

# Growing in FAITH™

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

Special issue for Advent 2013

## A fruitful Advent makes for a wonderful Christmas

It is said that a good beginning leads to a good outcome. Then a true Advent observance is a great step toward a wonderful Christmas. And a good Advent can also bring you spiritual renewal along the way.

Waiting can often produce greater joy when the wait is finally over. Why not consider adopting one or two of these ideas to increase your Christmas joy through a fruitful Advent wait?

### Pray the Wait.

- **Commit random acts of prayer.** Pray while you wait in line. Pray in the car. Pray when you're put on hold. Pray on your way to work. Keep your prayer simple and heartfelt.
- **Wait in his presence.** Make a visit to the tabernacle in your church to the Body of Christ. Spending time in reverent prayer before the Eucharist will bring healing and peace.
- **Ask God's advice for how much to spend on Christmas gifts.** It is hard to fully prepare for the Savior when you are racking up debt. Celebrate joyfully, simply, and responsibly.
- **Make a joyful noise.** St. Augustine is credited with saying that singing is praying twice. Hum along with the carols in the elevator. Sing hymns joyfully at Mass. Listen to Handel's Messiah or other sacred music of the season. Use song to boost your prayer - even if it's just singing in the shower.
- **Before you speak or act, pray that you will bear God's image in all that you say or do.** In this way, we won't be strangers, but rather will be ready and waiting to welcome him.
- **"Hail Mary" your way through Advent.** Consider the Blessed Mother's example of faith. Learn to see through her eyes, listen with her ears, and trust with her heart.



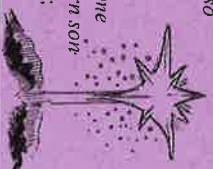
### Anticipate with hope.

- **This is a good time to make peace with one another, and be forgiving.** Jesus said, "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 25:23-25).
- **Open your heart.** December is the loneliest month of the year. Make a list of people you know who live alone, are new to your area, or who have lost a loved one this year. Include them in your family events, invite them to Mass, or pay them a visit.
- **Champion a service project.** Many parishes gather gifts for disadvantaged families or folks forgotten in nursing homes. Find out what your local community is doing or begin your own service traditions.
- **Become a soldier in the war for peace.** Avoid quarreling or gossip, and work for a spirit of unity.
- **Convert your heart.** Do a thorough examination of your conscience so that you can recognize patterns of sin that need to be changed. If you need help spotting them, ask your priest for advice when you go to Confession. (Hint: if you think you don't have any sins, read Exodus 20 and Matthew 5.)
- **Mark the season.** You may not be able to wait until Christmas Eve to decorate your home, but why not decorate slowly throughout Advent to measure progress through the season?
- **Advertise your faith in Jesus' birth.** Put on a joyful appearance, no matter what is going on in your day. Remind yourself of the coming miracle and what it means for each of us.

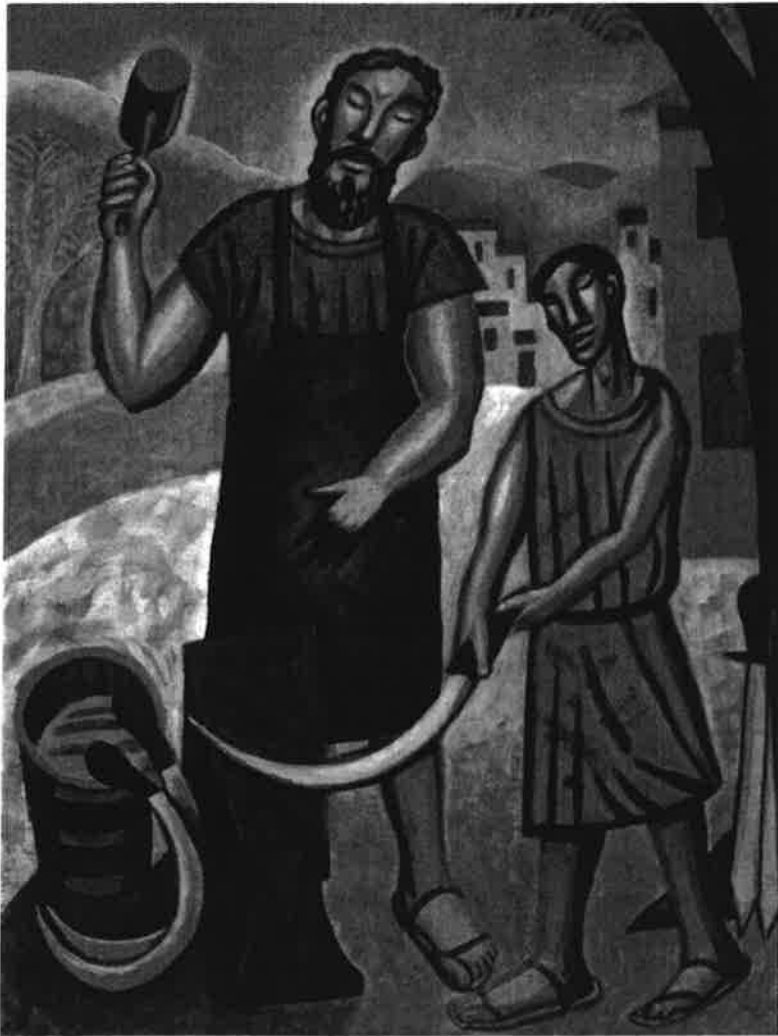
However you choose to observe Advent, remember the gifts of the first Christmas -- justice, peace, and freedom. They are God's Christmas gifts to us all.

# Advent 2013

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p><b>December 1</b></p> <p><b>B</b>uy or make an Advent wreath. Bless it and light the first violet candle each night this week. Read <i>Matthew 24:37-44</i>.</p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>A</b>dvent is about waiting for the Savior to come. Offer a prayer anytime you have to wait during Advent.</p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>L</b>et your Bible fall open and contemplate the reading the Holy Spirit puts before you.</p>	<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>I</b>nclude in your Christmas cards a note about the blessings you have received this year as a witness to God's love.</p>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p><b>O</b>ffer your parish the gift of your time, talent, or treasure. Describe it in a Christmas card and send it to your pastor.</p>	<p><b>6</b></p> <p><b>S</b>how love on St. Nicholas Day by making at least one generous act today.</p>	<p><b>7</b></p> <p><b>S</b>et a timer or other reminder to help you pray every morning and every evening this month. Continue after Advent.</p>
<p><b>8</b></p> <p><b>L</b>ight two violet candles in the Advent wreath each night this week. Sit in silence and enjoy the quiet. Read <i>Matthew 3:1-12</i>.</p>	<p><b>9</b></p> <p><b>T</b>oday honors the feast of the Immaculate Conception celebrating Mary's birth without Original Sin. In her honor, attend Mass.</p>	<p><b>10</b></p> <p><b>P</b>ick one habit that is keeping you from holiness. Resolve to conquer it during Advent.</p>	<p><b>11</b></p> <p><b>T</b>oday, try to remember stories from the Bible of God's merciful treatment of sinners.</p>	<p><b>12</b></p> <p><b>T</b>o honor Our Lady of Guadalupe, place a rose in a vase in your home and pray a "Hail Mary" whenever you pass it.</p>	<p><b>13</b></p> <p><b>T</b>he presence of Jesus in our lives speaks of our hope in God's mercy. Today, list your reasons for hope in the future.</p>	<p><b>14</b></p> <p><b>P</b>erform a thorough examination of conscience today. Then attend Confession to ready your soul to greet the Savior.</p>
<p><b>15</b></p> <p><b>T</b>oday is Gaude Sunday - the halfway point of Advent. Light two violet candles and the rose one for joy. <i>Matthew 11:2-11</i>.</p>	<p><b>16</b></p> <p><b>L</b>ight a candle and sit in silence for 15 minutes. Focus on whom it is you are waiting.</p>	<p><b>17</b></p> <p><b>P</b>ray for the men and women in the armed services who won't be able to spend Christmas with their families.</p>	<p><b>18</b></p> <p><b>M</b>ake time today to feed the hungry. Look for someone who is physically hungry or one who is hungry for kindness, too.</p>	<p><b>19</b></p> <p><b>P</b>ut a lamp or candle in a window to welcome the Christ child. Light it each night until Christmas.</p>	<p><b>20</b></p> <p><b>S</b>et up your Nativity scene. Picture yourself in the scene and think about how you would act if you were there.</p>	<p><b>21</b></p> <p><b>E</b>ven if you live alone, put up a Christmas tree. Put just a few ornaments on each day and finish up on Christmas Eve.</p>
<p><b>22</b></p> <p><b>L</b>ight all four candles in the Advent wreath tonight and all week. Reread today's Gospel reading. <i>Matthew 1:18-24</i></p>	<p><b>23</b></p> <p><b>T</b>his can be a sad time for those who are alone. Include anyone in your own gatherings who might otherwise be forgotten.</p>	<p><b>24</b></p> <p><b>G</b>ather some friends and neighbors and go Christmas caroling at a nursing home or homeless shelter.</p>	<p><b>25</b></p> <p><b>R</b>ejoice! Read the story of Jesus' birth in Luke 2:1-20. Think about how joyful it will be to finally meet Jesus when he comes.</p>	<p><i>"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." (Luke 2:1-7)</i></p>		



# FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT



## Christ our Peace

Father, we stream toward your  
mountain  
where you teach us the ways of peace  
and invite us to share in your salvation.  
Awaken us from our sleep  
so that through your grace  
the humble poor will be blessed!  
May your Word refashion our hearts  
and hands  
to pound our weapons into tools  
of service  
and banish all fear and distrust.  
As we come to the setting of the sun,  
may we walk in the light of your glory,  
and be ready to meet you  
at an hour we do not expect.  
We ask this through our light and  
everlasting peace,  
our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the  
unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God for ever and ever. Amen.

**Sunday, December 1, 2013**

**Walk in the Light of the Lord's Peace!**



Today's Readings: Isaiah 2:1–5; Romans 13:11–14; Psalm 122:1–2, 3–4, 4–5, 6–7, 8–9; Matthew 24:37–44. Today's First Reading invites us to climb the mountain of the Lord, to be instructed in the ways of our God, and walk on the path of justice and peace. God is gathering us to himself, and through the revelation of the Word, God is creating a new and universal community built upon harmony and lasting peace. Yet we live in times of conflict and war; we must lay down our weapons (physical weapons and violent attitudes) and take up the light of Christ's peace.

As we enter into this period of joyful expectation again, we adopt a hope-filled attitude and open ourselves to the kindness and salvation of our God. Through the Savior, God

again extends his infinite and redeeming love. Unlike the people Matthew speaks of, who, in the time of Noah, were unconcerned about the Lord's will for us, we try to prepare for his coming by staying awake and being attentive to the needs of the world. What needs? As in Isaiah's time, the world needs peace! Advent is the time to practice peace, to focus on reasons to rejoice in the Lord. In the domestic church of your home, explore ways that peace can take root—discussing conflicts instead of letting them build or explode, learning to find resolutions between different points of view. O Lord, give us peace in this holy season and help us to change our lives and live according to the Gospel.



## THIS WEEK AT HOME

### Monday, December 2

#### Invite the Lord under Your Roof

The centurion's words in today's Gospel, "Lord I am not worthy to have you come under my roof," are like the words we now say at Mass before receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord. During this holy season, gathered at the family dining table around the Advent wreath, invite the Lord under your roof. Share the light of Christ as you pray for the peace of God, whose face shines on us all. How do you proclaim peace in today's world? Today's Readings: Isaiah 4:2–6; Psalm 122: 1–2, 3–4b, 4cd–5, 6–7, 8–9; Matthew 8:5–11.

### Tuesday, December 3

#### St. Francis Xavier

The Holy Spirit is always at work in the Church. In today's Gospel, Jesus rejoices in the Spirit and reveals the truth to the child-like. The Spirit leads missionaries, like St. Francis Xavier, whose memorial we celebrate today, to share the love of Christ in places where he is not known. If you have children in your household, find places this Jesuit priest visited in the sixteenth century on a map of India and Japan, talk about respecting people of different cultures, and pray for missionaries. Today's Readings: Isaiah 11:1–10; Psalm 72:1–2, 7–8, 12–13, 17; Luke 10:21–24.

### Wednesday, December 4

#### St. John Damascene

John Damascene, the eighth-century saint whose memorial may be celebrated today, defended the Church's veneration of sacred images. Looking upon images of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the saints is like looking through a window that leads us to the face of God. In today's Gospel, Jesus feeds the multitudes. What could you do in Advent to feed the poor? Bring one or two cans of food to your church or local St. Vincent DePaul Society to be shared with households in need. Today's Readings: Isaiah 25:6–10a; Psalm 23:1–3a, 3b–4, 5, 6; Matthew 15:29–37.

### Thursday, December 5

#### The Rock of Salvation

Isaiah tells us today that God is our solid rock upon which we build a life of spiritual practices. Try the ancient practice of *lectio divina* (pronounced LEK-tee-oh dih-vee-nuh), or sacred reading of Scripture. Choose a Scripture passage and read it slowly (*lectio*), meditating on a word or phrase from the passage (*meditatio*), allowing a prayer to flow from the text (*oratio*), and resting in God's divine being (*contemplatio*). The *lectio* and *meditatio* steps are repeated two or three times before moving to *oratio* and *contemplatio*. Today's Readings: Isaiah 26:1–6; Psalm 118:1 and 8–9, 19–21, 25–27a; Matthew 7:21, 24–27.

### Friday, December 6

#### St. Nicholas

Many legends surround this fourth-century bishop who lived in what is now Turkey and whose memorial may be celebrated today. He is best known for his concern for the poor. Begin collecting coins today, and on January 22nd (the day of prayer for the legal protection of unborn children, established by the U.S. bishops) share what you collect with a local organization that advocates for unborn children. Day to day, pray about how to uphold the dignity of each human person. Today's Readings: Isaiah 29:17–24; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13–14; Matthew 9:27–31.

### Saturday, December 7

#### St. Ambrose

This fourth-century bishop, whose memorial we celebrate today, was a great teacher, and he also composed many hymn texts during his life. His words for the Advent carol "Savior of the Nations, Come" are found in most hymnals, or find the hymn at <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/html/s/a/saviorof.htm>, where you can hear the melody through Midi. Consider praying these words or even learning the song as this first week of Advent closes. Today's Readings: Isaiah 30:19–21, 23–26; Psalm 147:1–2, 3–4, 5–6; Matthew 9:35–10:1, 5a, 6–8.



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December 2013

**St. Cecilia Church**

Rev. James L. Secora, Pastor

## One Minute Meditations

### St. Juan Diego

On December 9th we honor St. Juan Diego. A humble Native American convert to Christianity, Juan Diego was visited by the Blessed Virgin at Tepeyac Hill in Mexico in 1531. She sent him to ask the bishop to build a chapel for her, and had Juan bring roses as a sign. When the roses spilled from his tilma (cape) before the bishop, it retained the image of the Blessed Mother which can be seen today. Millions converted as a result.



### Christmas unity

Christmas is a wonderful time to forgive anyone who hurt or disappointed us. After all, Jesus came to repair our broken relationship with God. He will give us the strength and power to forgive others if we ask.

### Hope always

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope"*

(Romans 15:13).



## What is under your tree this Christmas?

Christmas celebrates the most amazing truth: God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, loves each of us individually and particularly. Of all God's creatures, we alone were made for God himself. His love is free - the best gift for Christmas.

**Accept the gift.** To do that, open your heart to receive all the love he wants to give you. Empty yourself of resentment, bitterness, anger, envy - anything that doesn't belong - to make room. Start with the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Advent. Repeat often throughout the year.

**Unwrap the gift.** The Bible is the great

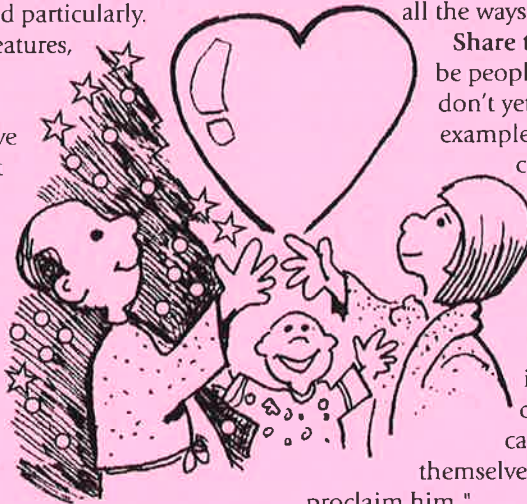
story of God's love and a personal love letter written by God to each of us.

Reading Scripture is key to revealing all the ways God loves us.

**Share the gift.** There may be people in your life who don't yet know God. Your example and influence could be the only way they will know what God's love can be like. Blessed Pope John Paul II said, "Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must

proclaim him."

**Give a gift yourself.** Take time to love God more each day. St. Augustine said, "To fall in love with God is the greatest romance, to seek him the greatest adventure, to find him, the greatest human achievement." Merry Christmas.



## Why Do Catholics Do That?

### Why do we celebrate the Immaculate Conception?

In December, we commemorate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne's womb without Original Sin. (Normally a Holy Day of Obligation, this year the solemnity is on December 9th and Mass attendance is not obligatory.)

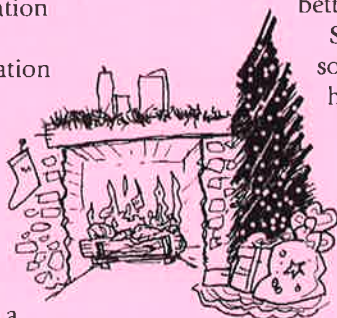


In 1854, Pope Pius IX pronounced that by a special act of divine grace, the Blessed Mother was conceived, through the union of her natural father and mother, without the stain of Original Sin, which has afflicted all other humans except for her divine Son.

## Have a real Merry Christmas!

Do you wish for an idyllic Christmas celebration complete with a warm fire, joyful music, and tinsel-covered tree? For many of us, the celebration comes at the end of weeks spent shopping, wrapping, and spending, and is wrought with family tensions, obligations, and exhaustion. Try these steps to keep your sanity and your Savior in your Christmas celebrating:

**Be realistic.** It isn't the goal of the season to make everyone happy. If you don't overspend and over extend before Christmas, you'll be in a



better frame of mind when it arrives.

**Soothe the beast.** Beautiful music can set a soothing tone for your celebration. Pick your favorite holy hymns to put yourself in the Christmas mood.

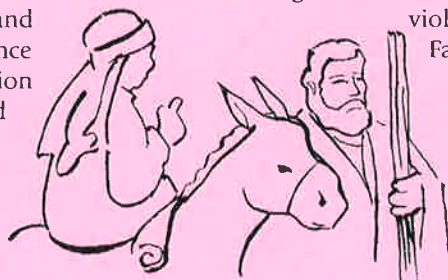
**Reach out.** Want to make your own problems seem small? Take on someone else's. Do at least one good Christmas deed for someone needy.

**Seek the eternal.** Jesus gives us peace, purpose, and perspective. Spend time with Jesus each day of Advent and Christmas to remind yourself of what is most important about Christmas.

### from Scripture

**Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23, God chooses each of us in a special way.**

Mary and Joseph were forced to travel in the last stages of her pregnancy from Nazareth to Bethlehem. On foot or donkey, it was a dirty and exhausting journey. Once there, they had no option for decent housing and had to stay in a stable with animals. Young Mary gave birth in crude conditions with no friend or family to help.



they arrived and they had to make their own way in an unfamiliar land.

Refugees all over the world flee violence like the Holy Family. Catholics have a special charge to protect them and those who are vulnerable: children, elderly, and poor. Like Mary's

After a short time, they fled to Egypt with their newborn to escape threats from the government, and stayed there for several years. There were no friendly faces to greet the family once

and Joseph's, God has a special place for each of us in his plan of salvation. Prayerfully ask God what he wants you to do for him and his kingdom.

### Feasts & Celebrations

**Dec. 14 – St. John of the Cross (1591).** As a Carmelite, St. John led a reform in the Order to encourage more prayer and simplicity. Briefly jailed over a misunderstanding, some of his best spiritual writing came from this experience.

**Dec. 21 – St. Peter Canisius (1597).** Born in Holland, he was ordained into the Society of Jesus and vigorously safeguarded the Catholic faith through writings and teaching. His work, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, is still used today.

**Dec. 26 – St. Stephen (first century).**

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

**Dec. 29 – The Holy Family (1st century).** On the feast of the Holy Family, we celebrate the family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. By their love and support of one another the Holy Family is a model for all Christian families.



### Q & A Do I have to attend Mass on Christmas?

In our culture, Christmas has become a warm and wonderful time to gather



with friends and family, a time to exchange gifts of love, and a time to enjoy family traditions. But first and foremost, Christmas celebrates the Incarnation - the

fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it.

There is nothing the world can offer us that compares to the fact that God "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God came and lived among us and rose from the dead to save us. He is still with us and offers us eternal life. That's what Christmas celebrates. So, yes, we do have to go to Mass to worship, adore, and offer thanks to the one who makes our salvation possible. He was born on Christmas.

Remember, Christmas is a Holy Day of Obligation when all Catholics are obliged to attend Mass.

#### Our Mission

To provide practical ideas that promote faithful Catholic living.

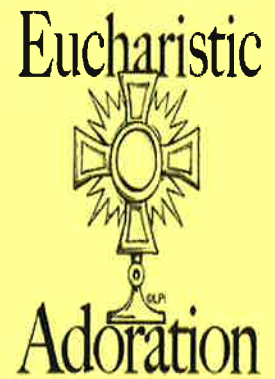
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# Celebrating **17** Years of Eucharistic Adoration at St. Cecilia's

since December 9, 1996



YOU are needed to continue this important ministry of prayer.

## **Looking for a gift for Jesus this Advent?**

The Holy Eucharist is the continuation of Christ's incarnation on earth where the same Jesus born two thousand years ago in Bethlehem is truly present with us now as He was then. Again, He comes quietly and humbly. Again, only the humble can see with the eyes of faith the humble Jesus hidden in the Blessed Sacrament. This is the faith that prompts you to come out in the middle of the night to adore Him. If He were visible and we could see Him with our senses, everyone would run out to welcome Him even in the middle of the night. But He remains hidden in the Blessed Sacrament because He is calling us to faith that we may come to Him in humility. Your sacrifice is the gold, frankincense and myrrh that pleases Him.

*"The Value of Sacrifice", Apostolate of Perpetual Adoration*

**Stop by the table** in the Narthex after Masses Dec. 7-8 to see a listing of the hours currently in need of adorers and second adorers. Members of the Eucharistic Adoration committee will be available to answer your questions and help you choose a weekly Adoration hour.

"O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine! My Jesus, for Thee I live, My Jesus, for Thee I die, My Jesus, I am Yours in life and death, Amen."