

Living the Christmas *Season!*

By: Kristi Quinlan



In American culture, we tend to put the Christmas cart before the horse! Lit trees go up and carols start playing in stores right after Halloween. By December 26, we're fatigued by it all and start packing up all that's Christmas-y. NOT. . . SO. . . FAST! Our Catholic faith invites us to a different approach.

Advent offers a time for *preparing* our minds, hearts, and homes. But come Christmas Eve, we pivot to *celebrating*. We're no longer focused so much on the future, as relishing the promise that is fulfilled. . . *now*. Emmanuel. . . God with us. . . has arrived! This truth is so game-changing that a single day is not adequate to take it in and celebrate it. Our Christmas joy spills over into a whole liturgical season all its own.

Let's make the most of the extra "together" time with our families over Christmas break—and beyond—to ponder, to share, to celebrate the Good News of the Christ-Child! Whether looking to enrich existing family traditions or try some new ones, here are a few ideas to get you celebrating all through this Christmas *Season*.

The Christmas Octave: Dec. 25–Jan. 1

Christmas and Easter memorialize such profound actions of God, that the Church gives a whole octave (the feast, plus 7 days) to ponder and to glorify God. Take this week to relish "God with us" in the manger and in your loved ones. Make each day special.

Celebrate

Catholic faith demands it! Physical actions (yes, including Christmas festivities) can express and reinforce spiritual truths and convey grace. This is the Catholic sacramental worldview, where we strive to live our humanness with integration. We are disciples of Jesus in our bodies, minds and spirits. So party on!

- **Keep decorations up** (at least until Jan. 9) and **light candles** at all octave dinners.
- **Enjoy some mealtime treat** (a fruit you don't normally get, a sugary breakfast cereal you don't normally allow, old-fashioned nuts in shells, a Christmas cookie or candy, fondue).
- **Institute an "after dinner cup of tea /cocoa"** to slow the pace and foster conversation.
- **Read a bedtime Christmas story** ([A Christmas Carol](#), [An Orange for Frankie](#). . . or [others](#). What are your family favorites?) **Watch a Christmas movie**.
- **Sing carols** with just tree-lights/candles. Sing a nightly lullaby to Baby Jesus.
- **Plan some family fun**: excursions, game nights, camp-out's on the living room floor by the fire, outdoor "Olympics." Was there some Christmas activity/baking/service project you didn't get to before Christmas? Why not do it now?!
- **Visit or Face-Time a different relative/friend each day.**
- **Take turns being in charge of a daily "surprise" each day of the octave**: a fun mealtime conversation topic, your own "family trivia," a new appetizer/snack, a Christmas song with adapted lyrics, a craft, a photo album you haven't looked at for a while. Think cost-free. . . just simple, family fun!
- Remembering that **Jesus came as a baby, who do you know has just had a baby?** Can you bring them a home-cooked meal? Is there a **crisis pregnancy center/women's shelter** in the area that needs diapers and other baby supplies?



Feast of St. Stephen: Dec. 26

- ◆ Read St. Stephen's story in Acts 6-7
- ◆ Sing "Good King Wenceslaus," a story set on this day
- ◆ To honor one of the first deacons, write a note to the deacon(s) in your parish
- ◆ Also called **Boxing Day**, maybe because employers used to give their household staff this day off, with a "Christmas box" to enjoy. Who might you thank with a Christmas box: your pastor, mailman, doctor?



Feast of the Holy Family: Dec. 26

- Go to **Sunday Mass** as a family. Make your family (immediate and extended) your Mass intention. Reflect on the Sunday Gospel together. (These sites may help your reflection: Holy Heroes' [Mass Prep](#) for young kids, Loyola Press' [Sunday Connection](#) for the whole family, and [The Five Loaves](#) for adults - but family-friendly videos.)
- Take turns **affirming the good qualities/talents of each family member** and pray a personalized blessing over them. Write thank you notes to each other.
- **Talk about** what you like/dislike about **your family** and how you can make it better. Using the letters of your last name, **come up with an acronym that represents your family** and post it somewhere for the day.
- **Set out photos of loved ones**—those you were unable to see this Christmas, or deceased. Remember them in prayer.
- At a meal time, have fun **imagining together: "a day in the life. . ." of the Holy Family!**

New Year's / Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God: Jan. 1

- Take some reflective time as a family to make a **list of the things you're grateful for** in this past year, and a **list of prayer intentions** for the coming year.
- Make it a fun **"spa/mini retreat" day**. Set the mood with calming music and candles. Relax in pj's, sipping tea & smoothies. **Pray a rosary** together or learn about and pray the [Angelus](#). **Make New Year's resolutions**; share them with each other.
- Go to **Mass** together as a family. **Ask Mary to join with you** in presenting your previously reflected upon list of gratitude and intentions to the Lord at Mass.
- Choose saints for the number of people in your family. Read enough about each saint to assign an appropriate virtue to them. Write them on slips of paper or print prayer cards and have **each family member draw their "patron saint for the year"** as their spiritual "buddy" to learn about and imitate.
- **Honor Mary** for her spiritual motherhood and find a way to **thank your own mom**.
- **New Year's Eve party family-style:** food, music, fun kid-friendly "drink menu," dance-party in the kitchen, games. . . If you're able to be with family/friends enjoy the celebration! Hold hands for a simple [prayer](#) to close the year and give hugs and kisses all around at midnight!

Tips for Making and Keeping New Year's Resolutions

1. Reflect on where God is inviting you to improve.
2. Choose one thing; make it specific. State it in the positive; write it down.
3. Make a plan: what circumstances present obstacles? What motivates?
4. Review and start again each morning. Examine your conscience at night.
5. Contemplate the habit/virtue in Jesus & Mary. Ask the Holy Spirit's help.
6. Tell someone close to you, so they can help hold you accountable.

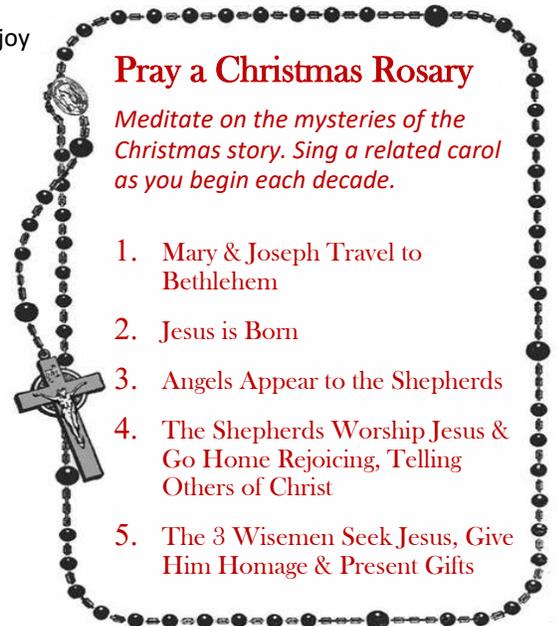
Some Other Feast Days

- Dec. 27: St. John the Apostle
Dec. 28: Feast of the Holy Innocents
Dec. 29: St. Thomas Becket
Dec. 31: St. Sylvester I
Jan. 2: Sts. Basil the Great
& Gregory Nazianzen
Jan. 4: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
Jan. 5: St. John Neumann
Jan. 6: St. André Bessette
Jan. 7: St. Raymond of Penyafort

Pray a Christmas Rosary

Meditate on the mysteries of the Christmas story. Sing a related carol as you begin each decade.

1. Mary & Joseph Travel to Bethlehem
2. Jesus is Born
3. Angels Appear to the Shepherds
4. The Shepherds Worship Jesus & Go Home Rejoicing, Telling Others of Christ
5. The 3 Wisemen Seek Jesus, Give Him Homage & Present Gifts



The Epiphany of the Lord: Jan. 2

- Go to **Sunday Mass** as a family. Reflect on the Sunday Gospel together. If the **Wisemen of your crèche** were displayed separately, bring them before Jesus.
- In some countries, children receive holiday gifts on this day from the 3 Kings, not Santa. Have a **simple gift exchange, where all gifts are a “gift of self coupon”** (To mom: I’ll sweep the floor 3 times upon request. To little sister: I’ll play with you for an hour — your choice of what we play. Etc.)
 - In many countries families eat a circlet-shaped “3 kings cake.” Buy one or [make one](#). Traditionally a dried bean or plastic figure of Baby Jesus is baked into the sweet bread. Whoever ends up with the object in their slice. . . (you decide! In Mexico, the “winner” hosts the party on Feb. 2, the Presentation of the Lord.)
 - In Germany and Austria, families seek the Wisemen’s protection for the new year, by **writing over the front door in chalk**: the year and initials of Caspar, Melchior, & Balthazar (ie.: 20-c-m-b-22)
- Watch [The Fourth Wiseman](#) or read [The Gift of the Magi](#) together.
- **Go out star-gazing** (maybe you need to drive out in the country where it’s darker!). Bundle up, sip cocoa, and reflect on the faith of the Wisemen and the power of God to bring about the miraculous star. Sing “We Three Kings.”
- Epiphany celebrates **God revealing himself to “the nations”** (the world beyond Israel). Celebrate with an international pot-luck (each participating family or family member makes an ethnic food), each shares a few facts about the country of their choice, or learns “Merry Christmas” in that country’s language. Pray for the countries represented. Thank God for including us (for the non-Jewish reading this!) in his plan. Discuss how your family can help reveal Jesus to others.
- For moms — in Ireland, this feast is also known as “[Women’s Christmas!](#)” The men do the cooking/housework and **the women get to “take the day off,”** gathering with friends for tea and visiting! (JUST an idea. . . coming from a mom, of course!)



Feast of the Baptism of the Lord: Jan. 9

- Go to **Sunday Mass** as a family. Thank God for the gift of Baptism. Reflect on the Sunday Gospel together.
- **Write all your family’s Baptismal anniversaries into your 2022 calendar** and plan to celebrate them in some way.
- Pull out your **Baptismal candles** (or others if you can’t find them!) and **renew your Baptismal promises together**. You can find them [here](#). ([This version](#) offers a simple reflective prayer for each promise, that could be helpful for unpacking together what these promises actually mean for our lives.) Bless yourselves with **holy water**.
- **Look at** photos/videos, gowns, **mementos of each family member’s Baptism**. Call or write to **godparents**, thanking them for their support on the journey of faith.
- Consider **reaching out to your parish to see if they need help with Baptismal Preparation Ministry**. Perhaps you can help give some personal follow-up/support to young parents who have had their children Baptized this last year.



From the Baptismal Rite for your Reflection

Candle lit from Easter Candle

(Child’s Name) Receive the Light of Christ. Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. (Child’s Name) has been enlightened by Christ. He/she is to walk always as a child of the light. May he/she keep the flame of faith alive in his/her heart. When the Lord comes, may he/she go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.



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