

Growing in FAITH™

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

December 2017

Sacred Heart Church

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One Minute Meditations

St. John of the Cross

Raised by his mother after his father's death, St. John

studied with the Jesuits in Spain.

He entered the Carmelite Order in 1563. St. John led a much-needed reform of the Order, encouraging more prayer and simplicity. His reforms were not always popular. He was jailed in a tower for almost a year, yet some of his most beautiful spiritual writing came from this experience.

He was a close friend of St. Teresa of Ávila.

"I am with you always."

Sometimes God can seem distant and silent. Yet, he promised to stay with us always (Matthew 28:20). The same God who came to Bethlehem 2,000 years ago still comes to us now to live in our churches and our hearts. Today, be mindful of God's loving presence. Ask him to help you grow closer to him.

"Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8).



A holy Advent leads to a joyful Christmas

During Advent, we wait for the gift of pure love. Taking time each day this season to create moments of watchful silence and thoughtful preparation will lead to real joy at Christmas.

Watchful silence.

"For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him" (Psalm 62:5).

God does not shout. He speaks quietly and softly, in a "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11-12). It isn't always heard in the rush of daily life but in the silence of our hearts. During Advent, slow down, quiet down and listen for the still small voice of God.

Prepare. "Continue steadfastly in prayer,

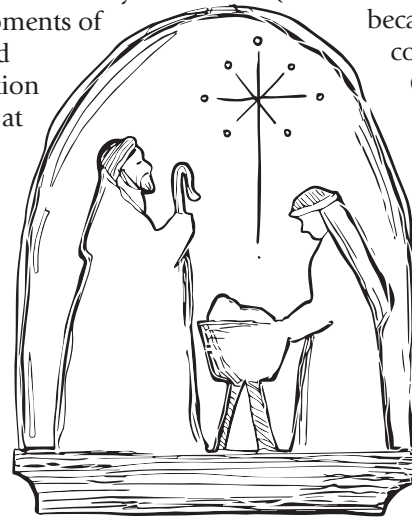
being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2). We fall into sin

because our hearts are not continuously turned to God.

When we confidently turn to him each day, he will give us the protection and strength we need to withstand the darkness of sin. God does not expect us to be perfect but he does want us to be a little better today than the day before. Regular Confession is indispensable.

Celebrate. We were created to have a mutual,

loving relationship with God. In fact, he loves us so much that he sent his Son to show us, tell us, and die for us. Celebrate our love story on Christmas with Mass and joy.



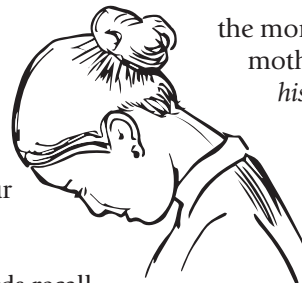
Why Do Catholics Do That?

Why do Catholics bow during the Nicene Creed?

When we proclaim our belief that God's Son was "born of the Virgin Mary and became man," we bow out of reverence for the mystery that made our salvation possible (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #461). These words recall

the moment when Mary became the mother of Jesus, who would, "save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

This is an amazing truth – out of love of us, God became man, died for our sins, and rose from the dead.



Share the Christmas gift of love

At Christmas time, we are asked to reach into ourselves and bring out only what is kind, generous, and loving. To help, remember that Jesus came to us out of love and wants us to find ways to share his love with others. *"This is my commandment: love one another as I love you"* (John 15:12). Ultimately, Christmas is about love.

Comfort those who suffer. This time of year highlights financial struggles and hardships. Offer the gift of love by calling your parish office or Catholic Charities (800-919-9338) to learn how

you can help others in need.

Offer the gift of yourself. The holidays can be sad for those who are alone. Spending time with someone else – especially when you don't have much to spare – is one of the most precious ways to show you care.

Forgive. There is no better time to offer forgiveness to someone who has wronged you or to ask it of someone you may have hurt. Forgiveness is a powerful form of love in action.



from Scripture

Luke 2:22-40, Look for the Lord

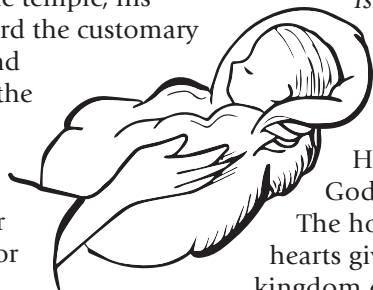
To the uninformed observer, Jesus' birth was unremarkable and his family was quite ordinary. When it came time to present Jesus in the temple, his parents couldn't afford the customary offering of a lamb and gave two pigeons as the offering of the poor instead. As faithful Jews, they did what was required by their faith to thank God for the gift of their child.

Yet, when Joseph and Mary presented their new baby in the temple, Simeon immediately recognized him as the Messiah. Inspired by the Holy

Spirit, he prophesied that Jesus was to be *"a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel"* (Luke 2:32).

Simeon was not alone in recognizing the Lord in the temple. Anna was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Her faith in God's promises gave her hope.

The hope God places in our hearts gives us a desire for the kingdom of Heaven. The Holy Spirit reveals the presence of the Lord to those who want to know him, to receive him, and to be happy with him forever.



Q & A How can I reduce stress this Christmas?

Christmas celebrates the amazing fact that God's Son became one of us to win us eternal life. It's not always



easy to focus on the Good News while shopping, wrapping, baking, rushing, and entertaining. Try these tips for a more joyful Christmas holiday:

Set limits. Stick to your spending limits when buying gifts to avoid sticker shock after the holidays. Be choosy about which invitations to accept so that you aren't exhausted when Christmas arrives.

Focus on prayer. Whether it's praying a decade of the Rosary, reading Scripture, or spending time before the Blessed Sacrament in church, daily prayer is a necessity not a luxury.

Prepare your heart. Make an examination of conscience and go to Confession. Experience God's mercy as the priest absolves your sins.

Make it last. For Catholics, Christmas isn't just one day – the season lasts until January. Celebrate The Holy Family (December 31st), The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (January 1st), The Epiphany (January 7th), and The Baptism of the Lord (January 8th).

Feasts & Celebrations

Dec. 8 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1854). On this day, we commemorate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne's womb without original sin. In addition to attending Mass, praying a joyful Rosary is a wonderful way to celebrate.

Dec. 12 – Our Lady of Guadalupe (1531). The Blessed Mother appeared as a Native American maiden to St. Juan Diego, also Native American. She asked that the bishop of Mexico build a chapel for her, and had him carry roses to the bishop as a sign. When the

roses were emptied from his tilma (cape), it retained the image of the Blessed Mother.

Dec. 16 – St. Adelaide (999). A Burgundian princess, St. Adelaide had to escape from a murderous plot for the throne. She was rescued by the Holy Roman Emperor, King Otto of Germany. She married him and upon his death ruled for their young son, Otto II. As queen of Germany she was known for charitable works, including founding and restoring monasteries.



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To provide practical ideas that promote faithful Catholic living.

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(Unless noted Bible quotes and references are from the Revised Standard Version and the New American Bible)