

Growing in FAITH™

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

December 2008

One Minute Meditations

Unborn joy

"When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb ..." (Luke 1:40). Even in the womb, John was filled with joy to serve God. With the coming of Christmas, look for ways to do God's will and then leap for joy as you fulfill his plan.

Proactive prolife

Voting for candidates who respect life is one way to protect life from conception to natural death. But being prolife is more than just a vote. It can be as significant as opening your home to children who have been abused or neglected or as simple as treating everyone around you with dignity and respect. Look for ways to be actively prolife in your life.

Merry Christmas from Jesus

"What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4-5).



Add sparkle to your Christmas

To children, Christmas is thrilling. To adults, just hearing the word "Christmas" can make us feel stressed. It's not Christmas that has lost its luster. There's just so much to do before Christmas that there's little time for wonder. Instead, try to make Christmas sparkle for others and see if it rubs off on you.

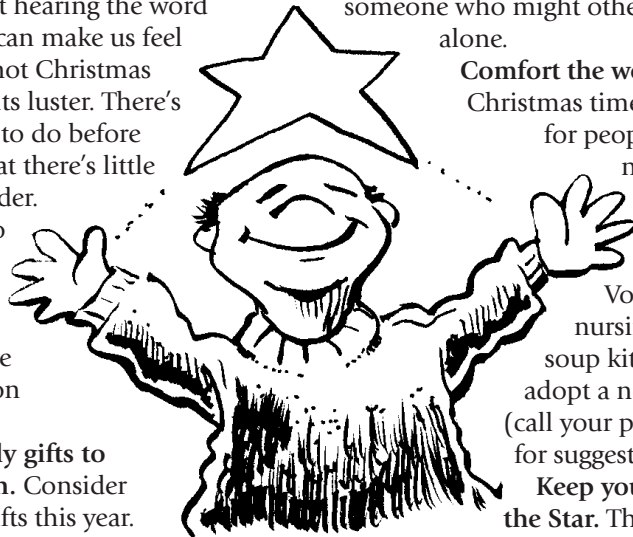
Leave kingly gifts to the Wise Men. Consider not buying gifts this year. Instead, give the gift of yourself. Write someone a poem, deliver a meal, or give a coupon for your time to be redeemed later.

Make room at the Inn. Invite someone from outside your family circle to Christmas dinner. It may be someone from work, a person you see regularly in

the store or at church, but welcome someone who might otherwise be alone.

Comfort the weary traveler. Christmas time can be hard for people who have no home or who are struggling financially. Volunteer at a nursing home or soup kitchen, or adopt a needy family (call your parish office for suggestions).

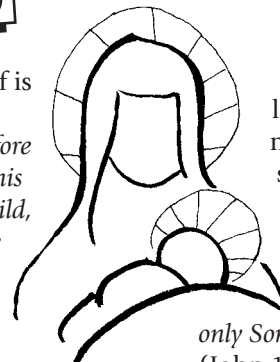
Keep your eyes on the Star. The miracle of Christmas is that God came to us. Isn't that amazing? Even more incredible, he hasn't left. Spend time with him in your parish's Perpetual Adoration Chapel or in front of the Eucharist on Christmas Eve. Look for other places to find him.



Why Do Catholics Do That?

Our authority for this belief is the Bible. Before Jesus was born, Isaiah was told, *"Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel"* (Isaiah 7:14). The angel God sent to Mary confirmed this mystery in Luke 1:34.

Why do Catholics believe in a "virgin birth?"



Had Jesus been conceived like the rest of us, he could not have been a perfect sacrifice for our sins. *"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14).

Love your family at Christmas

Christmas is about love but our celebration of the holiday brings together families and their baggage in ways that don't always bring out the best in us. This year, don't let family tension ruin your holiday.

Be realistic. No family is perfect and every member is important. Try to suspend judgment of your family this year and love them for who they are.

Host at your home. When you have too many people vying for your attention at the holidays, invite everyone to celebrate

together at your home. And one good way to diffuse family tension is to invite outsiders to join you.

Control yourself. While you can't control how someone else behaves, you can control how you react. This is not the time to finish old arguments or settle old scores. Refuse to get drawn into arguments and be generous with forgiveness.

Be Thankful. Concentrating on all the aspects of your life for which you are grateful will keep your mind focused on the positive. Feeling positive feels good.



from Scripture

Luke 2:22-40, Look for the Lord

To the uninformed observer, Jesus' birth was unremarkable and his family quite ordinary. When it came time to present him in the temple, his parents couldn't afford the customary offering of a lamb and gave two pigeons as an offering of the poor. As faithful Jews, they did what was required by their faith to thank God for the gift of their child.

Yet, when Joseph and Mary presented their new baby in the temple, Simeon immediately recognized him as the Messiah. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he

prophesied that Jesus was to be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."

Simeon was not alone in recognizing the Lord in the temple. Anna was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Her faith in God's promises gave her hope. The hope God places in our hearts gives us a desire for the kingdom of Heaven. The Holy Spirit reveals the presence of the Lord to those who want to know him, to receive him, and to be with him forever.



Feasts & Celebrations

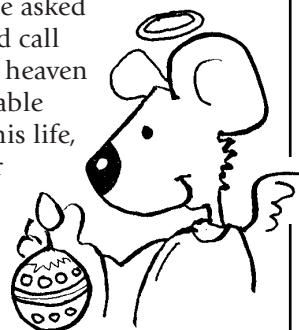
December is when we prepare for and celebrate Christ's birth and the miraculous events surrounding it.

December 8 - Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On this Holy Day of Obligation, we attend Mass to commemorate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne's womb without original sin.

December 12 - Our Lady of Guadalupe (1531). The Blessed Mother appeared to St. Juan Diego, also Native American. She asked to have a chapel built for her, and had

him carry roses in his tilma (cape) to the bishop as a sign. When he emptied his tilma before the bishop, it retained the image of the Blessed Mother.

December 27 - St. John (1st century). An apostle and friend of Jesus, St. John was known for his fiery temper. He once asked Jesus if he could call down fire from heaven on an inhospitable town. Later in his life, he and St. Peter asked the Holy Spirit to come down on the Samaritans.



Q & A How long does the Christmas season last?

The Church's real Christmas season starts on Christmas Day and lasts until the Baptism of Our Lord. By celebrating the whole season, you can make your Christmas joy last long after you've taken down the tree.



Here are some highlights of the season:

Feast of the Holy Family, December 28th. Gather for a special meal with family or make contact with out-of-town relatives.

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, January 1st. Dedicate a special rosary to the Blessed Mother asking her to help you grow in love and trust.

The Epiphany, January 4th. The image of the Magi honoring Jesus has become a symbol of sharing him with the entire world. This is our opportunity to think about the way we live so that we can better reveal Christ to our world.

The Baptism of Our Lord, January 11th. Take time this day to renew your Baptismal vows and decide what you can change in your life to help you can live as Christ did.

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