Growing in FAITH™

Discovering **hope and joy** in the Catholic faith. December 2011

St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church

Fr. John Hall

One Minute Meditations

Grow in prayer

Our prayer life can mature and grow when we pray for intentions outside ourselves. For example, we can pray for victims of war, the sick who suffer in great pain, people who don't believe in God, and for those in jails and prisons whether we know them or not. The best kind of prayer is the kind that comes from the heart.

Immaculate Conception

Mary was prepared from her conception to become the mother of God. December 8th is the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the day we celebrate that she was conceived in St. Ann's womb without Original Sin. It is a Holy Day of Obligation and Catholics are required to attend Mass. Praying a Rosary would be an additional way to honor the mother of our Savior.

Pray for life

Throughout your Christmas celebrations, please pray that all nations will come to respect life from conception to natural death.

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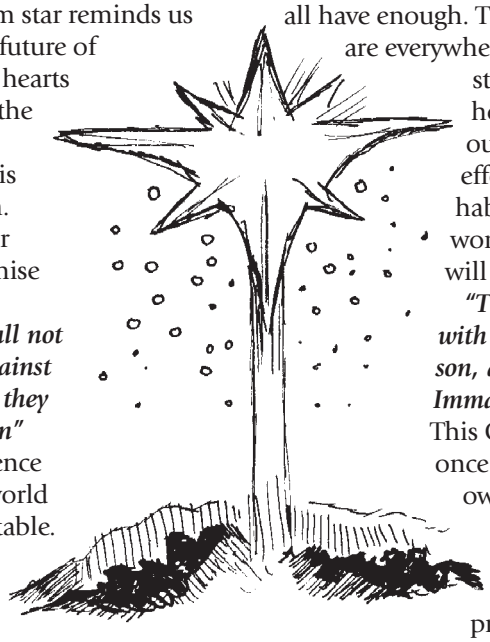
Open your heart to the Christmas promise

This time of year is full of promise and the Bethlehem star reminds us of our hope for a future of peace in our own hearts and the hearts of the world. But we cannot achieve this peace on our own. We must open our hearts to the promise of Christmas.



"One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again" (Isaiah 2:4). Violence flourishes if the world accepts it as inevitable. The world can change if the love of the Christmas child takes root in our hearts. Peace flows from hearts that love.

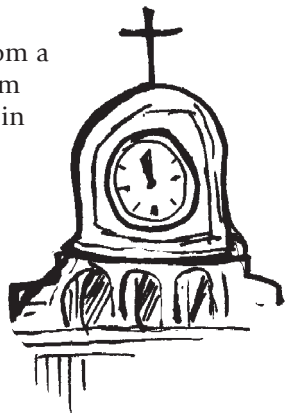
"The poor will eat their fill; those who seek the Lord will offer praise" (Psalm 22:27). Peace spreads more easily when all have enough. These days the poor are everywhere and people are struggling to hold onto hope. If we each make our holiday charitable efforts a year-round habit, perhaps the words of the psalmist will come true.

"The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). This Christmas we can once again rekindle our own sense of innocence and hope. Try to experience the new life promised with the birth of the Christ child and be like the young girl long ago who believed that nothing is impossible when God is involved.

Why Do Catholics Do That?

Why do some parishes offer Midnight Mass on Christmas?

Midnight Mass grew from a custom where people from the countryside gathered in the early monasteries on Christmas Eve to attend Confession, sing hymns, and to participate in the Eucharist. Afterwards, a feast lasted well into Christmas morning.

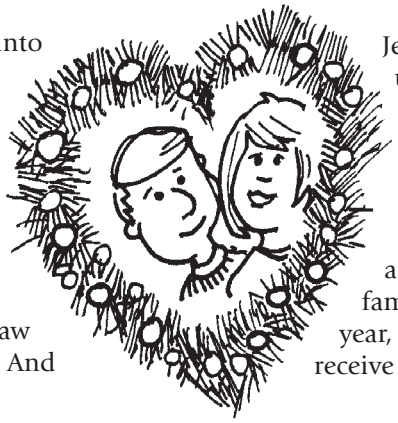


Midnight Mass, or Mass close to midnight, gathers us together to greet the newborn Christ Child. The readings for the liturgy of Midnight Mass proclaim the birth of Christ but also remind us that he came to offer salvation to all people.

Love is the reason for this season

At Christmas time, we are asked to reach into ourselves and bring out only what is kind, generous, and loving. To help, remember that an unimaginable love is the reason for this season.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16). God loves us so much that he denies us nothing that will draw us to him in Heaven, not even his only son. And Jesus' love is so great that he became one of us so we can share more fully in the Father's love.



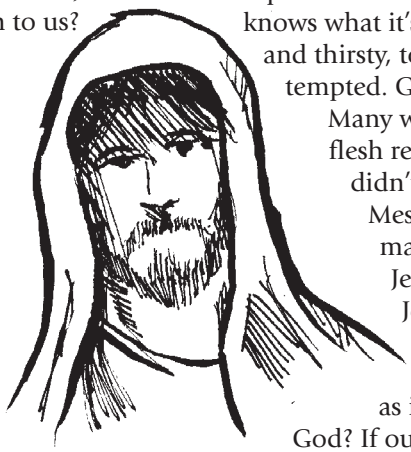
"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). At Christmas, we celebrate the moment when God chose to share our experience in the world. And we are asked to reach beyond our friends and family to share God's love with the world. This year, your gift to Jesus can be a heart ready to receive and spread his love.

from Scripture

John 1:1-18, Who Is Jesus?

On December 25 we celebrate the birth of Jesus. But just who is Jesus and what does he mean to us? This question has been asked for thousands of years.

John tells us in this Gospel. Jesus is the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity. He is the source of life. He enlightens us about God and his nature. Grace and truth come to us through Christ. To know Jesus is to know God.



At the same time Jesus took on our humanity. He lived as we live. He experienced what we experience. He knows what it's like to be hungry and thirsty, to be tired, to be tempted. God understands us.

Many who saw Jesus in the flesh rejected him. They didn't recognize him as the Messiah. We each have to make a choice about Jesus. Do we choose Jesus as our personal Messiah, our savior? Do we live our lives as if we are children of God? If our answers are "yes," then Jesus is the one to whom we turn for enlightenment and grace.

Q & A

Is it okay to miss Mass on Sunday if I am busy?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) says, "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass" (CCC, 2180). "Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin" (CCC, 2181). This excludes those who cannot attend for unavoidable reasons such as illnesses or infirmity, for example.

Life can get so busy that when Sunday comes around each week, it becomes just another day to run errands or catch up on chores. Yet, God intended the Sabbath (Sunday for Catholics) to be a holy day of rest for us when we reconnect with him. That's one of the reasons he gave us the Third Commandment.

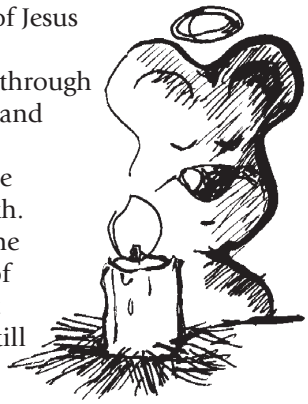
Attending Mass each week is not just something we have to do, it is something we get to do. At Mass, each faithful Catholic is fed with abundant graces. We know that our Lord is truly present in the Eucharist, and we receive his body and blood in this Sacrament. The Mass is a precious gift to us. Try not to miss even one.

Feasts & Celebrations

Dec. 9 – St. Juan Diego (1548). A simple, humble Native American who became a faithful Christian, Juan Diego was visited by the Blessed Virgin. She asked him to petition the bishop of Mexico for a chapel in her honor, and gave him roses for the bishop as a sign. When the roses were emptied from Juan's tilma (cape) before the bishop, it retained the beautiful image of the Blessed Mother.

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. Because of a misunderstanding, he was jailed for nine months, but some of his beautiful spiritual writing came from this experience. His mystical-poetical reflections showed his love of prayer.

Dec. 21 – St. Peter Canisius (1597). Born in Holland, he was ordained into the Society of Jesus and worked strenuously through his writings and teachings to safeguard the Catholic faith. His work, The Catechism of the Catholic Church, is still used today.



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To provide practical ideas that promote faithful Catholic living.

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