

Growing in FAITH™

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

December 2009

One Minute Meditations

Mary's faith

Like us, Mary got confused by God's instructions. When the angel appeared and told her of her role in God's plan, she was "greatly troubled" and confused enough to ask, "How can this be ...?" (Luke 1:29, 34). Even the full explanation was too enormous for her to completely understand. It was Mary's great faith in God that caused her to say, "Yes," to whatever he asked.

The Advent wait

We spend Advent waiting for something wonderful to happen. Yet in our impatience to get to that something wonderful, we can forget that the wait can be wonderful, too. Try taking it one week at a time and wait, hope, prepare, and rejoice at the miracle of Christ's birth.

A Catholic difference

As Catholics, we are never alone in our efforts. We are members of the Church, the body of Christ, and together we make a real difference.



Celebrate Christmas like the first one

Celebrating Christmas can be anything but peaceful. Between the extra spending, shopping, and holiday activities leading up to Christmas, we may be more stressed at this time than at any other time of year.

Yet Jesus certainly doesn't want it that way. He spent his first day on Earth in a manger. His first outfit was little more than wrappings of cloth and his first gifts weren't entertaining. Why not learn from the first Christmas how to truly celebrate his birth?

Surround yourself with family. Jesus spent that first night in the company of his parents. Their gifts to him were simple: love and attention. Celebrate Christ's birth with family or invite

others who would otherwise celebrate alone.

Praise God like the angels. "And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God" (Luke 2:13). There is an abundance of amazing Christmas hymns and carols to sing out praise. Renew the tradition of caroling in your neighborhood or host a caroling party by inviting family and friends to share their joy through song.

Give gifts from the heart. The Magi "opened their treasures and offered him gifts" (Matt. 2:11). What gifts can you offer from your treasure of talents? Remember, gifts from the heart are more valuable than anything you can find in a store.



Why Do Catholics Do That?

Why do Catholics believe Mary was born without Original Sin?

The *Catechism* teaches that God gave Mary all the gifts necessary for her to become mother of our Savior. In fact, when the angel Gabriel addressed Mary as "full of grace" in Luke 1:28, he meant that Mary had the special divine



help necessary for the task ahead.

While we are cleansed of original sin at Baptism, Pope Pius IX infallibly affirmed that Mary's role in Jesus' work was so crucial that it kept her from original sin at the outset.

Give gifts of love this Christmas

Jesus came to us out of love. He suffered and died on the Cross out of love. During Advent and Christmas, why not find ways to share Jesus' gift of love with others? "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you" (John 15:12).

Look for the lonely. Christmas can be a sad time for those who are alone. Gifts of love can be as simple as baking Christmas cookies, sending a card with a personal note, or offering to share a Christmas meal.



Reach out to the suffering. Many people are struggling financially this year. Even if you are one of them, consider calling your parish office or Catholic Charities (800-919-9338) to find out how you can help someone who is worse off. That's a great gift of love.

Offer time. This is one of the most precious ways to show you care. Spending time with someone else - even when you may not have it to spare - is a gift of love that will not be forgotten.

from Scripture **Luke 2:41-52, Living in the world**

In this reading, the Holy Family went to Jerusalem during the year Jesus was twelve. In those days, a Hebrew boy became a man around the age of twelve and was recognized in a ceremony we know as a Bar Mitzvah. At this point a Jewish boy would begin formal education in the Torah and Hebrew Scriptures.

This was an important time in Jesus' life. This reading said that Jesus stayed behind to talk with the scholars and teachers, and told his parents he was



doing his Father's work. He had become aware of his duties to his Father in Heaven, yet he remained mindful of his responsibilities to his parents on Earth and obediently left with them.

Christians live in the world, in neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. Jesus demonstrated his respect for his ties to his family, yet he continued to pursue his place in God's plan of salvation.

The lesson for us is that we don't have to retire from the world to be holy. Instead, we have to find ways to live a holy life in the world.

Q & A What are the origins of some of the carols we sing?

Some of the most popular Christmas hymns date back two hundred years or more.

Silent Night – Written as a poem in 1816 by Austrian priest Joseph Mohr,



it came in handy two years later when his church organ broke. Mohr gave the poem to his friend Franz Xavier Gruber who wrote the melody in time to be played on a guitar for Midnight Mass.

O Little Town of Bethlehem – Rector Phillips Brooks of Philadelphia wrote it in the late 1800s after he had visited the Holy Land. He was inspired by the view of Bethlehem from the hills of Palestine.

O Holy Night – The words were written by Placide Cappeau de Roquemaure, a wine seller, in 1847 when the parish priest asked him to write a poem for Christmas.

O Come All Ye Faithful – Englishman John Wade is credited with writing this hymn in Latin in 1744. One hundred years later, it was translated into English by an Anglican minister, Frederick Oakeley. Since then, it has been translated into 76 languages.

Feasts & Celebrations

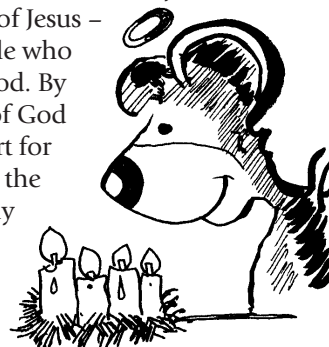
December 8 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This is the day we celebrate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne's womb without original sin.

December 12th - Our Lady of Guadalupe (1531). The Blessed Mother appeared to St. Juan Diego in Mexico. She asked him to tell the bishop to build a chapel for her, and had him carry roses in his tilma (cape) as a sign. When he emptied his tilma before the bishop, it retained the image of the Blessed Mother.

December 26 – St. Stephen (1st

century). A deacon of the early Church, St. Stephen angered the Jewish authorities by preaching that the Israelites consistently rejected God's chosen messengers. He was stoned to death and became the first martyr.

Dec. 27 – The Holy Family (1st century). On this feast day, we celebrate the family of Jesus – three people who lived for God. By their love of God and support for each other, the Holy Family is a model for all Christian families.



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