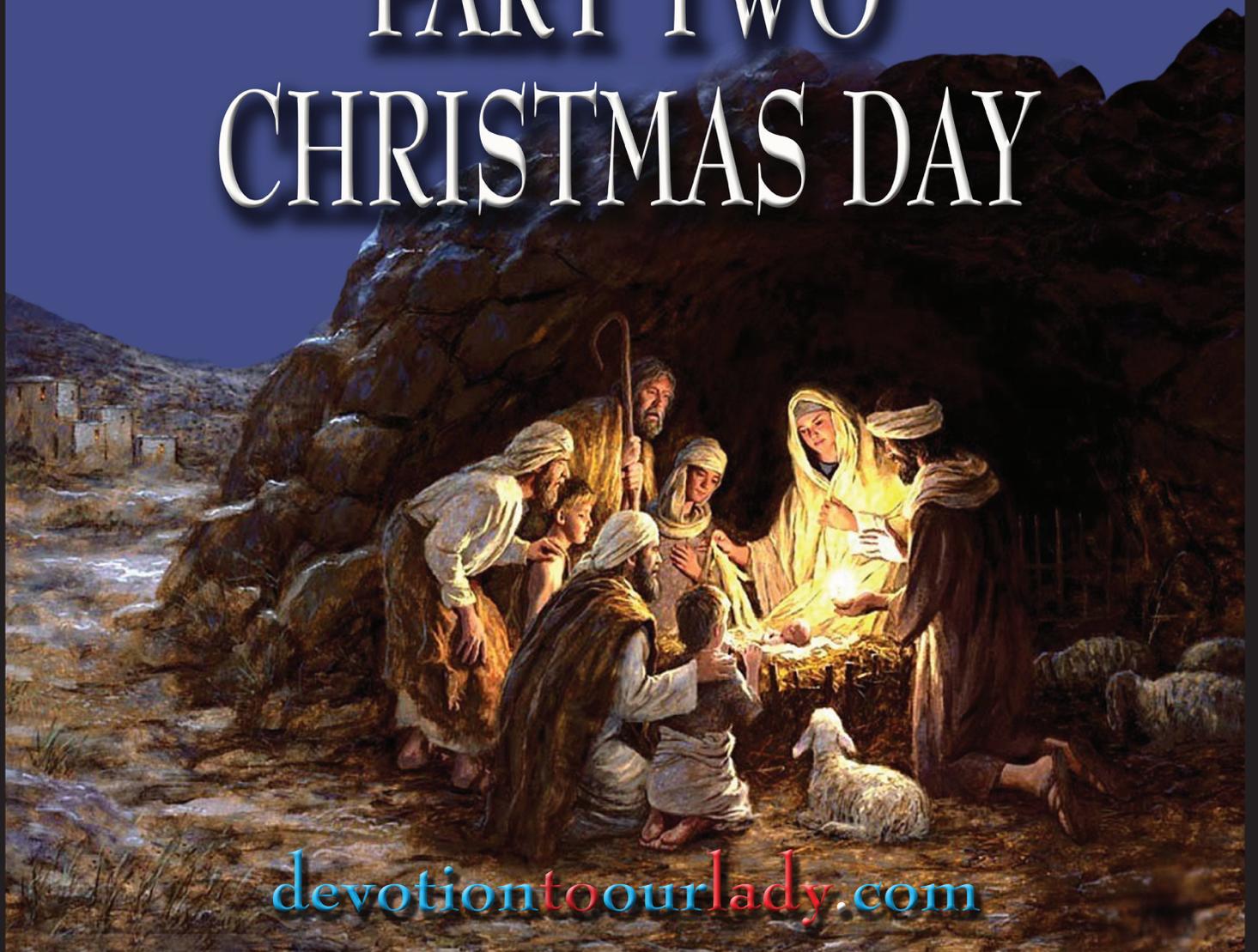


CHRIST AT THE HEART OF CHRISTMAS

Prayers & Rituals

PART TWO CHRISTMAS DAY



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

RECOMMENDED MORNING RITUAL (can be changed according family circumstances)

1. THE MORNING PROCLAMATION OF CHRIST'S BIRTH
2. CHRISTMAS DAY MORNING PRAYERS AND ANGELUS
3. FIFTEEN DECADE ROSARY WITH MEDITATIONS ON THE NATIVITY, TO BE SCHEDULED AT INTERVALS THROUGHOUT THE DAY
4. DAY VIGIL AT THE CRIB ARRANGEMENTS

RECOMMENDED AFTERNOON RITUAL (can be changed according to circumstances)

5. THE MIDDAY ANGELUS
6. PRAYERS AND READING BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE CHRISTMAS DINNER;
7. READINGS AND REFLECTIONS TO PUT LOGS ON THE CHRISTMAS FIRE IN YOU SOUL;
8. IDEAS FOR CHRISTMAS DAY ACTIVITIES THAT KEEP THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS ALIVE;

RECOMMENDED EVENING RITUAL (can be changed according family circumstances)

9. THE EVENING ANGELUS
10. CHRISTMAS NIGHT PRAYERS

“For a Child is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace”

(Isaias 9:6)

“She shall bring forth a Son and thou shalt call His name **JESUS. For He shall save His people from their sins.”**

(Matthew 1:21)



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1. PROCLAMATION OF CHRIST'S BIRTH

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This Proclamation of Christ's Birth can be made first thing in the morning, when the family has assembled for morning prayers, or it could be made before Christmas dinner, when all the guests and visitors are present and assembled.

THE LEADER READS THE FOLLOWING:

Brethren! Let us listen to the prophet Isaias:

“Be comforted, be comforted, my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and call to her: for her evil is come to an end, her iniquity is forgiven: she hath received of the hand of the Lord double for all her sins. The voice of one crying in the desert: ‘Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the wilderness the paths of our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough ways plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh together shall see, that the mouth of the Lord hath spoken! Say to the cities of Juda: “Behold your God! Behold the Lord God shall come with strength, and his arm shall rule! Behold His reward is with Him and His work is before Him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: He shall gather together the lambs with His arm, and shall take them up in his bosom, and He himself shall carry them that are with young.” ” (Isaias 40:1-11).

“For a Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us, and the government is upon His shoulder: and His Name shall be called, ‘Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace.’ His empire shall be multiplied, and there shall be no end of peace. He shall sit upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom: to establish it and strengthen it with judgment and with justice” (Isaias 9:6-7).

Brethren, this prophecy was fulfilled as we see by the words of the Evangelist, St. Luke, in the following account of the Incarnation:

“And in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And the angel being come in, said unto her: ‘Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee! Blessed art thou among women!’ Who having heard, was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be.

“And the angel said to her: ‘Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever. And of His kingdom there shall be no end!’” (Luke 1:21-26-33).

“And it came to pass, that in those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that the whole world should be enrolled. And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem: because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with Child.

“And it came to pass, that when they were there, her days were accomplished, that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:1-7).

“And there were in the same country shepherds watching, and keeping the night watches over their flock. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the brightness of God shone round about them; and they feared with a great fear.

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“And the angel said to them: Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people! For, this day, is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God, and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will!’ (Luke 2:8-14).

“And it came to pass, after the angels departed from them into Heaven, the shepherds said one to another: ‘Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us!’

“And they came with haste; and they found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in the manger. And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this Child. And all that heard, wondered; and at those things that were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God, for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.” (Luke 2:15-20).

Brethren, as we rejoice over the coming of our Savior, Who has come to save us from the devil, the world and the flesh. Let us not celebrate as the world, the flesh or the devil would have us celebrate. But let us celebrate more with the soul than with the body. As Jesus said: *“Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).*

Let us then place the Word and Bread of Heaven before the words and food of this world. Let us inebriate ourselves with the Word of God and not the wine of the world. Let us digest the words of God more than the food of the world. In this way we shall both please Heaven and sanctify our souls—rather than please the world and tarnish our souls.



2. CHRISTMAS MORNING PRAYERS & THE ANGELUS

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Just as we prepare a special meal—and not the usual meal—on Christmas Day, so too should our prayers be somewhat different on Christmas Day. Routine is the killer of devotion and fervor. Yet it is hard to break out of the cycle of routine. Hopefully the following prayers—some new, some merely expanded—will give you ideas for “cooking up” your own special prayers on this great feast day!

ACT OF ADORATION

Jesus! My Lord and my God! I adore Thee in Thy humility—in that Thou hast forsaken the joys of Heaven and exchanged them for the sufferings of Earth, taking on the mantle of our sinful human nature. I beg of Thee to remove my heart from its adoration of the world and what it can offer, and place my heart in the cradle of Thy heart. For my treasure is, then there is my heart also!

ACT OF PRAISE

O Jesus, incarnate God! I rejoice in Thy coming and praise Thy goodness—in that Thou hast come to seek and save that which was lost! Thou dost come to save, not only those who love Thee—though imperfectly—but to also save those who hate Thee! O Love incomprehensible! *“Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:13)—but Thou didst lay down Thy life even for Thy enemies! Thy Love is to be ever praised!

ACT OF THANKSGIVING

Who can grasp the immensity of Thy charity, O Lord incarnate? Thou dost never cease to shower us with blessing and graces, while we never cease to shower you with sins and offens-

es! Turn our cold indifferent hearts of stone into hearts of flesh: *"I will give them one heart, and will put a new spirit in their bowels: and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh!"* (Ezekiel 11:19).

ACT OF SORROW

Thou didst come to seek and save that which was lost—Thou didst come to call sinners to penance! O Lord! I am a sinner and I feel lost in the middle of such a sinful world. I am overcome with confusion, dread and sorrow at the sight of my faults, omissions and ingratitude. I detest them and the offence they have caused Thee, Who art so good and deserving of all my love. This is the miserable way in which I have repaid Thee, for having humbled Thyself in Thy incarnation—having come to shed Thy blood and die for my salvation! How much more ungrateful can I be? I beseech Thee to continue that same mercy and to inspire me with a true sorrow for my faults, a firm desire to amend my life and graciously grant me the forgiveness of all my sins.

THE ANGELUS

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

R. And she conceived of the Holy Ghost.
HAIL MARY....etc.

V. Behold the Handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it done unto me according to thy word.
HAIL MARY....etc.

R. And the Word was made flesh.

V. And dwelt amongst us.
HAIL MARY....etc.

R. Pray for us O holy Mother of God.

V. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray. Pour forth, we beseech Thee O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may, by His Passion and Cross, be brought to the glory of His Resurrection, through the same Christ Our Lord. **R.** Amen.

DAILY REMINDER OF THE INCARNATION

The Incarnation is a central dogma of the Faith. It is the launch-pad of the act of our Redemption and Salvation. It is the foundation of all that follows. It is a mind-blowing event, where God humiliates Himself to take on our flesh and our nature. For us to reduce ourselves to the level and nature of tiny bug, is not even anywhere near the 'reduction' undergone by God in becoming man. It is something that we rightfully and justly should remember each day.

The Angelus reminds us of the Annunciation and Incarnation, when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary with great, if somewhat startling, news! As we read in Chapter One of Luke's Gospel, (Luke 1:26-38) God wished Mary, truly a model of humility, to be the Mother of His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ!

Mary had been prepared in God's mind before the beginning of time. She had been conceived without the stain of Original Sin, as defined by the Church's dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

The Angelus pays tribute to a crucial aspect of Mary's role in the Incarnation, when it quotes from Luke's Gospel "be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). This wonderful event could not have happened without her consent, without what is known as her fiat. By saying "yes" to God in allowing herself to become His mother, she showed us the ultimate example of trust in our Creator!

Whenever we pray the Angelus, we are reminded of the threefold aspect in cooperating with God. First God makes an offer—"the angel of the Lord declared unto Mary"—He sends a message; He makes His will known in some way. Secondly, we have to respond to that offer—"be it done unto to me according to thy word"—we can accept or refuse God's offer. Thirdly, if we accept, then the fruit is eventually produced, sooner or later—"and the Word was made flesh."

THE ROSARY

15 Meditations on Nativity

**“But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.”
(Luke 2:19)**



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3. FIFTEEN ROSARY MEDITATIONS ON THE NATIVITY

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POWER, RICHNESS & UNFATHOMABILITY

The Rosary consists of a few very short prayers, but they have a most powerful effect. The Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Glory Be form the backbone and are the essence of the Rosary. If these simple prayers are used well—and are prayed slowly and with devotion—then marvelous results can flow forth. But mark well the words “prayed slowly and with devotion”! That can be a real challenge, even for the best of folk!

God is not mocked, and, therefore, we should pray in a manner that manifests our seriousness about what we are doing, and shows that we really want to pray, thereby, saying what we mean, and meaning what we say! Then, a simple prayer can be powerful and will simply produce powerful results. The power of the simple Rosary is beautifully shown by St. Louis de Montfort, in his book, *The Secret of the Rosary*.

We have all heard of the saying: “*Familiarity breeds contempt.*” The more we become used to something, then the chances are that we will gradually—perhaps even imperceptibly—lose our estimation and respect for it.

Marriage is a wonderful (or should we say “terrible”) example of this. The respect, patience, efforts and love, spent in winning-over the future spouse, can very quickly evaporate over the years and give place to their opposites. The same applies to newly bought items—at first we take such great care over them, handle them gently, keep them sparkling clean, etc. However, over time, all that is forgotten and we can even give way to misuse and abuse.

The same can be said of prayer—whether it be the supreme prayer of the Sacrifice of the Mass, or the Divine Office, or the Holy Rosary. If we are not careful, our assistance at Mass will degenerate with relative ease, and our Rosaries and other prayers will slide comfortably into a daily mechanical routine that we apply to so many other things and chores of life.

FIRST MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY "REJECTION AT BETHLEHEM"

Can you imagine such audacity? Rejecting God! Mary and Joseph come to Bethlehem, carrying God with them, and they are rejected! However, we must add that there was no massive signpost being carried by Mary and Joseph saying: "We are bringing and offering God to you!"

Very few followed their religion that well, so that they knew what to expect and when to expect it. It was hidden from most eyes—just like many mysteries of the Faith are hidden from the eyes of the worldly and vain people.

St. Paul says: "It is written: 'God hath given them the spirit of insensibility; eyes that they should not see; and ears that they should not hear, until this present day!'" (Romans 11:8), while Jesus says: "God hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them" (John 12:40). Let us not be so caught up with the things of this world that we end up closing the door on Jesus.

SECOND MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY "POVERTY IN THE FIRST CHRISTMAS"

The King of kings should have a palace in which He should be born—or at least that would be our way of doing things! Yet God says: "My thoughts are not your thoughts: nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Isaias 55:8-9).

Most people want to be rich—God, the richest of all, wanted to be poor. Our Lord and God's mas-

terpiece, Our Lady, were dealt the 'cruel' card of poverty—yet every cloud has a silver lining (if we have the eyes of Faith to see it).

When we have many things, we have less time for God—this was the sad case of affairs in the history of the Chosen People. Whenever they experienced "times of plenty", they gradually fell away from God by enjoying the many things they had. God is the only really important thing that we cannot afford to lose.

It reminds us the parable Our Lord told: "The land of a certain rich man brought forth plenty of fruits. And he thought within himself, saying: 'What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?' And he said: 'This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and will build greater; and into them will I gather all things that are grown to me, and my goods. And I will say to my soul: 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years take thy rest; eat, drink, make good cheer!'" But God said to him: 'Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee: and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?' So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God" (Luke 12:16-21).

THIRD MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY "THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CAVE"

The cave or stable, in which Our Lord was born, symbolizes our sinful soul. The cave was outside the city walls, just as we are outside the 'walls' of Heaven. A stable is for animals, and, when we sin, we act like animals—which lack human reason. St. Thomas Aquinas says that any thought, word or action against right reason is a sin of one kind or another—either mortal or venial.

The cave or stable would have smelled of animals—just as our soul smells of sin. St. Joseph would have cleaned the cave or stable the best he could, so that it would be in better shape for Mary to give birth to Jesus there. We should likewise clean our souls the best we can by good and frequent confession. If we fail to clear out mortal sin, then Our Lord will not come to our cave!

FOURTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY “THE SYMBOLISM OF FIRE”

It was winter time, and so, no doubt, St. Joseph would have tried to light some kind of fire. This is very fitting, since Our Lord would later say: *“I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I, but that it be kindled?”* (Luke 12:49).

Fire is both light and heat—it is a symbol of both Faith and Charity. Yet we cannot love what we don't know—if our Faith and knowledge of the Faith is weak, then our love of God will be weak. St. Thérèse of Lisieux lamented: *“Jesus is so little loved, because He is so little known!”* Do I feed the fire of my Faith continually with logs of knowledge?

Yet knowledge without charity is vain and useless. As St. Paul says: *“Now concerning those things that are sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up; but charity edifieth ... If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing”* (1 Corinthians 8:1; 13:1-3).

FIFTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY “THE SYMBOLISM OF THE OX AND ASS”

In most paintings of the Nativity, we see an ox and an ass in the stable. Both are beasts of burden—which immediately brings to mind the burden of having to carry the cross if we wish to get to Heaven: *“And Jesus said to all: ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’”* (Luke 9:23) ... *“And he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me”* (Matthew 10:38).

The ox is a symbol of our mind, that must labor in acquiring knowledge—not so much of the world, but of God. That man with a most brilliant

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mind, St. Thomas Aquinas, was nicknamed “The Dumb Ox.” Actually, he was far from dumb—but that was because his main intellectual labor was thinking, learning and talking about God. The ass is of the equine family, comprising horses, donkeys, mules, etc. We all know the saying: *“Stubborn as a mule!”* The ass, or mule, symbolizes our stubborn will, which want to do its own thing, rather than doing the will of God.

Usually, the ox and the ass are seen as kneeling—this signifies that we must humbly bow down, kneel and adore God. We may well be the adopted children of God, but we are not His equals.

SIXTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY “THE PRESENCE OF SHEPHERDS”

Our Lord comes to be the Good Shepherd, so it is fitting that God would arrange for shepherds and sheep to be present at His Son's birth:

“I am the Good Shepherd. A good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep. But the hireling, and he that is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and flieth: and the wolf catcheth, and scattereth the sheep. And the hireling flieth, because he is a hireling: and he hath no care for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd; and I know Mine, and Mine know Me. As the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father: and I lay down My life for My sheep. And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd” (John 10:11-16).

As Our Lord also said: *“Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it! Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves”* (Matthew 7:13-15).

SEVENTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY “THE PRESENCE OF SHEEP”

Our Lord may be the Good Shepherd—but are we good sheep? Do we listen to His voice? Or do we listen to voice of worldly shepherds, who are false shepherds, mere hirelings, seeking some self advantage or profit at our expense? They preach a doctrine of worldliness: fun, entertainment, riches, pleasures, indulgence, etc.

Our Lord, though He was the Good Shepherd, would be called—by St. John the Baptist—“the Lamb of God.” Before baptizing Our Lord, John would say: “The next day, John saw Jesus coming to him, and he saith: ‘Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29). Isaias also spoke of the Messiah under the symbol of a sheep: “He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth. He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and He shall not open His mouth” (Isaias 53:7). Are we uncomplaining lambs and sheep in the hands of God and His Divine Providence? Or do we bleat complainingly at everything that God allows to happen?

EIGHTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY “THE SYMBOLISM OF HEROD”

Herod blatantly symbolizes the world. He fears losing his place and palace to Christ—the so-called “King of the Jews.”

“When Jesus therefore was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of King Herod, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying: ‘Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east, and are come to adore Him!’ And King Herod, hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling together all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. But they said to him: ‘In Bethlehem of Juda. For so it is written by the prophet: “And thou Bethlehem the land of Juda art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the Captain that shall rule My people Israel.”’

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“Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them; and sending them into Bethlehem, said: ‘Go and diligently inquire after the Child, and when you have found Him, bring me word again, that I also may come to adore him!’

“And having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their country ... Then Herod, perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry; and sending killed all the men children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the borders thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men” (Matthew 2:1-16).

We would like to see peace between Christ and world—but it will never happen. The world, together with the devil and the flesh, make up the three chief enemies that we have to fight. There is no and can be no truce between them and us. As Scripture says: “Bear not the yoke with unbelievers. For what participation hath justice with injustice? Or what fellowship hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath the faithful with the unbeliever? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God; as God saith: ‘I will dwell in them, and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people!’ Wherefore, ‘Go out from among them, and be ye separate!’ saith the Lord” (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

NINTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY “THE THREE WISE MEN”

The number three is a powerful mystical and symbolic number. We have the three Persons of the Holy Trinity; the three members of the Holy Family; the three Theological Virtues; the three stages of the spiritual life that we must pass through before being allowed into Heaven.

On the negative side, we have the three ways in which we sin—thoughts, words and actions; we strike our breast whilst saying the *Confiteor* or “I Confess to Almighty God” prayer; we have the

three required elements that must be present if we are to be guilty of mortal sin: the thought, word or action must be seriously wrong, we must know it is wrong at the time of doing it, and we must fully want to do it; we have the three places or destinations that are directly connected to our sins or lack of sins: Heaven, Purgatory or Hell.

If we are wise—like the three wise men—then we will avoid sin at all costs, just like they avoided Herod, and seek Christ with all our might.

TENTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY "THE THREE GIFTS"

The Apocalypse has those terrible words to say: *"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold, nor hot. I would thou wert cold, or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth. Because thou sayest: I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing: and knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of Me gold fire tried, that thou mayest be made rich; and mayest be clothed in white garments, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear; and anoint thy eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see"* (Apocalypse 3:14-18).

Yes, we are spiritually poor, blind and naked, as the Apocalypse just said. Just as the three kings brought three gifts, so do the three persons of the Holy Trinity counsel us to turn to Them for the solution: to buy from Them gold, white garments, and eye-salve. These three are an echo of the three gifts offered to Jesus by the Magi.

The Gold in both cases is the gold of charity, which, as we said with the Scriptural quote above, will have grown cold in many souls.

The white garments correspond to the Myrrh. The Myrrh is a symbol of suffering, being used both as a painkiller and for embalming the dead. The white garments reflect that suffering, as shown by this quote: *"These are they who are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* (Apocalypse 7:14).

The Eye-Salve corresponds to the frankincense of prayer, which rises like smoke to Heaven. The blind man is begging and praying to Jesus for his blindness to be removed. *"Jesus asked him saying: 'What wilt thou that I do to thee?' But he said: 'Lord, that I may see!'"* (Luke 18:41). His prayer is the eye-salve that removes his blindness.

The three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh also remind us of Holy Eucharist in another way.

(1) The Holy Eucharist is our most precious treasure on Earth, just like gold is regarded as the most precious metal.

(2) The Holy Eucharist as the Sacrifice of the Mass is the most powerful prayer that we have, and frankincense is the most precious of all brands of incense, and incense is a symbol of prayer: "The smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God" (Apocalypse 8:4).

(3) The Holy Eucharist is also the greatest sacrifice that can be offered to God, and this what the Eucharist as the Sacrifice of the Mass does daily. The Sacrifice of the Mass brings healing graces to world. Likewise, Myrrh is a symbol of the supreme sacrifice, as it is used for embalming after the supreme sacrifice of death has taken the life of person; and myrrh also has healing 'graces', for it is also used for medicinal purposes.

Today there is not enough gold, frankincense and myrrh in our lives. We love too little; we pray too little; we suffer too little. That is why we risk having little chance for salvation unless we follow the example of the three kings and follow the counsels of the Apocalypse in our apocalyptic times! Love, pray and suffer!

ELEVENTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY "THE GIFT OF GOLD"

Gold is a symbol of charity and God. The word "gold" even has the word "God" in it! Scripture says: *"As silver is tried by fire, and gold in the*

furnace: so the Lord trieth the hearts” (Proverbs 17:3).

Just as gold is most valued of metals, so too is charity the most prized virtue: *“Now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity”* (1 Corinthians 13:13).

It is “soul” of all other virtues, giving them life and value. This is why St. Paul says: *“If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

He then goes on to describe the effects of charity: *“Charity is patient, is kind: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up; is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things”* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Let us often meditate and reflect on this most crucial of all virtues, for, as one saint said: “When we die, we will be judged on one thing alone—charity!” How much charity, if any, was in all the things that I thought, said and did? It is our charity that will pay for our sins: *“Charity covereth all sins”* (Proverbs 10:12).

This is what Our Lord pointed out to the Pharisees, concerning the seven-devil possessed adulteress, St. Mary Magdalen: *“Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much”* (Luke 7:47). And this is why St. Peter says: *“But before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves: for charity covereth a multitude of sins”* (1 Peter 4:8).

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TWELFTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY “THE GIFT OF FRANKINCENSE”

Frankincense is an aromatic resin obtained from trees of the genus *Boswellia* family of trees, particularly *Boswellia Sacra*. The English word is derived from Old French “franc encens” (i.e., high quality incense) and is used in incense and perfumes. So we see that there is “incense” and “frankincense” with frankincense being high quality incense. The same applies to our prayers: there are prayers that are “said” and there are prayers that are “prayed”. The difference is what Our Lord Himself spoke of: *“This people honoureth Me with their lips: but their heart is far from Me”* (Matthew 15:8).

There are four main species of *Boswellia* that produce true frankincense and resin from each of the four is available in various grades. We could very broadly categorize prayer in a similar arbitrary fashion, saying that there are four main species of prayer: (1) the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, (2) The Divine Office or Liturgy of the Hours, (3) The Holy Rosary and (4) all other prayers. Each of these species has various grades of quality, which depend upon the fervor we put into praying those prayers.

Frankincense is tapped from the scraggly but hardy trees by slashing the bark, which is called striping, and allowing the exuded resin to bleed out and harden. These hardened resins are called tears. The aroma from these tears are more valuable for their presumed healing abilities and are also said to have superior qualities for religious ritual. Similarly, suffering greatly enhances the power of prayer.

Our Lord said on the Mount of Olives: *“Pray! That ye enter not into temptation! The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh weak”* (Matthew 26:41). Our Lord spent forty days and nights praying in the unforgiving environment of the desert. Also, the mountain is a rock and Our Lord would go there to pray often:

“And having dismissed the multitude, he went into a mountain alone to pray. And when it was evening, he was there alone” (Matthew 14:23).

"He went out into a mountain to pray, and he passed the whole night in the prayer of God" (Luke 6:12). "He took Peter, and James, and John, and went up into a mountain to pray" (Luke 9:28).

St. Augustine says that prayer is the key of Heaven that fits all the gates of Heaven and all the treasure chests of God. Elsewhere he says that what bread is to the body, prayer is to the soul. And *"He knows how to live well, who knows how to pray well."*

Jesus said: *"And when ye pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men: Amen I say to you, they have received their reward" (Matthew 6:5).*

"And Jesus spoke also a parable to them, that we ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). This is why St. Paul says: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

THIRTEENTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY "THE GIFT OF MYRRH"

What is Myrrh? It is a fragrant gum or resin obtained from certain trees, especially in the Near East, which is used as incense, perfume and medicine. Frankincense and myrrh were the antibiotics of the ancient world.

Myrrh resin is a natural gum. It can also be ingested by mixing it with wine. The soldiers mixed Myrrh with wine and offered it on a sponge on the end a lance, for Jesus to drink as He was dying on the Cross, but Jesus refused it. It was meant to act as a painkiller, but Jesus did not want any painkillers, He wanted to suffer as much as He possibly could to prove His love for us. *"And they gave Him to drink wine mingled with myrrh; but he took it not" (Mark 15:23).*

The name Myrrh is rooted in the Aramaic word for "bitter." The rugged appearance of the Myrrh tree, together with its sharp thorny branches, cries out loud and clear the idea of suffering and mortification. To get Myrrh, the Myrrh tree must be first wounded, this is done with a knife

or some other lance-like pointed object. This reminds us of Our Lord being pierced with the nails and the lance upon the cross.

Let us understand that Heaven sent sufferings, though, like myrrh, they may be very bitter, they also have a wonderful medicinal effect, which if we 'swallow' the medicine, will cure us of our past and present ailments and also preserve from any future disease of sin.

FOURTEENTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY "THE PRESENCE OF JOSEPH"

Joseph oozes humility—the virtue so precious in God's eyes, and the solid necessary foundation of the spiritual life, without which we merely build on collapsible sand.

He is the head of the Holy Family, yet he is lower than both Jesus and Mary in sanctity. He is up there among the greatest saints, yet we hear so little coming from his mouth in the records of Holy Scripture.

God humiliates him by leaving him in anguish about Mary's pregnancy—to the point where he is about to walk away and leave her.

His efforts at providing for Mary in Bethlehem are "shot-down" by God, who arranges for constant rejection at each door Joseph approached seeking shelter.

He is humbled by 'losing' the Christ Child for three days—goodness knows how much he must have suffered anguish over losing Him.

As Holy Scripture says: *"He that loveth his son, frequently chastiseth him" (Ecclesiasticus 30:1). "For whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth: and as a father in the son he pleaseth himself" Proverbs 3:12).*

FIFTEENTH MEDITATION ON THE NATIVITY "THE PRESENCE OF MARY"

God chose Mary as the doorway through which Christ would come into the world. She must also be the doorway through which we must enter Heaven. There is no other way.

The saints have to powerful things to say on this matter:

St. Albert the Great (a Doctor of the Church), says: *“They who are not thy servants, O Mary, shall perish.”*

St. Bonaventure (a Doctor of the Church) repeats the same thought when he says: *“They who neglect the service of Mary shall die in their sins.”* And again: *“For them, from whom Mary turns away her face, there is not even a hope of salvation.”*

St. Ignatius of Antioch (a Father of the Church), a martyr of the second century, writes: *“A sinner can be saved only through the Holy Virgin who, by her merciful prayers, obtains salvation for so many who, according to strict justice, would be lost.”*

If a lack of devotion to her is a mark of eternal reprobation a constant love for her must be a sign of eternal salvation. Many spiritual writers state that devotion to Mary is a sign of predestination.

St. Alphonsus Liguori (a Doctor of the Church) says: *“It is impossible that a servant of Mary be damned, provided he serves her faithfully and commends himself to her maternal protection.”*

St. Anselm (a Doctor of the Church) writes: *“He who turns to thee and is regarded by thee cannot be lost.”*

St. Antonine is of the same opinion. He says: *“As it is impossible for them from whom Mary turns away her eyes of mercy to be saved, so it is necessary that they to whom she turns her eyes of mercy and for whom she intercedes to be saved and glorified.”*

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THE ROSARY

15 Meditations on Nativity

**“But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.”
(Luke 2:19)**





CHRISTMAS DAY VIGIL AT THE MANGER OF OUR LORD

**Don't leave Him alone,
lest He leave you alone!**



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4. CHRISTMAS DAY VIGIL AND PRAYERS

from devotiontoourlady.com

Whose birthday is it today? Well, we all know the answer in theory—it is Jesus' birthday—but is that reflected in practice?

In many, if not most families, Jesus will have been left behind at the church! We go to Mass to see Him, but we do not really take Him home. Or, if we do take Him home, we leave Him sitting alone in the corner somewhere, while we go about having our Christmas Day ‘fun’.

It was much the same on His first birthday. There was no room for Him in any house, so He had to be born in a cave. Today is no different, we just stuff Him in a closet until it's time to bring Him out for some attention during our Christmas Day Rosary! Yet some will not even find time for their daily Rosary today!

If it is HIS BIRTHDAY, then LET US SHOW IT by giving Him regular attention all throughout the day. If you are invited to someone's birthday party, you can “bet your bottom dollar” that this person will have one or many people paying them attention all throughout the party. Someone will always be talking to them or listening to the “birthday boy”! Let it be the same for Christ on His birthday. An all-day vigil, whereby somebody is praying at the nativity scene can and will be a powerful statement as what Christmas is all about! If we cannot give Jesus material presents at Christmas, let us at least ensure a spiritual presence.

We cannot outdo God in generosity. After all, it's His birthday! Parents spend day and night watching over a sick child! The world is sick and Our Lord is sick of the world! *“Watch and Pray! The spirit is willing, the flesh is weak.”*

SIGN-UP SHEET FOR ALL-DAY PRAYER VIGIL

10:00 am to 10:15 am	10:15 am to 10:30 am	10:30 am to 10:45 am	10:45 am to 11:00 am
11:00 am to 11:15 am	11:15 am to 11:30 am	11:30 am to 11:45 am	11:45 am to 12:00 pm
12:00 pm to 12:15 pm	12:15 pm to 12:30 pm	12:30 pm to 12:45 pm	12:45 pm to 1:00 pm
1:00 pm to 1:15 pm	1:15 pm to 1:30 pm	1:30 pm to 1:45 pm	1:45 pm to 2:00 pm
2:00 pm to 2:15 pm	2:15 pm to 3:30 pm	2:30 pm to 2:45 pm	2:45 pm to 3:00 pm
3:00 pm to 3:15 pm	3:15 pm to 3:30 pm	3:30 pm to 3:45 pm	3:45 pm to 4:00 pm
4:00 pm to 4:15 pm	4:15 pm to 4:30 pm	4:30 pm to 4:45 pm	4:45 pm to 5:00 pm
5:00 pm to 5:15 pm	5:15 pm to 5:30 pm	5:30 pm to 5:45 pm	5:45 pm to 6:00 pm
6:00 pm to 6:15 pm	6:15 pm to 6:30 pm	6:30 pm to 6:45 pm	6:45 pm to 7:00 pm
7:00 pm to 7:15 pm	7:15 am to 7:30 pm	7:30 am to 7:45 pm	7:45 pm to 8:00 pm
8:00 pm to 8:15 pm	8:15 pm to 8:30 am	8:30 pm to 8:45 pm	8:45 pm to 9:00 pm
9:00 pm to 9:15 pm	9:15 pm to 9:30 pm	9:30 pm to 9:45 pm	9:45 pm to 10:00 pm



5. THE CHRISTMAS MIDDAY ANGELUS

from devotiontoourlady.com

THE ANGELUS

- V.** The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.
R. And she conceived of the Holy Ghost.
HAIL MARY....etc.
- V.** Behold the Handmaid of the Lord.
R. Be it done unto me according to thy word.
HAIL MARY....etc.
- R.** And the Word was made flesh.
V. And dwelt amongst us.
HAIL MARY....etc.
- R.** Pray for us O holy Mother of God.
V. That we may be made worthy of the
promises of Christ.

Let us pray. Pour forth, we beseech Thee O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may, by His Passion and Cross, be brought to the glory of His Resurrection, through the same Christ Our Lord. **R.** Amen.

A PRAYER OF UNITY

I
n rural parishes, when the parish Angelus bell tolled at noon, a person could scan the many fields and see people stopped in their tracks as they prayed the Angelus. In those days, the Angelus was so much a part of rural life that as soon as the first toll of the bell was heard, the horses stopped themselves without having to be told to do so by their drivers. What a wondrous sight it must have been to look out over the fields and, there, see your neighbor praying the same prayer you were praying at the same time of the day—giving a little token and a sense of feeling of unity in Faith.

IT COMES IN “THREES”

Since the Angelus is divided into three parts, we will have three parts to the article. Firstly, the spiritual part; then the historical part; and finally the practical part or its usage.

The Incarnation is a central dogma of the Faith. It is the launch-pad of the act of our Redemption and Salvation. It is the foundation of all that follows. It is a mind-blowing event, where God humiliates Himself to take on our flesh and our nature. For us to reduce ourselves to the level and nature of tiny bug, is not even anywhere near the ‘reduction’ undergone by God in becoming man. It is something that we rightfully and justly should remember each day.

The Angelus reminds us of the Annunciation and Incarnation, when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary with great, if somewhat startling, news! As we read in Chapter One of Luke’s Gospel, (Luke 1:26-38) God wished Mary, truly a model of humility, to be the Mother of His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ!

GENUINE HUMILITY

When we pray the first mystery of the Holy Rosary—the Annunciation—we often announce that the fruit of this mystery is humility. Mary’s humility was genuine. As St. Alphonsus Liguori notes in his classic work *The Glories of Mary*, “*her only desire was that her Creator, the giver of every good thing, should be praised and blessed.*”

When Mary calls herself the handmaid, or the servant, of the Lord, in the Angelus (from Luke 1:38) it is with inspiring humility and sincerity. She thought of herself first and foremost as God’s servant, seeking glory, not for herself, but rather for Him. Mary was happy to have God work through her. As she expressed it most famously in the canticle the Magnificat, “*My soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my Savior*” (Luke 1:46-47).

St. Paul echoed this wonderful sentiment when he wrote that “*he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 10:17). In so doing, Mary became, as St. Augustine put it rather poetically,

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a “heavenly ladder, by which God came into the world,” descending from Heaven to Earth, to become flesh in her womb. This brings to mind the line from Matthew’s Gospel: “*Whoever humbles himself shall be exalted*” (Matthew 23:12).

“YES” TO GOD — “NO” TO THE WORLD

The Angelus pays tribute to a crucial aspect of Mary’s role in the Incarnation, when it quotes from Luke’s Gospel “*be it done to me according to thy word*” (Luke 1:38). This wonderful event could not have happened without her consent, without what is known as her fiat. By saying “yes” to God in allowing herself to become His mother, she showed us the ultimate example of trust in our Creator!

TOO TOUGH?

Do you think that having that kind of Faith is too daunting a task? Think about the ways in which God calls each of us in our daily lives. Do we say “yes” when Christ wants to work through us, in showing His love to others? Or when He asks us to be graceful in trying and testing situations? Mary knew that the Messiah would be a “Man of Sorrows”—to accept being His Mother, meant that this was not going to be walk in the park or a picnic! This was going to mean trouble, real trouble; together with suffering, real suffering. Prayer and meditation on Mary’s reaction, to the invitation in the Annunciation, can help us to do His will.

LOVE IS A UNION OF WILLS

Speaking of God’s word, the Angelus completes its short summary of the Incarnation with the moving reference to our Lord from John’s Gospel: “*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*” (John 1:14). As we read in the letter to the Hebrews, Christ was like us in all things but without sin (Hebrews 4:15). St. Bernard noted that our Lord came to show us His love, so that He might then experience ours—that we might say to Him, “Be it done unto me according to Thy word”—for love is a union of wills; it is wanting what the beloved wants.

6. PRAYERS AND READINGS FOR THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

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OPLATKI

If the Oplatki were not eaten on the Vigil of Christmas, they can be eaten either at breakfast on Christmas Day, or at the later Christmas dinner. This ceremony should precede the meal. The following chapter has the ceremony and history in all its full detail.

PRAYERS BEFORE EATING THE LEADER READS THE FOLLOWING:

Before we joyously celebrate the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ by partaking in His symbolic banquet, let us remind ourselves of what Holy Scripture says of such matters:

Our Lord Himself pointed out the true hierarchy of things when He said: *"It is written, that Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word of God"* (Luke 4:4).

This is why St. Paul speaks of people *"Whose end is destruction; whose God is their belly; and whose glory is in their shame; who mind earthly things"* (Philippians 3:19).

Since the Word of God is better food than the material food that God has provided for us; and since we are made of both body and soul, it is therefore fitting that on such a great spiritual feast as the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, we should not just focus on the meat and food for our bodies, but also the spiritual bread that nourishes our souls.

That is why we begin our physical meal with these spiritual thoughts, so that we might eat like the pagans, whose "god is their belly and who mind earthly things" but that we might celebrate joyfully but in a Christian manner, always bearing in mind the counsels of mortification and sobriety.

"And it came to pass, that when they were there, her days were accomplished, that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."

(Luke 2:6-7).

"The star which they had seen in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. And seeing the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And entering into the house, they found the Child with Mary His Mother, and falling down they adored Him; and opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

(Matthew 2:9-11).



Let us now say together our Grace Before Meals:

“Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ Our Lord. Amen.”

AT SOME POINT DURING THE MEAL, PERHAPS IN BETWEEN COURSES, IT IS SUGGESTED THAT YOU BREAK FOR PRAYER, WHICH CAN BE SAID STANDING AROUND THE TABLE.

A DECADE OF THE ROSARY COULD BE PRAYED, OR ANY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING READING COULD BE MADE

THE MARRIAGE FEAST AT CANA

“And the third day, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee: and the mother of Jesus was there. And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples, to the marriage. And the wine failing, the mother of Jesus saith to Him: ‘They have no wine!’ And Jesus saith to her: ‘Woman, what is that to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come!’

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His mother saith to the waiters: ‘Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye!’

Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece.

Jesus saith to them: ‘Fill the water pots with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim.

And Jesus saith to them: ‘Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast!’

And they carried it. And when the chief steward had tasted the water made wine, and knew not whence it was, but the waiters knew who had drawn the water; the chief steward calleth the bridegroom, and saith to him: ‘Every man at first setteth forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But thou hast kept the good wine until now!’

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee; and manifested his glory, and His disciples believed in Him.” (John 2:1-11).

CHRISTMAS DAY READINGS AND REFLECTIONS

““He gave thee manna for thy food, which neither thou nor thy fathers knew: to shew that not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.”
[Deuteronomy 8:3]



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7. CHRISTMAS DAY READINGS & REFLECTIONS

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MARY GIVES BIRTH TO CHRIST

The narrative of Christ’s birth, inexhaustible in its meaning, is sublime in its simplicity. “While all things were in quiet silence and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy almighty Word leapt down from ... Thy royal throne” (Wisdom 18:14-15). The Son of God, born miraculously of the Virgin Mary, is enthroned among the brute cattle. Only the Faith of Mary could fully appreciate the utter destitution, the homelessness of that eternally significant birth.

We can picture her lovingly embracing her Child and adoring Him as her God. We can visualize her wrapping Him in swaddling clothes and gently laying Him on the straw in the manger.

When we ponder the extreme poverty of the Child and the fact that, at His birth, there were only two spectators, we cannot but marvel at the Faith of His Mother. Is this the God Who “*laid the foundations of the Earth, when the morning stars praised Him together, and all the sons of God made a joyful melody*” (Job 38:4, 7)?

Cribbed and confined in the narrow manger, is this the God Whom the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain? How reconcile the poverty and humility of His birth with the prophecy of the archangel that He would be great and would be called the Son of the Most High? Reason, powerless before this overwhelming mystery, can only wonder and adore.

The God “*with Whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration*” (James 1:17) is now subject to the suffering of frail mortals. The God of

infinite power is now a helpless Infant. Externally, He is like every other child. He knows all things, since He is God; but He cannot even speak, let alone communicate His knowledge intelligently. His inarticulate cries prove His helplessness.

How severely the Eternal Father tried the Faith of the Mother of His Divine Son! We cannot comprehend Mary's thoughts as she gazed on her Child with wondering awe. How conflicting her feelings when she contemplated her own nothingness and the infinite greatness of the God miraculously born of her!

Who can conceive the fervor of her prayer, the depths of her love, the tenderness of her motherly solicitude? Nor can we form a true idea of the peace and joy that Christ, with boundless beneficence, bestowed upon His Mother.

It was for Mary Heaven by anticipation when she lifted Him from the manger, cradled Him in her arms or folded Him to her heart. Her happiness was indescribable when the body of her Child touched her body. That same body touches ours in Holy Communion. The love that Christ lavished upon His Mother was not the love of an ordinary child. It was the product of reason and grace; it was divine love, not instinctive human love. And Mary received it with the utmost humility, never for a moment deeming herself worthy of it, but returning the glory of a favor so precious to her Divine Benefactor.

Such love set her heart on fire with love of her Infant Son. Not merely as her Son, but as her God, as her unique Savior, since she had shared anticipatively in the merits of His passion and death, did the Blessed Mother love her Divine Child.

She fully appreciated that she could not love Him too much Who, because He was God, was worthy of infinite love. Her love, actuated by grace, was purely supernatural. Its action, its fervor, its progress could be neither diminished nor restrained, because Mary loved her Child and her God according to the measure of the grace with which she was full.

We have but a very faint notion of the deluge of delight that overflowed unimpeded in her immaculate soul.

The love of her Divine Child, which was the reason for her indefinable joy, was also the cause of her bitter sorrow. The sword of sorrow that transfixed the heart of Christ likewise pierced her own heart. Mary's suffering equaled her love. But though both gripped her soul simultaneously, neither the one nor the other could disturb her peace of mind or victimize her with any inordinate thought of self. Her joy did not transport her nor did her sorrow and suffering depress her. She received both with perfect resignation to the divine will.

Like Mary, we should strive with every power within us to love Christ for His own sake. Purity of intention will then characterize our thoughts, words and actions. Our Lord will be their principle and term. *"He who is perfect in charity,"* says St. Clement of Alexandria, *"does not go through the motive of the love of God: God is the most important, nay, the only end of all the works of the lover"* (Book of Stromata).

Love of God for His own sake is not mercenary. *"It does not,"* to use the words of St. Bernard, *"seek its own interests; true love suffices to itself; it is its own reward; it seeks nothing but the object beloved"* (Serm. on Canticles). Again, like Mary, we should not long for divine comfort, but should willingly accept and bear the cross in the spirit of true followers of our crucified Master.

MARY AND THE SHEPHERDS

The views of worldly wisdom and the providence of God are entirely incompatible. In announcing the momentous fact of Christ's birth, the angel told the humble shepherds that they would recognize the Savior of the world by His poverty. *"This day is born to you a Savior, Who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger"* (Luke 2:11-12).

The Eternal Father tested the Faith of these illiterate men, but only to strengthen it; for immediately after the angel had conveyed his signal intelligence to them, the celestial choirs chanted the sublimest symphony of the sweetest song that man ever heard: *"Glory to God in the highest; and on Earth peace to men of good will"* (Luke 2:14).

The shepherds proceeded at once to verify the heavenly revelation. With the disappearance of the vision, unable to restrain their feelings, they said one to another: *"Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us. And they came with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in the manger"* (Luke 2:15-16).

Simple and beautiful must have been their description of the remarkable illumination with which they had been so specially favored. We can behold them kneeling before the crib and adoring, praising and thanking God, and paying their tribute of reverent homage and deep love to His Mother. They could not but conclude that Christ had been born mysteriously, for they found Mary, not the victim of the painful suffering usually associated with childbirth, but in perfect health.

Her soul was doubtless stirred with sentiments of admiration for the wondrous providence of God when she witnessed the first adorers of her Divine Child who had been led to the crib by the message of an angel, and her heart pulsed with gratitude for the high honor that God had conferred on her.

Never had she realized so vividly God's estimate of poverty, humility and simplicity; for not to Herod and his sycophants, not to the rich and powerful, not to the learned masters in Israel, not to the proud and carnal-minded, but to the lowly and poor of an outlying rural region was the astounding fact of Christ's birth first revealed. In reflecting on this inspiring, soul-stirring truth, she fully appreciated the meaning of her own abject poverty and the extreme destitution of her spouse.

Holy Scripture does not enlarge on the meeting of Mary and the shepherds. It simply states: *"Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart"* (Luke 2:19).

She was too well grounded in virtue to neglect any opportunity of advancing in the way of God. She lived only to glorify God by her growth in holiness. Queen of Saints that she was, she listened most attentively to the simple and appealing message of the shepherds, which was inspired by the God Who had miraculously led these humble and sincere men to the lowly palace of the newborn King. *"Pondering them in her heart"* (Luke 2:19), she used all their words for her spiritual nourishment.

How full of instruction for us is the revelation of Christ's birth to the poor and unassuming shepherds! Like them, we shall find Christ only if we are simple, guileless, humble and docile. *"Amen I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven"* (Matthew 18:3).

Only when the soul is innocent and artless, open and ingenuous, frank and confiding, does she become fit soil for the growth of every virtue. Childlike simplicity is the primeval novitiate of holiness. The searching rays of divine grace penetrate with the utmost ease the soul of a child. By becoming like little children in the sight of God, we will travel the path of perfection with giant strides, because the humility of the child is the most potent antidote against pride, whose deadening effect paralyzes our progress.

Every phase of Christ's life is an object lesson portraying some particular truth. The angel informed the shepherds that they would find the Child wrapped in swaddling clothes. What could be more weak than a newborn infant thus attired? By willingly submitting to a state of extreme feebleness and therefore of total dependence, Christ taught us how to overcome the degrading bondage of our self-will, which makes us the worst of slaves.

Perhaps we have learned in the school of bitter experience how prone we are to vice and how apathetic to virtue. *"All men are ruined on the side of their natural propensities."*

We must conquer our natural impulses if we would not defeat eternally the designs of God in our regard. Now, the human will is disciplined and reduced to a state of spiritual bondage by the virtue of obedience. As the Infant Christ, wrapped in swaddling clothes, was incapable either of movement or resistance, but wholly dependent upon His Mother, so the soul, even though strong in Faith, is spiritually inert and helpless. She becomes spiritually active through prompt obedience to lawful authority, especially to him who is for her the direct voice of God, her spiritual guide.

The soul interiorly mortified by fidelity in obeying the divine bidding as expressed to her by her director, finds it comparatively easy to practice the humility, the poverty and the self-denial which Christ preaches with magic persuasiveness from His pulpit, the cheerless crib. How low He sank in the estimation of men in order to teach us the virtue which we must learn and practice before we can practice any other virtue!

In imitation of His overwhelming humility, we should never desire worldly honor and pre-eminence. *"You know that the princes of the Gentiles lord it over them; and they that are greater, exercise power upon them. It shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be the greater among you, let him be your minister. And he that will be first among you, shall be your servant"* (Matthew 20:25-27).

Though the poorest of God's poor, if we are truly humble we will not complain about the adverse conditions of our earthly lot. If rich, we will not glory in our abundance and make of it a dangerous, even fatal gift prompting us to indulge habits of luxury and indolence.

On the contrary, we will be perpetually astir to alleviate human suffering and to improve the estate of God's favored children, the poor. By our

spirit of detachment from riches, we will glorify God for His bounty and thus render ourselves impervious to the alluring appeal of sensuality. Disengagement from the perishable goods of earth will enable us to live mortified lives conformable to the doctrine and example of Jesus Christ. If we learn the lesson taught so forcefully by the Eternal God from His comfortless crib, we cannot be delicate members of a crucified Head.

MARY AND THE CIRCUMCISION

As God Incarnate, Christ was not bound by human or positive law. The lawgiver is not subject to his own laws, and Christ, the God-Man, was the Lawgiver of both the Old and the New dispensation. But with a humility that shocks and confounds our detestable pride, He freely submitted to the rigorous and abasing ceremony of the circumcision. Mary beheld her Child, in subjecting Himself to this law, sign Himself with the sign of sinners and willingly accept the punishment of their sin. She thus witnessed her Divine Son bind Himself to obey perfectly every ordinance of the Old Law and offer

Himself to His Eternal Father as the Victim of the New Testament for the sins of mankind. The first shedding of His blood was but the sorrowful prelude to its full outpouring on the heights of Calvary. Today, the storm is threatening *"for the sky is red and lowering"* (Matthew 16: 3). On Golgotha, it will break with full force when Christ will redeem man *"from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us—for it is written: 'Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree!'"* (Galatians 3:13).

Could we sound the depths of Mary's love for her Child, only then would we understand the anguish of her sorrow as she minutely observed the knife cutting his virginal flesh and the blood flowing from His sacred body.

But she docilely underwent this trial, the ominous foreboding of far greater pain when she will, with her Divine Son, drain the chalice of His

passion. With unshaken Faith, she adored the decrees of Heaven, suffering as no other mother ever suffered or ever will suffer; through a common bond of sympathy born of intensest love for her Child, becoming a holocaust with Him for the innumerable sins of men.

Though her foresight of suffering, which began when she consented to be the Mother of Christ, intensified during this initial shedding of the Savior's blood, with the generosity characteristic of supernatural sacrificial love, she united her offering of herself with that of her Divine Son. Her Faith, which was her love in action, enabled her to surrender herself to a life of perennial suffering with loving resignation to the will of God.

Mary's foreknowledge of the passion and death of Christ consequent upon her free acceptance of the divine motherhood enlightened her to understand the full meaning of the name Jesus which her Child was called both at His circumcision and also by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

Alone of all mortals, she could best appreciate the sorrow and desolation identified with the name of her Divine Son. Every time she uttered it, she felt, with a sorrow "great as the sea" (Lamentations 2:13), the agony and dereliction of His bitter passion and His brutal crucifixion; for the name of Jesus signifies: "God is salvation, the Savior." She realized that, though she was exalted to the highest Heavens as Mother of God, her very exaltation would be the reason and the measure of her suffering. Christ, by His baptism of blood, became the King of Martyrs; Mary, by sharing in spirit His passion, became the Queen of Martyrs.

Can we claim Jesus as our blood Brother and Mary as our Mother if we shrink from sorrow and pain? The cross is inescapable.

The *Imitation of Christ* tells us:

"There is no salvation of soul nor hope of eternal life, except in the cross. Take up therefore your cross and follow Jesus, and you will enter into

life everlasting. He has gone before you carrying His cross, and has died for you on the cross, that you also might carry your cross and desire to die on the cross. "If we be dead with Christ ... we shall live also together with Christ" (Romans 6:8); "As you are partakers of the sufferings, so shall you be, also of the consolation" (2 Corinthians 1:7); Behold, all depends on the cross and dying on the cross; and there is no other way to life and to true interior peace than the way of the holy cross ... Go where you will, seek what you will, and you shall not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below, than the way of the holy cross. Arrange all things to your liking, yet you shall always find something to suffer, whether you will it or not; and thus you will always find the cross" (Imitation of Christ, Bk. II. ch. 12, 11-17).

The patient endurance of life's hardships, in imitation of Jesus and Mary, is the price of eternal life. "Dearly beloved, think not strange the burning heat which is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you. But if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that, when His glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

We must, then, appropriate the lesson of Christ's physical circumcision by the moral circumcision of our hearts, "the circumcision not made by hand in despoiling of the body of the flesh" (Colossians 2:11). This is indispensable if we would resemble Christ and His Blessed Mother.

Our yearning to become like to them will soften the pain of our earthly martyrdom, will make us gladly tread with them the wine-press of anguish and sorrow, and will transmute the bitterest desolation of life's warfare into the sweetest joy that shall be but the anticipation of the joy to be eternally ours when the God of all consolation shall wipe away all tears from our eyes.

CHRISTMAS GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Be of
good cheer!
The Lord of
heaven gives
thee joy!"
(Tobias 7:20)



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8. CHRISTMAS GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

from devotiontoourlady.com

On Christmas Eve, the Poles have a beautiful custom of playing games. Can playing games be pleasing to Christ? Well, yes and no! Yes, if our spiritual duties and prayers do not have to be sacrificed for the sake of games. But no, if we end up "short-changing" Jesus on His birthday.

It must be kept in mind that, today, there is far too much emphasis on games and fun, and too little emphasis on the spiritual side of things. No doubt you recall the words of the Angel of Portugal (a.k.a. The Angel of Peace) at Fatima, when he appeared to the Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, who were busy playing a game at the time:

"What are you doing?" he chided the children, "Pray! Pray a great deal! The Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary have designs of mercy on you. Offer unceasingly prayers and sacrifice yourselves to the Most High. Make of everything you can a sacrifice and offer it to God as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and in supplication for the conversion of sinners! Above all, accept and bear with submission the sufferings which the Lord will send you!"

The Angel of Portugal seems to us to be a bit of a "spoilsport" or "killjoy"! Yet that is what God wanted. Part of the problem—though this was not the main reason—was that the children were accustomed to shortening their prayers so that they would have more time to play! A Christmas Day habit if there ever was one!

We can play, but we must pray before we play, and pray more than we play—in fact, our whole day can and should be one unceasing prayer, switching from one kind of prayer to another—

for prayer is essentially the raising of the mind and heart to God.

This is why Holy Scripture says: *“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Our Lord also becomes a “killjoy” or a “fun-slayer” because *“Jesus spoke also a parable to them, that we ought always to pray, and not to faint”* (Luke 18:1) and Holy Scripture adds: *“Pray without ceasing”* (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Games, therefore, fall into this category of a loose form of prayer—*“whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God.”*

To our modern mind, soaked in lukewarmness and indifference, twisted and corrupted by maxims, fashions, trends and attitudes of the world, such an idea seems to be “too much”, too radical, too extreme, even fanatical!

Yet how else can you interpret the command from the Old Testament and which Our Lord Himself repeated: *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength. This is the first commandment”* (Mark 12:30)? There is only one possible interpretation—the interpretation that everyone mistakenly thinks is impossible and too demanding! How else can you interpret the word “whole”? There is no “wobble room”—whole means total, everything, all, entire.

Thus Our Lord is saying that our entire day should be a prayer in one form or another! Hey! We even promise the same thing in our morning offering—are we lying to God? *“O my God, through the Sorrowful and Immaculate of Mary, I offer Thee ALL my thoughts, words and actions, prayers, joys and sufferings of this day, etc.”*

Do we say one thing, but mean another? So even our games should in some way be a prayer to God. If our games take us away from God in any way, or affect and diminish our love, re-

spect, fervor and devotion, or weaken our spiritual life, then they are not good games. If, on Judgment Day, we shall have to answer to God for every idle word—*“I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment!”* (Matthew 12:36)—then so too for all the games we participate in. Pick your games wisely and use them temperately or moderately!

Okay, so much for the principle of games—what about the games themselves? What games? Well, everyone has their own ideas about games—but for once in a year, can we not make the effort to plan for and even create from scratch some Christmas orientated games? Heck, we plan and create so many other secular things—are we really that dumb when it comes to the spiritual?

Part of the problem must be a fear of coming out second-best in comparison to the multitude of secular games available. Human respect is also a big fear factor—what on earth will people think of me suggesting that we play some kind of Christmas orientated game (or let’s stop beating about the bush and call it for what is: a religious game! There! I said it!).

Here are some ideas—laugh if you want—but at least it is an attempt to fulfill the Scriptural command of *“whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God”* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

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CHRISTMAS TREASURE HUNT

You could take the classical game of the “Treasure Hunt” and make the Baby Jesus your treasure. Hide the Baby Jesus in a location and then have religious questions and religious clues for the treasure seekers. For those who need a refresher course, here is something found online. You can look for other rules or ideas too.

RULES: Treasure Hunt can be played as individuals or teams competing for time. It is fun to play either inside or out. The goal of the game is to lead the seekers through a set of clues that takes them from place to place to find a treasure. The “seekers” need to read each clue they find and figure out the next location.

TO START: A game organizer must create and hide the clues to set up the game for the “seekers.”

- Cut small squares of paper for the clues.
- For children who can't read – write the clue word with a drawing of where they are to look.
- For children who can read, write out the clue location.
- For older children (or even adults), challenge them with riddles or trivia questions to find the clue location.
- Keep the clues a distance apart, making sure the location of your final clue accommodates the size of the treasure

HIDING THE CLUES: The best way to hide the clues in Treasure Hunt is to read the first clue, put it in a starting place (we use the kitchen) and hide the next clue in the location written on the clue you just read. Follow the same path the kids will when they search. Read each clue before folding and hiding it, so that you know where to go to next.

PLAYING THE GAME: Children are handed the starter clue. It tells them the location to hunt for the next clue on their way to the treasure. As many or as few clues can be prepared and hid. The final clue leads to the treasure—the Infant Jesus.

Treasures can be whatever you want — anything from treats and toys to special prizes and promises. You could give the prizes a religious flavor—Rosaries, holy medals, holy cards, scapulars, little statues, books, pictures, etc. We put things in zip lock bags for each of the kids on the hunt.

HINTS:

- Keep the clues from your treasure hunt for next time. You can just mix up the order and hide the note in a new spot at each location.
- The older the kids and the more times they have played, the tougher the hiding spots.
- Or let the older kids split into teams and create each other's clue locations.

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CHRISTMAS TRIVIA QUIZ

You could divide up family and guests into teams or groups: for example, (1) the Holy Family, (2) the Angels, (3) the Shepherds, (4) the Magi.

The questions need some forethought and planning—hence the need to start now, well before Christmas. Questions need to accommodate the different age ranges and levels of knowledge. Nobody like playing a game where they get all the answers wrong!

Resources can be Holy Scripture, catechisms, books on the life of Christ, other books about Christmas. Time permitting, though in all honesty it will be “long-shot”, we may be able to come up with a Christmas Trivia Quiz—but don’t count on it. In any case, it is impossible to make a “one-size-fits-all” Christmas trivia quiz because of the incredible ranges of knowledge that people have—all the way from lots of knowledge down to little knowledge. You make it too hard and nobody will like it, you make it too easy and it becomes so ridiculously easy that it is boring. You know your family and guests, you should be the one to cater for them, rather than expect someone to “do surgery blindfolded”.

Example of Christmas Themed Questions

Q. 12 Days of Christmas (12 questions asking for one of the 12 days: e.g. “What was sent on the 4th Day of Christmas?”)

A. Partridge in a Pear Tree—Two Turtle Doves—Three French Hens—Four Colly (Calling) Birds—Five Gold Rings—Six Geese A-Laying—Seven Swans A-Swimming—Eight Maids A-Milking—Nine Ladies Dancing—Ten Lords A-Leaping—Eleven Pipers Piping—Twelve Drummers Drumming.

Q. Where did the song originate 12 Days of Christmas (come from)?

A. It came from Catholics in England during the Protestant Revolution (‘Reformation’).

Q. Who was the Roman Emperor that called for a census at the time of Jesus’ birth?

A. Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1).

Q. Where were Joseph and Mary living when the census was called for?

A. Nazareth.

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Q. Who was the ruler (king) at the time Jesus was born?

A. Herod.

Q. In which city or town did the king live?

A. Jerusalem.

Q. When do we celebrate the birth of Jesus?

A. Christmas Day, December 25th

Q. In which town was Jesus born?

A. Bethlehem.

Q. What does the word “Bethlehem” mean?

A. Town of Bread.

Q. In Christmas carols, what chief animals do hear mentioned?

A. Ox, ass, sheep.

Q. What were the first words of the single angel who appeared to the shepherds?

A. “Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people!” (Luke 2:10).

Q. What were first words of the choirs of angels that the shepherds heard?

A. “Glory to God in the highest and peace on Earth to men of good will!” (Luke 2:14).

Q. Where does the Bible say the Magi came from?

A. The East (Matthew 2:1).

Q. Name one of the Three Magi (Three Kings). There you have 3 separate questions.

A. Caspar or Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasaar

Q. Name the gifts brought by the Magi (Three Kings). There you have 3 separate questions.

A. Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh

Q. Spell Frankincense

Q. Spell Myrrh

That is just a small example of the questions that could be asked to keep within the boundaries and theme of Christmas. This is just the tip of the iceberg of the questions you could formulate. Start now. You will need the time.

CHRISTMAS CAROL COMPETITION

Another way to keep Christmas focused on Christ is to have a Christmas carol competition. This entails dividing those who are present into two or more teams. Each team can select to sing the opening line of a Christmas Carol of their own choice. They sing only one line and then the next team must sing the second line. If there is a third team, then they must sing the third line, if there is no third team, then the third line of the carol by default must be sung by the first team.

If there are several teams, then as soon as one team fails to correctly sing the line they must sing, then that team drops out of that particular carol singing. The remaining teams keep going until there is a winner, with all other teams having failed to correctly sing the next line. For every correct line, a team is awarded one point. The team with the most points at the end of the competition is obviously the winner.

It is strongly suggested that you have an extensive list of the lyrics of as many Christmas carols as possible, in order to refer to the words in cases of dispute. To avoid difficulties, you could always refuse a team's choice of carol if you do not have a written copy of the words or lyrics of that carol.

CHRISTMAS CHARADES

Everybody is probably familiar with the game of charades. If not, here is a brief description. Charades is a parlor or party word guessing game. Originally, the game was a dramatic form of literary charades: a single person would act out each syllable of a word or phrase in order, followed by the whole phrase together, while the rest of the group guessed.

A variant was to have teams who acted scenes out together while the others guessed. Today, it is common to require the actors to mime their

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hints without using any spoken words, which requires some conventional gestures.

Once again, you divide up everybody into teams. You will alternate teams (A-B-A-B-A-B) or rotate teams if there are more than two teams (A-B-C-D-A-B-C-D) until every player has acted at least once.

Each person on that team will have to act-out for their own team, by silent gestures and signs the Christmas-related word(s) that they will be assigned by a the adjudicator or they will simply pick a card from a pile of cards on which a word or words will be written.

The team has a maximum time limit (usually 1 minute, but make it 2 minutes if the players are unfamiliar with Charades, or are a little "rusty") to try and guess the word(s) being acted-out by their team member. You can add to the time limit a limited number of guesses—for example 10 guesses.

You need to enforce a silent performance by the player to his or her teammates. To enforce a focus on physical acting out of the clues, silent mouthing of the words for lip-reading, spelling, and pointing are generally banned. Humming, clapping, and other noises may be banned as well.

You will need a scoreboard or sheet to tally the teams' points: one for every correctly guessed answer and one point for every answer the opposing team failed to guess within the allotted time.

Or you could, after the time has expired or the maximum number of guesses have been used up, offer one guess to the opposing team and if they get it right, then they get the point in that manner, rather than freely being given a point without any effort on their part. If there are more than two teams playing, then the offer could go to team that is in last place. If the team in last place fails to guess correctly, then offer it to the team in second-last place. If everyone fails, then no point is given.

Obviously, the way you want to play is entirely up to you and your group! One thing that we enjoy doing is allotting more points for harder words. You can do this by asking players to sort their words by difficulty (easy, medium, and hard) and writing on each one a point value: 1 point for easy words, 2 points for medium words, and 3 points for hard words.

All the words MUST be part of the Christmas Story. Announce beforehand, and enforce, a respect and avoidance of ridicule of holy persons and things connected to the Christmas Story. Our pantomime gestures should not lessen or tarnish the respect owed to God and things connected with God. If a player transgresses this, then tell them that a point will be deducted as a consequence. If repeated, ban the player concerned. The game is meant to serve as a reminder of the Christmas Story, and should not cheapen it.

Below, you will find the most common standard gestures made in the Charades game. Some of them, of course, will not apply to the Christmas Story Charades, but here they are anyway. It would be wise to "copy, paste and print out" these gestures to hand out to those who are somewhat unfamiliar with Charades.

• STANDARD SIGNALS

PERSON: Stand with hands on hips.

PLACE: Point down to the ground in front of you.

OBJECT: Point to an inanimate object.

BOOK TITLE: Unfold your hands as if they were a book.

MOVIE TITLE: Pretend to crank an old-fashioned movie camera.

SONG (CHRISTMAS CAROL) TITLE: Pretend to sing.

TV SHOW: Draw a rectangle to outline a TV screen.

QUOTE OR PHRASE: Make quotation marks in the air with your fingers.

PLAY TITLE: Place both hands out, palms facing the audience and touching at the thumbs, and draw them apart like a theater curtain.

POEM: The player pretends to hold a paper and pretends to read the poem.

LOCATION: Make a circle with one hand, then point to it, as if pointing to a dot on a map.

EVENT: Point to your wrist as if you were wearing a watch.

COMPUTER GAME: Using both hands move your thumbs like you are using a game pad.

WEBSITE: Hold one hand out, palm down, horizontal to the ground, as if holding a computer mouse. Make a sweeping motion side to side, then stop and tap index finger as if "clicking".

• TO INDICATE OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORD OR PHRASE:

NUMBER OF WORDS IN THE CHARADE: Hold up the corresponding number of fingers.

WHICH WORD YOU ARE WORKING ON: Hold up the number of fingers again.

NUMBER OF SYLLABLES IN THE WORD: Lay the number of fingers on your arm.

WHICH SYLLABLE YOU ARE ON: Lay the number of fingers on your arm again.

LENGTH OF WORD: Make a "little" or "big" sign as if you were measuring a fish.

SOMEONE HAS GUESSED PART OF THE CHARADE CORRECTLY: Point at your nose with one hand, while pointing at the person with your other hand.

SOUNDS LIKE OR RHYMES WITH: Cup one hand behind an ear, or pull on your earlobe.

LONGER VERSION OF: Pretend to stretch a piece of elastic.

SHORTER VERSION OF: Do a "karate chop" with your hand.

PLURAL: Link your little fingers.

PAST TENSE: Wave your hand over your shoulder toward your back.

OPPOSITE: Form each hand into a hitch-hiker's thumb signal and point them in opposite directions.

THE ENTIRE CONCEPT: Sweep your arms through the air making big brackets.

A LETTER OF THE ALPHABET: Move your hand in a chopping motion toward your arm (near the top of your forearm if the letter is near the beginning of the alphabet, and near the bottom of your arm if the letter is near the end of the alphabet).

A COLOR: Point to your tongue, then point to an object of the color you're trying to convey. If no objects are available, then pantomime an object that typically possesses the color in question.

CLOSE, KEEP GUESSING! Frantically wave your hands about to keep the guesses coming, or pretend to fan yourself, as if to say "getting hotter".

STOP! WORK ON SOMETHING ELSE: Hold both arms out in front of you, palms of your hands waving, facing your teammates, while simultaneously shaking your head, eyes closed.

• COMMON SMALLER WORDS:

"A" steeple index fingers together.

"I" point at your eye, or your chest.

"THE" make a "T" sign with your index fingers.

"THAT" make a "T" with your index fingers, followed by one flattened hand tapping your head for "hat". Following this with the "opposite" sign indicates the word "This."

"OR" pretend to paddle a canoe.

"ON" make your index finger leap on to the palm of your other hand. Reverse this gesture to indicate "Off."

• SIGNALS FOR LETTERS OR VOWELS

"A" place the index fingers together to form an "A" frame.

"I" point at the corner of the eye with the index finger.

"E" with your right hand, point three fingers horizontally (sideways) and place the index finger of your left hand in a vertical (upwards) position, over the knuckles of the right hand.

"O" middle finger and thumb touching to form an "O".

"U" hold hand palm facing up with thumb facing the team, form a "U" with index finger and thumb, fold the other remaining three fingers inward towards the palm.



9. THE CHRISTMAS EVENING ANGELUS

from devotiontoourlady.com

THE ANGELUS

- V.** The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.
R. And she conceived of the Holy Ghost.
HAIL MARY....etc.
- V.** Behold the Handmaid of the Lord.
R. Be it done unto me according to thy word.
HAIL MARY....etc.
- R.** And the Word was made flesh.
V. And dwelt amongst us.
HAIL MARY....etc.
- R.** Pray for us O holy Mother of God.
V. That we may be made worthy of the
promises of Christ.

Let us pray. Pour forth, we beseech Thee O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may, by His Passion and Cross, be brought to the glory of His Resurrection, through the same Christ Our Lord. **R.** Amen.

HISTORY OF THE ANGELUS

The historical origins of the Angelus are rather complex. According to Fr. Herbert Thurston, "The history of the Angelus is by no means easy to trace with confidence, and it is well to distinguish in this matter between what is certain and what is in some measure conjectural." The big picture view is this:

BIG PICTURE VIEW

Firstly, it is certain that the Angelus at midday and in the morning were of later introduction than the evening Angelus. Secondly, it is certain that the midday Angelus, which is the most recent of the three, was not a mere development or imitation of the morning and evening

devotion. Thirdly, there can be no doubt that the practice of saying three Hail Marys in the evening, somewhere about sunset, had become a general custom throughout Europe in the first half of the fourteenth century; and that it was recommended and indulged by Pope John XXII in 1318 and 1327.

There was a tradition in the monasteries of Europe, during the Middle Ages, around the 11th or 12th century, to ring a bell at dusk, or early evening, as a kind of salute to the Virgin Mary. This custom was then embraced by cathedral and parish churches, where, at the sound of a bell, the faithful were encouraged to pray three Hail Marys in honor of the Blessed Virgin being visited by the angel, which was believed to have occurred during the evening.

The morning Angelus grew out of a practice of ringing a bell in the morning, honoring Mary as the "Morning Star," and seeing in her the bride who "*cometh forth as the morning rising ... bright as the sun*" (Canticles 6:10).

The Angelus prayed at noon was the last to develop. It is possible that it had its origin in the custom of the ringing of a bell at noon, on Fridays, in memory of our Lord's Passion. This further developed with the prescription of Pope Callistus III, who ordered the daily ringing of the bells at noon, with the praying of three Our Fathers and Hail Marys, asking for divine protection from the Turks, who were threatening Christendom at that epoch.

The present-day form of the Angelus, with its antiphons, Hail Marys and final prayer, came about in the 16th century and is found for the first time in a catechism printed in Venice, in 1560.

MORE DETAILED HISTORY

(Getting Sleepy? You will now!)

These facts are admitted by all writers on the subject, but when we try to push our investigations further we are confronted with certain difficulties. Therefore, we can say with certitude that this devotion was already well established around 700 years ago—but if it was well-established

at that time, it means that it must have begun well before that time. Here are the fruits of research from some Church historians that will now give a slightly more detailed picture of its origins.

ELEVENTH CENTURY EVIDENCE—1000's

The Angelus originated with the 11th-century monastic custom of reciting three Hail Marys during the evening, or Compline, bell. The first written documentation stems from Italian Franciscan monk Sinigardi di Arezzo (died 1282). Franciscan monasteries in Italy document the use in 1263 and 1295. The current form of the Angelus prayer is included in a Venetian Catechism from 1560. In 1269, St Bonaventure urged the faithful to adopt the custom of the Franciscans of saying three Hail Marys as the Compline bell was rung.

FIRST CAME THE EVENING ANGELUS

Fr. T. Esser, O.P., who has studied the history of the Angelus in depth, says we can be absolutely certain of three Hail Marys being recited at the sound of the bell in the evening, from the text of a decree of the Provincial Synod of Gran in the year 1307. However historians are agreed that there are a good many facts which suggest that some such practice was already established at least in the previous century, or not even earlier. There is a vague, and not very well confirmed tradition, which ascribes to Pope Gregory IX, in 1239, an ordinance requiring that a bell should be rung for the salutation and praises of Our Lady.

Further back than this, direct testimonials do not go; but that does not mean the Angelus is not older than existing testimonials! In a monastic rule composed by St. Aethelwold of Winchester, England, around 975, that certain prayers called the *tres orationes* (three prayers), preceded by psalms, were to be said after Compline, as well as before Matins and again at Prime, and, although there is no express mention of a bell being rung after Compline, there is express mention of the bell being rung for the *tres orationes* (three prayers) at other hours.

In the Franciscan decree of St. Bonaventure’s time, referred to above, this is precisely what we find, namely, that the laity in general were to be induced to say Hail Marys when the bell rang at Compline, during, or more probably after, the recitation of the Divine Office of the friars. A special appropriateness for these greetings of Our Lady was found in the belief that at this very hour she was saluted by the angel.

THEN CAME THE MORNING ANGELUS

This last suggestion about the tres orationes (three prayers) also offers some explanation of the fact that shortly after the recital of the three Hail Marys at evening had become familiar, a custom established itself of ringing a bell in the morning and of saying the Ave thrice. The earliest mention seems to be in the chronicle of the city of Parma, 1318, though it was the town-bell which was rung in this case. Still the bishop exhorted all who heard it to say three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys for the preservation of peace, which is why it was called “the peace bell”.

The morning Ave Maria soon became a familiar custom in all the countries of Europe, not excepting England, and was almost as generally observed as that of the evening. But while in England the evening Ave Maria is found as early as 1324. No formal direction, as to the morning ringing, is found before 1399.

LAST OF ALL CAME THE MIDDAY ANGELUS

This suggests a much more complicated problem which cannot be fully discussed here. The one clear fact, which seems to result alike, from the statutes of several German Synods in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as also from books of devotion of a somewhat later date, is that the midday ringing, while often spoken of as a peace bell and formally commended by King Louis XI of France, in 1475, for that special object, was closely associated with the veneration of the Passion of Christ—for tradition has it that Christ was crucified at midday and died at three o’clock in the afternoon.

At first it appears that this midday bell, e.g. at Prague in 1386, and at Mainz, Germany, in 1423, was only rung on Fridays, but the custom, by degrees, extended to the other days of the week. In the English Hours of Prayer and the German Hortulus Animæ of the beginning of the sixteenth century, rather lengthy prayers commemorating the Passion are provided to be said at the midday tolling of the bell, in addition to the ordinary three Hail Marys.

THE ANGELUS BELL

The Angelus, in all its stages of development, was closely associated with the ringing of a church bell. Though, in modern times, this custom has fallen by the wayside—like so many other good customs that expressed the Faith.

The ringing of the Angelus bell, in the 14th century and even in the 13th century, must have been very general. The number of bells belonging to these two centuries, that still survive, is relatively low, but a considerable proportion bear inscriptions that suggest that they were originally intended to serve as Ave bells. Many bear the words Ave Maria; or, as in the case of a bell at Helfta, near Eisleben, in Germany, dated 1234, the whole sentence: *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.*

Bells inscribed with Ave Maria are also numerous in England, but there the Angelus bells seem in a very large number of instances to have been dedicated to St Gabriel, the angel mentioned in the prayer (Luke 1:26–27). In the Diocese of Lincoln alone there are nineteen surviving medieval bells bearing the name of Gabriel, while only six bear the name of Michael, a much more popular patron in other respects.

In France, the Ave Maria seems to have been the ordinary label for Angelus bells; but in Germany the most common inscription of all are the words *O Rex Gloriæ Veni Cum Pace* (“O King of Glory, Come with Peace”). In Germany, the Netherlands, and in some parts of France, the Angelus bell was regularly known as the Peace bell, and “to toll for peace” was a phrase popularly used for ringing the Angelus.

CHRISTMAS DAY NIGHT PRAYERS

“And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and he passed the whole night in the prayer of God”
(Luke 6:12).

“When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father, Who seeth in secret, will repay thee”
(Matthew 6:6)



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10. CHRISTMAS DAY NIGHT PRAYERS

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O God, come to my assistance.
O Lord make haste to help me.
Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and the Holy Ghost;
as it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.

Dear Lord, night has come, the day is done. Let Thy peace flow over this household throughout the dark of night and in the few still hours of the coming morning. Wipe away our troubles. Cleanse us of worry and doubt. Through Thee, may Thy magnificent power be our protection forever more. Amen

ACT OF ADORATION

I adore Thee, O my God, with that spirit of submission which the presence of Thy sovereign greatness inspires. I believe in Thee, because Thou art truth itself. I hope in Thee, because Thou art faithful to Thy promises. I love Thee with my whole heart, because Thou art infinitely worthy of being loved, and, for Thy sake, I love my neighbor as myself.

ACT OF THANKSGIVING

Help me, O Lord, to return Thee thanks for all Thy inestimable blessings and favors. Thou hast thought of me and loved me from all eternity, how little have I returned that love, until now! Thou hast formed me out of nothing, and it is little or nothing that I have given back to Thee! Thou hast redeemed me by Thy Passion and Death, but I am prepared to suffer so little for love of Thee! Each day Thou dost continue to shower me with countless graces, while I often shower Thee with countless offenses. What return should I make for

such great mercies and benefits? From this day forth, I will never forget to thank Thee, for graces both great and small.

PRAYER FOR LIGHT TO KNOW OUR SINS

O Holy Ghost! Eternal fount of life and light. Drive away the darkness and fear that blinds us to the blackness and ugliness of sin. Grant me the grace to hate sin as Thou dost hate sin, and to dread nothing so much as to commit it in the future.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Has this festive day been a spiritual day? ... Have I kept God in mind? ... Have I kept a Christian spirit or indulged in worldliness? ...

Did I make time for prayers and spiritual reading?... Or did I consider the spiritual as a hindrance to having fun? ... Did I take the appropriate time to say my prayers well, or did I rush through them in a desire to do “better” things? ...

Have I been temperate in food and drink? ... Did I drink too much alcohol? ... Have I spoken with a Christian tongue or a worldly tongue? ... Have I tried to attract attention to myself? ...

Have I flirted with others? ... Have I been the occasion of sin to others? ... Have I been pure in my glances, thoughts, words and actions? ...

Have I suppressed my curiosity?... Have I listened to gossip? ... Have I used bad language? ... Have I given in to human respect, just to be accepted by the crowd? ... Have I been a hypocrite, pretending to be what I am not? ... Have I been boasting? ...

Have I failed to stand-up for Christ when things were done or said that would be an offense to Him? ... Have I taken God’s Name in vain? ... Have I made unseemly jokes about God, Our Lady or the Saints, or laughed if others did? ...

Have I watched television shows that would be an offense to God? ... Have I given in to jealousy or envy? ... Have I been resentful of others? ... Have I given in to rash judgment? ... Murmuring? ... Discouragement? ... Criticism? ...

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Have I revealed the sins of other people?... Have I lied about others or myself? ... Have I insulted anyone? ... Have I harmed someone in any way? ... Have I been grateful to God and to others?

ACT OF CONTRITION

O Lord! I am overcome with confusion, dread and sorrow at the sight of my faults, omissions and ingratitude. I detest them and the offence they have caused Thee, Who art so good and deserving of all my love. This is the miserable way in which I have repaid Thee, for having shed Thy Precious Blood and having died for my salvation! How much more ungrateful can I be? I beseech Thee to continue that same mercy and to inspire me with a true sorrow for my faults, a firm desire to amend my life and graciously grant me the forgiveness of all my sins.

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, and because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.

PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT

O my God! If only I had never offended Thee! Henceforth, I will strive to avoid the occasions of sin—whether they be places, things or companions. I will pray all the more in temptation and will fight to overcome those sins into which I am most prone to fall. Grant me the grace to be faithful to these resolutions and help me against all the assaults of Hell.

PRAYER OF COMMENDATION

O my God, at the end of this day I thank Thee most heartily for all the graces I have received from Thee. I am sorry that I have not made a better use of them. I am sorry for all the sins I have committed against Thee. Forgive me, O my God, and graciously protect me this night.

Blessed Virgin Mary, my dear heavenly Mother, take me under your protection. St. Joseph my

provider and guide, my dear Guardian Angel, my good Patron Saint, and all you saints of God, watch over me and pray for me, not only during this night, but for the rest of my life, and particularly at the hour of my death.

Dear Jesus, have pity on all poor sinners, and save them from Hell. Have mercy on the suffering souls in Purgatory. Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

Bless, O Lord, the repose that I am about to take, so that my bodily strength may be renewed and I may awake refreshed and ready to serve Thee better tomorrow.

Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake; watch over us as we sleep, that awake, we may keep watch with Christ, and asleep, rest in His peace.

Watch, dear Lord, with those who wake, or watch, or weep tonight, and give Thy angels charge over those who sleep. Tend to Thy sick ones, O Lord Jesus Christ, rest Thy weary ones, bless and have mercy on Thy dying ones, soothe and comfort Thy suffering ones, shield Thy joyous ones, and pity all for Thy love's sake. Amen.

O Lord, we pray Thee to visit this home and drive from it all snares of the enemy. Let Thy holy angels dwell in this home to preserve us in peace; and let Thy blessing be always upon us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Eternal Father, I desire to rest in Thy Heart this night. I make the intention of offering to Thee every beat of my heart, joining to them as many acts of love and desire. Thus I hope and pray that even while I am asleep, I will bring back to Thee souls that offend Thee. I ask forgiveness for the whole world, especially for those who know Thee and yet sin. I offer to Thee my every breath and heartbeat as a prayer of reparation. Amen.

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee we cry, poor banished children of Eve. To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us, And after this our exile, show unto us the blessed Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. O clement. O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

O God, our refuge and our strength, look down with mercy on Thy people who cry out to Thee, and, by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, of St. Joseph her spouse, of Thy Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and of all the Saints, do Thou mercifully and graciously hear the prayers which we pour forth, for the conversion of sinners and for exaltation of Holy Mother the Church, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

May the Divine Assistance remain always with us, and may the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give Thee my heart and my soul. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, assist me in my last agony. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with Thee. Amen.