



Living CHRISTMAS

YOUR GUIDE TO LIVING OUT THE FULL CHRISTMAS SEASON

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.

- **Keep decorations up** and light candles at 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** or watch a Christmas Movie.
- **Sing carols with just treelights/candles** or sing a nightly lullaby to Baby Jesus
- **Plan some family fun:** excursions, game nights, campout’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 FaceTime 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?

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!

Other Feast Days to Celebrate

- Dec. 27: St. John the Apostle
- 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 Wise Men seek Jesus, give him homage, and present gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh



DECEMBER 26: FEAST OF ST. STEPHEN

- 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
- This day is called Boxing Day in other countries 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?



DECEMBER 28: FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY



- Read this day's Mass readings as a family and discuss them. Pray for your immediate and extended family in a special way.
- 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 would like your family to look like. Using the letters of your last name, come up with an acronym that represents your family and post it on the fridge.
- Set out photos of loved ones—those you were unable to see this Christmas, or deceased—and remember them in prayer.
- At a meal time, have fun imagining together "a day in the life of the Holy Family!"

JANUARY 1: SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

- Go to Mass together as a family. Ask Mary to join with you in thanking God for the past year and placing the new one in his hands.
- 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 mini retreat day. Set the mood with calming music and candles. Pray a rosary together or learn about and pray the Angelus. Make New Year's resolutions and share them with each other.
- 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.



TIPS FOR MAKING 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.



JANUARY 4: THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

- **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” (offering to do chores, spend quality time, share favorite toys, etc)
- In many countries families eat a circlet-shaped “3 kings cake.” Buy one or make one using a recipe from online! 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 is the winner (what that means? you decide!)
- 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 potluck where each person makes an ethnic food and 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.
- Do the Blessing of the Home and Household on Epiphany. The USCCB has instructions for how to do this blessing at www.usccb.org/prayers/blessing-home-and-household-epiphany



JANUARY 11: FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD



- Thank God for the gift of Baptism. Reflect on the day’s Gospel reading together.
- Write all your family’s Baptismal anniversaries into your 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 online. 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

(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.

