



## CHRISTMASTIME

### *The Holy Family*

Jesus is born in Bethlehem, and following Jewish law he is circumcised eight days later. While Mary and Joseph are at the Temple they encounter two people. Simeon is a very old devoted man. God has promised him that he would not die until he had set eyes on the Christ. Anna was a prophetess. They both proclaimed Jesus as Israel's salvation.

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On the night of Jesus' birth the shepherds came to the stable to see if the message they received from the angels was true. How wonderful it must have been for Mary to hear their amazing story. Eight days later, when Jesus is taken to be circumcised, two others proclaim Jesus' greatness. Simeon and Anna and the shepherds reaffirmed for Mary the message to which she had said yes to nine months earlier.

Jesus' mother was certainly a woman of faith, but I wonder what went through her mind when Joseph told her there was no room for them at the inns. She must have been concerned about giving birth to the future Messiah in a stable. No doubt, Joseph made the space as clean and comfortable as possible. But Mary was a first-time mom, away from her family in a strange town; she must have been afraid and confused.

In the afterglow of giving birth, Mary undoubtedly forgot all of her concerns. Certainly her faith was

***Feast of the Holy Family***

***Luke 2:22-40***

***date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_***

**“...[M]y eyes have  
seen your  
salvation...[a light]  
for glory to  
your people Israel”  
(vv. 30, 32).**

reaffirmed as she looked at her beautiful baby boy. However, God, being a gracious God, also sent the shepherds, Simeon and Anna so they could confirm the message, leaving no doubt in Mary's mind that all was well.

God may not send shepherds or prophets, but if we keep our eyes and ears open we may well discover God's messengers in our own life, people who affirm our faith and let us know that all is well. Like Mary, we need to remember those moments, reflecting on them often in our hearts, especially in times when our faith needs a lift.

**Family Response:** As a family, talk about who are or have been the angels and messengers in your life.

**Personal Response:** How has your child been God's messenger to you? What have they taught you about God or your faith?

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What do you want to remember about last week?

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What are you looking forward to next week? What are your concerns?

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### *Paying Homage*

Mary, the baby Jesus and Joseph are still in Bethlehem, but they have left the stable and are resting in someone's home. While they are there three men from the East arrive. The strangers have followed a star and are seeking a newly born king. When they see Jesus they know their search has ended.

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Imagine Mary and Joseph's surprise when the Magi turn up at their door. The Holy Family lets them in, and the strangers kneel on the floor saying all sorts of wonderful things about their newborn. Before leaving they give them gifts fit for the grandest of kings.

Imagine Mary and Joseph's conversation when the Magi left—first, the shepherds, then Simeon and Anna and now these exotic-looking travelers. They began their Bethlehem visit with only a stable for shelter, and now they carried gold, frankincense and myrrh. Having Jesus in their life was certainly going to be interesting. But they were open to challenges and surprises, hardships and blessings.

The same is true when we accept Jesus in our lives. With Jesus as our center we are expected to be like Mary and Joseph—open to all that life offers. We are expected to open our hearts and our lives to the poor as well as the wealthy, to the uneducated as well as those who are wise. God calls us to accept the unexpected guest in whatever travel-weary appearance they come.

***Feast of the Epiphany***

***Matthew 2:1–12***

***date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_***

**“...[W]e observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage” (v. 2).**

Life is filled with challenges and hardships, benefits and surprise whether you believe in Jesus or not. However, those of us who believe are given a treasure even more precious than gold, frankincense or myrrh. When we say yes to Jesus, the good and not so good parts of life are shared with him, and all that is and is to be becomes a gift.

**Family Response:** Have each family member talk about how they think Mary and Joseph reacted to the visit of the Magi. Ask each person what was one of the biggest surprises they have ever experienced.

**Personal Response:** Having a child in the house offers surprises every day. What still surprises you about being a parent?

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## ORDINARY TIME

### *Baptism of the Lord*

It is the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and John baptizes Jesus. Once more we discover that Jesus is someone incredibly special. When he comes out of the water a dove appears and a voice is heard from heaven that proclaims Jesus as God's Son.

Before Abraham and Sarah, people believed in gods who were capricious. The people saw themselves as simple pawns. Abraham chose to worship one God, and his God was not fickle. God made a covenant with Abraham and the Jewish people. God would always be with them, and they would be his chosen people. With Jesus, God has entered into a new covenant with all those who believe.

There is a new order, a new covenant. God is not only with us; God is in us. We are not only the chosen people; we are the children of God. In this Gospel, even before Jesus begins his ministry, we hear him named the Son of God. Jesus will spend his whole lifetime trying to convince the people around him that they too are God's children.

As Christians we realize we have received new life. God is in us, and nothing, absolutely nothing, not even death, can overcome us. This doesn't mean Christians do not suffer the normal troubles of our mortal world. It means that those troubles are bearable and less cumbersome because we know they cannot destroy us. We know that with God as our Father, and Jesus as our

**First Sunday in  
Ordinary Time  
Mark 1:7-11**

**date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_**

**"You are my Son,  
the Beloved;  
with you I am  
well pleased"  
(v. 11).**

brother, we will do more than survive, we will flourish forever. This is something to celebrate.

Make sure your life reflects the joy-filled contentment of what it means to be a Christian, a child of God. Let your children know that believing in Jesus is an upbeat, life-giving experience.

**Family Response:** Discuss what it means to be a child of God. What special privileges and responsibilities do we have?

**Personal Response:** Write down how you would feel if you heard God say to you, "You are my son/daughter, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

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### *Becoming Disciples of Jesus*

After Jesus is baptized, two of John's disciples begin to follow him. They follow Jesus to where he is staying and spend the day listening to him. Andrew, one of the men, tells his brother, Peter, about the day he has spent with Jesus the rabbi, the teacher.

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John the Baptist points out Jesus to two of his disciples. On John's word they begin to follow Jesus, asking him where he is staying. Jesus invites them to come and see, and they spend the day with him listening and learning. Eventually Andrew and his brother Simon Peter become not only Jesus' disciples but also his first apostles.

Many of us share the same story of how we became disciples of Jesus. We began by being sent by someone else. Usually a parent or grandparent tells us about Jesus, takes us to church, and enrolls us in religious education classes or a Catholic school. We believe in Jesus because the people we respect and trust believe in Jesus.

To become disciples of Jesus, however, we have to do what those first apostles did. We have to take some steps on our own. We have to follow Jesus and spend some time with him. Jesus invites each of us, as he invited those first apostles, to follow him. It's up to us to respond to his invitation.

We need to talk to Jesus one-on-one in prayer (vocal prayer). We need to read and think about Scripture (meditation). And we need to listen to God's response in silence (contemplative prayer). These three ways of praying—vocal prayer, meditation and contemplation—have been a part of our Catholic tradition

**Second Sunday in  
Ordinary Time  
John 1:35–42**

**date: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_**

**“We have found  
the Messiah”  
(v. 41).**

for centuries. Become familiar with each prayer type and teach your children how to pray in these different ways. Then when they are ready, they will be able to take those first steps toward Jesus on their own.

**Family Response:** Practice vocal prayer together. Ask each person to say a prayer in his or her own words or a prayer they have memorized.

**Personal Response:** What is your prayer life like right now? How can you improve on it?

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