – St. Stephen (first century). A deacon of the early Church, St. Stephen preached that God can be found everywhere, not just in one place like the temple. He angered the Jewish authorities and became the first martyr of the Catholic Church.



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