National Bulletin on Liturgy

Volume 23-Number 122 September 1990

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON
National Bulletin on Liturgy
A review published by the
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

This Bulletin is primarily pastoral in scope. It is prepared for members of parish liturgy committees, readers, musicians, singers, catechists, teachers, religious, seminarians, clergy, and diocesan liturgical commissions, and for all who are involved in preparing, celebrating, and improving the community's life of worship and prayer.

Editorial commentary in the Bulletin is the responsibility of the editor.

Editor
J. FRANK HENDERSON

Editorial Office
NATIONAL LITURGICAL OFFICE
90 Parent Avenue (613) 236-9461
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1 extension 176

Business Office
PUBLICATIONS SERVICE
90 Parent Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1

Subscriptions:
- in Canada: $10.00 a year
- outside Canada: $12.00 a year

Price per copy:
- $3.50 plus 49¢ postage

Quantity discount for this issue:
- For 50 or more copies to one address, 30% off price given above, plus 8% for postage and handling.

National Bulletin on Liturgy, copyright © Concan Inc., 1990. No part of this Bulletin may be reproduced in any form without the prior written permission of CCCB Publications Service.

Excerpts from the English translation of The Roman Missal © 1973, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL); excerpts from the Liturgy of the Hours © 1970, ICEL; excerpts from Documents on the Liturgy, 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts © 1982, ICEL. All rights reserved.

International Standard Serial Number: ISSN 0084-8425
Legal deposit:
National Library, Ottawa, Canada
Second Class Mail:
Registration Number 2994
The two to three weeks between Christmas Day and the Sunday of the Baptism of the Lord is a time when we are encouraged to dwell on the meaning of Christmas and prolong its celebration. Yet in practice Christmas often ends by December 26. This issue will consider the importance of the Christmas season and its many special feasts, especially Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord. It will discuss practical ways to celebrate the Christmas season even in the midst of the distractions of seasonal sales, New Year’s festivities, and sports.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christmas Season and Contemporary Culture</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liturgies of Christmas time: An Overview</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solemnities, Sundays and Weekdays</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Unity of the Christmas Season</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation and Incarnation</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christology of the Liturgy</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating the Christmas Season</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmastime and Parish Life</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief Notes</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

In the liturgical calendar of the church Christmas is more than just the day of December 25: it is an entire season as well.

The Christmas season begins the late afternoon or early evening of December 24 and continues through the Sunday that is called the solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord. The latter can be as early as January 9 or as late as January 13.

Though the Christmas season extends from two to three weeks, many individuals, households and parishes complete their celebration of Christmas by midnight of December 25. For all practical purposes there is no season of Christmas at all for them.

What is this Christmas season and what is its meaning? How can it be celebrated well? What implications does the season of Christmas have for the life of the parish? These are the main questions addressed in this issue of the Bulletin. First, however, the context needs to be considered: what is the relationship between the Christmas season of the church, and Christmas in contemporary North American society?

Liturgical texts of the Christmas season are quoted at length to help us grasp the "flavor" of this season, provide ample material for meditation and catechesis, and aid preachers in focusing their thoughts.
The Christmas Season and Contemporary Culture

In late November, December and part of January both the Christian people and our contemporary society celebrate two important but quite distinct seasons.

The Christian people celebrate the season that prepares for and leads up to Christmas (Advent) and the season that extends and develops the celebration of Christmas (Christmastime).

Our society celebrates two seasons of its own:

- The secular Christmas season begins in mid to late November (or even earlier) and extends through Christmas Day.
- The New Year's season begins on December 26 (Boxing Day in Canada) and extends through the third Sunday of January (Superbowl Sunday).

Different understandings: Our society uses the term "Christmas," and the high point of its celebration is Christmas Day, December 25. However, the way society celebrates Christmas and how it understands Christmas, are substantially — though not totally — different from the practice and understanding of the church. Furthermore, the secular season that follows Christmas Day — the New Year's season — is almost completely different than the Christmas season of the church.

What are some of the characteristics of the Christmas and New Year's seasons of contemporary North American society?

The Christmas Season

Gifts are an important part of the secular Christmas season. The emphasis sometimes is more on buying them, however, than on giving and receiving them. In many retail stores, about forty percent of the whole year's business is done during the six weeks before Christmas Day. Economic pressures on store owners and managers are great, and through intense advertising, pressure to buy is brought to bear on all members of society.

Helping those in need: Many charities also receive most of their income in December, and they too bring their needs to the notice of the public. Special efforts are made to provide food, clothing and gifts for the poor at Christmas as well. While commendable in themselves, these projects tend to ignore the needs of poor children, women and men during the rest of the year and fail to address the causes of poverty in our society.
Parties: December is also a time for parties: in schools, at work, in neighborhoods, with friends. Special cookies and cakes may be baked or purchased, and there is plenty to drink. Carols – both traditional and contemporary – may be sung.

Christmas cards and letters can bring people closer together, but can also be formal and impersonal. This too is a big business.

Christmas Day itself is a time for family reunions and celebrations. The turkey or goose, with dressing, cranberry sauce and pumpkin or mince meat pie, is traditional fare. Students and others living away from home may travel from near or far to be with their families for Christmas. For families that are divided, this can be a time of extra stress.

Music: Christmas is a time for special music. In addition to a small number of well known traditional carols, popular secular songs such as White Christmas and Jingle Bells have become Christmas traditions as well. There is a increasing body of recently composed, nonreligious Christmas songs, and in many circles these have become more important than music with a religious content.

Santa Claus: The visual icons of society’s Christmas season include Santa Claus – who bears little resemblance to St Nicholas, bishop of Myra – the snowman, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, the decorated Christmas tree, and Christmas lights on homes and outdoor trees as well as on the tree in the home.

Not religious: The religious message of Christmas is hinted at in Christmas pageants in schools, manger scenes in windows or front yards, newspaper headlines that read, “Peace on earth. Good will towards men,” and passing references to the birth of Jesus. But all too often these have no real religious content. The story of Jesus’ birth is simply traditional, sentimentalized, and something that is “nice for the children.” It bears only a remote resemblance to the church’s theological understanding of Christmas. The Christmas stories told on television are Charlie Brown’s Christmas, the Grinch who Stole Christmas, and similar fantasies. Midnight Mass from Rome may be watched, but more for its music and spectacle than as a religious event.

---

The New Year’s Season

Christmas ends abruptly the night of December 25. Thereafter, one hears almost no Christmas music on the radio, for example, and television viewing moves rapidly on to the events of the New Year’s season.

New Year’s celebrates both the end of one year and the beginning of the next. This dual role characterizes many of its feasts and rituals.

Sales: It is a time for sales in retail stores. The great bargains on Boxing Day (December 26) draw many from their homes and holidays back downtown and to the malls for frenzied shopping. Shopping resumes in early January when many stores have still more traditional sales.

Holidays: New Year’s is also a time for travel and holidays away from home. Some people go away immediately after Christmas, at least for a few days,
while others take two or three week holidays in Hawaii, Mexico or Cuba. Some retired persons move to Florida, California or Arizona for an extended period. Schools are out, and many government employees have extra days off.

New Year's Eve brings lively parties, with toasts, noise makers, special hats, and its own song, Auld Lang Syne. Before and after midnight there is much drinking and festivity.

Resolutions: For those who listen, national and international leaders such as the Governor General and the Queen make televised speeches on New Year's Day, and there is much talk about the making of resolutions. The new year will be better than the old one.

Sports: The New Year's season is especially centered around sports. The traditional January 1 bowl games - United States football championships brought to Canada via television - have proliferated in recent years. There are now about 25 such games and they are played over the course of a week before and after New Year's Day itself.

Superbowl: Professional football on television dominates the Sundays of January, building up to the extravaganza of the Superbowl on the third Sunday of the month. It is accompanied by tremendous hoopla on television and in the newspapers.

Parties: All these sporting events may be accompanied by parties and by hours spend in front of the television set, at least by some members of the family.

Not theological: The New Year's season of our society has no Christian theological content whatsoever. It has a strong economic basis, and promotes consumerism and passivity. Sports, buying and partying are its idols, and the message is clearly enunciated that Sunday is a day for sports.

Excess: The Christmas and New Year's seasons of society have their own rituals, celebrations, songs and stories. They tend to be seasons of excess.

Christians Respond

How are Christians to respond to the Christmas and New Year's seasons as they are celebrated in contemporary North American culture?

Name and describe: It is well to recognize these seasons for what they are. It is helpful to name them and describe the ways in which they differ from the seasons the church celebrates at the same time of year.

Post-Christian society: Christians should accept that they may not be able to change this situation. They live in a post-Christian society and do not have the power or influence to alter the secular status quo. In addition, they have to respect the many members of society who have no religious faith or whose faith is other than Christianity.

Participation: Christians, as members of society, will participate in the secular Christmas and New Year's seasons, at least up to a point. They cannot help doing so.
The good side: They need to recognize that some of the values of these secular seasons are good or at least neutral, though not necessarily religious and not Christian. Gifts, parties, cards, holidays and sports all can be good in themselves. Christians should not be mean-spirited or negative about the positive aspects of these seasons, and should rejoice with those who rejoice.

Critical discernment: Christians also need to discern and critique the negative values of the secular Christmas and New Year's seasons, and distance themselves from these. This may be done privately or publicly.

Good celebrations: Christians need to celebrate the church's liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmastime well: the true Christmas message must be proclaimed and lived clearly and strongly within the Christian community. We can learn something from members of other religious traditions who have had to maintain their own liturgical calendars while living as minorities.

Becoming bilingual: Christians, therefore, need to become fluently "bilingual." They will continue to speak the language of the church's understanding and celebration of Advent, Christmas and Christmastime, and they will need to speak the language of our society's celebrations of Christmas and New Year's as well. They must understand that these are two different languages, however, and not get them mixed up.

Countercultural: Christians need to become selfconsciously bicultural, and when appropriate, countercultural. This may not be easy, and will require a deep level of commitment and understanding.
Liturgies of Christmas Time: An Overview

What is included in the Christmas season, according to the liturgical calendar? What feasts do we celebrate? What are the solemnities, feasts, Sundays and weekdays of this season?¹

Christmas Eve: Officially, the season of Christmas begins the late afternoon or evening of December 24, with the celebration of evening prayer 1 of Christmas. The mass of the vigil of Christmas (December 24) may be celebrated either before or after evening prayer 1. Later “on Christmas Eve it is fitting that by means of the office of readings, a solemn vigil be celebrated before (Midnight) Mass.”²

Christmas Day itself has three eucharistic celebrations: the mass at midnight, the mass at dawn, and the mass during the day. “Morning prayer on Christmas Day is said as a rule before the mass at dawn,”³ and evening prayer 2 is said, as usual, in the late afternoon or evening.

The week following Christmas is observed as the octave (eight days) of Christmas. It includes a number of special occasions.

- The Sunday of this week is the feast of the Holy Family. (But when Christmas itself falls on Sunday, this feast is observed on December 30.) Three cycles of readings are provided for Holy Family.

- December 26 is the feast of Saint Stephen, the first martyr; December 27 is the feast of Saint John, apostle and evangelist; and December 28 is the feast of the Holy Innocents.

- December 29, 30 and 31 are the fifth, sixth and seventh days within the octave of Christmas, respectively, and each has special readings and liturgical texts.

January 1 is of particular significance. It is:

- the octave day of Christmas
- the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
- the memorial of the conferral of the holy Name of Jesus⁴

² General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours (1971) (GILH), n 215. DOL 426, 3645
³ GILH, n 216. DOL 426, 3646
⁴ GNLYC, n 35. DOL 442, 3801. See also DOL 497, 4097.
• New Year's Day, "a day of hope."

• World Day of Peace.6

• In addition to the mass of Mary the Mother of God and the Holy Name of Jesus,7 a votive mass "for peace" may be celebrated "wherever there is a special celebration for peace [and] at the discretion of the local Ordinary."8

• The Sacramentary (n. 531) tells us that the mass "for various public needs: beginning of the civil year" may not be celebrated on January 1.

**Second Sunday:** The liturgical calendar provides for a Second Sunday after Christmas, but in Canada this is replaced by the Epiphany.

**Epiphany:** Though the traditional date of the Epiphany of the Lord is January 6, in Canada and many other countries it is celebrated on the Sunday between January 2 and January 8.

**Baptism of the Lord:** The Sunday following the Epiphany is the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. (However, when the Epiphany is celebrated on Sunday, and when this Sunday falls on January 6 or 7, then the Baptism of the Lord is transferred to the Monday following Epiphany.9) Three cycles of readings are provided for the Baptism of the Lord.

**The weekday calendar** provides texts for the eucharist and for the liturgy of the hours for Monday through Saturday before Epiphany (or for January 2-8), and for Monday through Saturday after Epiphany. Because of the annual movement of the calendar, not all of these texts will be used every year.

**Another Christmas feast,** that of the Presentation of the Lord, is observed outside the Christmas season itself, on February 2. The Annunciation of the Lord, celebrated on March 25, is also related to Christmas. Finally, we shall see later that the readings of the second Sunday of ordinary time (usually, the Sunday following the Baptism of the Lord), are also related to those of the Christmas season.

**More than Jesus' birth:** It is clear that the Christmas season celebrates more than just the birth of Christ, central though this is. In fact, we celebrate "the memorial of Christ's birth and early manifestations."10 We celebrate not only his birth and infancy, but also his boyhood, growing up in Nazareth, and baptism as an adult.

---

5 Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Mariais cultus,* on rightly grounding and increasing Marian devotion (1974), n 5. DOL 467, 3903
6 *Mariais cultus,* n 5. DOL 467, 3903. See also DOL 497, 4097; 498, 4098; 499, 4099
7 *Mariais cultus,* n 5. DOL 467, 3903
8 See DOL 498, 4098
9 See DOL 460, 3873
10 GNLYC, n 32. DOL 442, 3798

137
History of the Liturgies of Christmas


The Christmas Scriptures


Commentaries on the Liturgies and Source Books


Solemnities, Sundays and Weekdays

In order to celebrate the season of Christmas well it is necessary to commit ourselves to its movement and immerse ourselves in its scripture readings, liturgical texts, and songs. The liturgies of this short season provide a wealth of material, almost an embarrassment of riches.

Christmastime expresses both a unity and diversity. Its many individual solemnities, Sundays, weekdays and saint’s days tell us that the story of Christmas is too rich and too great to be told or celebrated on a single day. Rather, it is told and retold from different perspectives, its separate facets are allowed to shine one by one, its multiple dimensions come to the fore individually. The diversity of the individual celebrations of the Christmas season will be considered first. Later, the unity of this season will be explored. Because they are more familiar, the liturgies of Christmas Day will be dealt with in less detail than those of the other solemnities and Sundays.

Christmas: the Nativity of the Lord

Christmas is unique in having four complete eucharistic liturgies, plus evening prayer 1 and 2, morning prayer and the office of readings.

Christmas Vigil

The gospel of the vigil mass (Matthew 1: 1-25) tells first of the genealogy of Jesus. He is son of Abraham, of David and of Joseph; he is son also of the women Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary. The second half of this chapter tells of the birth of Jesus. Before Mary and Joseph had begun to live together, Mary became pregnant, and Joseph wondered what to do about this. The revelation of Jesus’ identity comes through the message of an angel: the child is conceived by the Holy Spirit and he shall be called Jesus, for he will save his people. Joseph responds in obedience and faith: when he awakes, he does as the angel commanded him.

The opening prayer¹ speaks not only of the present celebration but also of the Second Coming of Christ:

Eternal God, every year you gladden our hearts by renewing our hope of redemption; grant that we who accept your Son as our Redeemer may face him with confidence when he comes as our judge.

Christmas Mass at Midnight

The first part of the second chapter of Luke's gospel is proclaimed at the midnight mass. Luke begins by telling us of a census which brings Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem; while they are there, Mary gives birth to Jesus, swaddles him, and lays him in a manger. This sets the scene.

Angels twice announce the messiah. "I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord." The second proclamation is the canticle, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to those favored by him."

The opening prayer uses the image of light:

God our Creator, who made this most holy night radiant with the splendor of the one true light, grant in your mercy that as we celebrate on earth the mystery of that light, we may also rejoice in its fullness in heaven.

Christmas preface 1 speaks of the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ.

In the wonder of the incarnation your eternal word has brought to the eyes of faith a new and radiant vision of your glory. In him we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see.

Christmas Mass at Dawn

The Lukan story continues to relate how the human participants react to the revelation of Jesus. The shepherds obey the angel, go into Bethlehem, see the child, glorify and praise God, and then return to their fields. People of the town hear about the child from the shepherds and are astonished. And Mary keeps all these things, pondering them in her heart.

The opening prayer continues to use the image of light:

God of splendor, the new light of your incarnate Word has broken upon us. By faith it glows in our hearts: make it shine forth also in our actions.
Christmas preface 2 tells us of the mission of Christ:

Today you fill our hearts with joy
as we recognize in Christ the revelation of your love.
No eye can see his glory as our God,
yet now he is seen as one like us.

Christ is your Son before all ages,
yet now he is born in time.
He has come to lift up all things to himself,
to restore unity to creation,
and to lead mankind from exile
into your heavenly kingdom.

Christmas Mass During the Day

A fourth Christmas message is proclaimed in the mass during the day. This is the prologue of John’s gospel: in the beginning was the word. Key words are word, life, and light. The world did not know him, but to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God. The word became flesh and we saw his glory; he is full of grace and truth.

John the Baptist was a witness to Christ, only a witness to speak of the light. Jesus Christ brings grace and truth, and reveals God to us, because he is “nearest to the Father’s heart.”

The opening prayer describes the consequences of the incarnation for us:

O God,
you wonderfully created human nature
and even more wonderfully
restored its dignity in Christ.
Give us the grace to share in his divinity,
for he has come to share in our flesh and blood.

Christmas preface 3 continues to speak of the effects of the incarnation for humanity:

Today in him a new light has dawned upon the world:
God has become one with man,
and man has become one again with God.
Your eternal Word has taken upon himself
our human weakness,
giving our mortal nature immortal value.
So marvellous is this oneness between God and man
that in Christ man restores to man
the gift of everlasting life.

The antiphons for evening prayer and morning prayer provide a range of poetic and scriptural interpretations of the Christmas story and its celebration.

He comes in splendor, the King who is our peace; the whole world longs to see him.
O praise the Lord, Jerusalem. 
Zion, praise your God.

The eternal Word, born of the Father before time began, today emptied himself for our sake and became man.

Tell us, shepherds, what have you seen? Who has appeared on earth? We have seen a newborn infant and a choir of angels praising the Lord, alleluia. 

A little child is born for us today; little and yet called the mighty God, alleluia.

You have been endowed from your birth with princely gifts; in eternal splendor, before the dawn of light on earth, I have begotten you.

With the Lord is unfailing love; great is his power to save. 

In the beginning, before time began, the Word was God; today he is born, the Savior of the world. 

When the sun rises in the morning sky, you will see the King of kings coming forth from the Father like a radiant bridegroom from the bridal chamber.

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth, alleluia.

Christ the Lord is born today; today, the Savior has appeared. Earth echoes songs of angel choirs, archangels' joyful praise. Today on earth his friends exult: Glory to God in the highest, alleluia.

**In the responsories we sing:**

Today you will know the Lord is coming. 
And in the morning you will see his glory.

The Lord has made known . . . His saving power.

The Word was made flesh . . . He lived among us.

**The intercessions begin:**

Christ Jesus emptied himself and took the form of a slave. He was tested like us in all things and did not sin.

The Word of God existed before the creation of the universe yet was born among us in time.

At the birth of Jesus, angels proclaimed peace to the world.

**The intercessions** themselves speak more about Jesus Christ and the incarnation:

You came into the world heralding the new age foretold by the prophets. 
You once took on the weakness of our human condition. 
You were born into poverty and lowliness. 
You came to earth to lead everyone into the kingdom.

You are the eternal word of God who flooded the world with joy at your birth. 
You saved us and by your birth revealed to us the covenant faithfulness of the Lord.
You are the King of heaven and earth who sent messengers to announce peace to all. 
You are the true vine that brings forth the fruit of life.
You came as chief shepherd and guardian of our lives.
King from all eternity, you desired to be born within time and to experience
the day-to-day life of men and women.
 Awaited from the beginning of the world, you came only in the fullness of time.
You became man and gave new life to our human condition in the grip of death.

Holy Family

Holy Family A: The story of the exile into Egypt from the second chapter of
Matthew’s gospel is proclaimed. This passage presupposes the proclamation of
Christ to the magi through the star; the massacre of the innocents is omitted.

Faithful Joseph responds to the command of the angel to take the child and
his mother and flee to Egypt; and later, to rise and take the child and his moth­
er and go to the land of Israel. It is king Herod and Herod’s son who reject the
revelation of Christ. In the journey to and from Egypt Jesus and his parents
relive the story of Israel, going down as Joseph and Jacob and their clan did,
and returning to Israel in a new exodus.

Holy Family B: Luke’s message of good news continues with the presentation
of Jesus in the Temple. The scene is set by describing the obedience of Mary,
Joseph and Jesus to the law of Moses. Then Jesus’ identity is recognized and
proclaimed in a prophetic manner by Simeon and by Anna.

Simeon, inspired by the Holy Spirit, speaks two oracles. He blesses God, for
his (Simeon’s) eyes have seen the salvation prepared for the gentiles and for
the chosen people. Simeon blesses the parents and tells Mary that some will
accept and others will reject Jesus. He adds, “a sword will pass through your
own soul.” Anna, finally, gives thanks to God and speaks of Jesus to all who
were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Holy Family C: The last part of Luke’s second chapter tells of the finding of
the boy Jesus in the Temple. Jesus is now twelve years of age and able to
speak and act on his own; it is the beginning of his adulthood. This passage
again tells of the revelation of Jesus’ identity, but here Jesus himself proclaims
this message when he calls God his Father: “Did you not know that I must be
in my Father’s home?”

This story tells us of the piety of Jesus’ family and their obedience to the law
of Moses, of Jesus’ wisdom, and of his dedication to God’s will. In the end he
goes back to Nazareth and is an obedient teenager; Mary keeps all these
things in her heart.

The opening prayer speaks of the example given to us by the Holy Family.

   God of blessings,
   in the holy family you gave us the ideal
   of a household united in perfect love.
   Grant that we may follow their example
   and be welcomed with joy into your home
   in heaven . . . .
Other scripture readings, for mass and for the liturgy of the hours, are more related to "family" than to Christmastime.

Many antiphons for evening prayer and morning prayer continue to tell the Christmas story:

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary; Mary gave birth to Jesus who is called the Christ.

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; the child in her womb is conceived by the Holy Spirit.

The shepherds went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, with the child cradled in a manger.

The parents of Jesus went each year to Jerusalem for the solemn feast of Passover.

The child grew in wisdom and strength, and the favor of God was upon him.

His father and mother were full of wonder at what was said about their child.

After three days Jesus was found in the temple, seated in the midst of the doctors, listening to them and asking them questions.

Jesus returned with Mary and Joseph to Nazareth; there he lived and was obedient to them.

Jesus grew in wisdom with the years and was pleasing to God and men.

The child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and his parents did not know it. They thought he was in the group of travelers and looked for him among their relatives and friends.

Son, why have you done this to us? Think what anguish your father and I have endured looking for you. But why did you look for me? Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?

In the responsories we sing:

The Word was made flesh; he lives among us. From his fullness we have all received.

Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me. You were obedient to Mary and Joseph.

He had to become like his brothers in every way to show the fullness of his mercy. He was seen on earth and lived among men and women.

The intercessions begin:

Let us adore the Son of the living God who humbled himself to become a son of a human family . . . .
The intercessions themselves speak of Jesus and his parents.

You loved your parents and were loved by them.
You were eager to be about your Father’s business.
Christ, after three days your anxious parents found you in your Father’s house.
Christ, you have made Mary and Joseph sharers in heavenly glory.

Jesus, eternal word of the Father, you made yourself subject to Mary and Joseph.
You are our teacher, and your own mother pondered in her heart every one of your words and deeds.
Christ, by your work the world was made, but you were willing to be called a worker’s son.
Jesus, in the family at Nazareth you grew in wisdom, age and grace before God and men.

Mary, Mother of God (January 1)

The gospel passages used at mass overlaps partially with that used for the Christmas mass at dawn (Luke 2: 16-21 instead of 2: 15-20). The reading begins with the shepherds going into Bethlehem; they recognize the child in the manger, tell everyone around of their marvelous experience, and then return to their flocks praising God. Mary treasures all these things.

• Verse 21, not used on Christmas Day, advances the story to the eighth day after Jesus’ birth. He is circumsized and given the name Jesus, as directed by the angel at the time of the annunciation.

The first reading is the Aaronic benediction (Numbers 6: 22-27). “This is how you are to bless the children of Israel.” Mary is one who is blessed and who blessed the Lord.

The psalm also refers to blessing: “0 God, be gracious and bless us. May God still give us his blessing till the ends of the earth revere him.”

Paul’s letter to the Galatians (4: 4-7) contains one of the few references to Mary outside the gospels: “When the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a women . . . to enable us to be adopted as sons.”

The opening prayer speaks of the role of Mary in the incarnation.

God our Redeemer,
through the fruitful virginity of blessed Mary
you offered to the human race
the treasures of eternal salvation.
Let us experience the power of her prayers,
for she bore to us a Son
who is the source of our life . . . .

In the prayer over the gifts we ask that “on this feast of Mary, the Mother of God . . . our salvation will be brought to its fulfillment.” The prayer after communion names Mary as “the Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ and the mother of the Church,” and asks that “our communion with her Son bring us to salvation.”
The antiphons and acclamations interpret the nature of this feast.

Hail, holy Mother. The child to whom you gave birth is the King of heaven and earth for ever.

A light will shine on us this day, the Lord is born for us: he shall be called Wonderful God, Prince of peace, Father of the world to come; and his kingship will never end.

In the past God spoke to our father through the prophets; now he speaks to us through his Son.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

The readings at evening prayer 1 and 2 (Galatians 4: 3-7) is the same as the second reading at mass, with the addition of one verse at the beginning. At morning prayer the reading is from Micah 5: 1-5a, 6, which is the passage that names Bethlehem as the town from which will be born "the one who is to rule over Israel." It describes this king as one who "will stand and feed his flock; he himself will be peace." This is the prophecy referred to in the gospel for Epiphany.

The antiphons refer both to Jesus and to Mary, and describe the incarnation in poetic terms.

O marvelous exchange. Man's creator has become man, born of a virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

Your blessed and fruitful virginity is like the bush, flaming yet unburned, which Moses saw on Sinai. Pray for us, Mother of God.

The Virgin has given birth to the Savior: a flower has sprung from Jesse's stock and a star has risen from Jacob. O God, we praise you.

Mary has given birth to a King whose name is everlasting; hers the joy of motherhood, hers the virgin's glory. Never was the like seen before, never shall it be seen again, alleluia.

In his great love for us, God sent his son in the likeness of our sinful nature, born of a woman and subject to the law, alleluia.

Marvelous is the mystery proclaimed today: man's nature is made new as God becomes man; he remains what he was and becomes what he was not. Yet each nature stays distinct and for ever undivided.

The responsory at evening prayer proclaims that "The Word was made flesh, and he lived among us." At morning prayer we sing, "The Lord has made known . . . his saving power."

The intercessions begin:

Blessed be the Lord Jesus, our Peace, who came to unite man with God. Let us pray to him in humility:

Let us give glory to Christ who was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit . . .

To Christ, Emmanuel, whom the Virgin conceived and brought forth, let us give praise and prayer to him.
The intercessions themselves interpret the incarnation and this feast further:

When you were born you showed your kindness and gentleness.
You made Mary, your Mother, full of grace.
You came to announce God's good news to the world.
You desired to become our brother by being born of the Virgin Mary.
You came as the Sun rising over the earth.

Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, you are wonder-Counselor and Prince of Peace.
Our King and our God, you have raised us up by your coming.
You made yourself like us.
You made yourself a citizen of our earth city.

You gave Mary the joy of motherhood.
King of peace, your kingdom is one of justice and peace.
You came to make the human race the holy people of God.
By your birth you strengthened family ties.
You desired to be born into the days of time.

Epiphany of the Lord

The gospel for mass tells the of the adoration of the magi. Having come from the east, they ask King Herod, "Where is the infant king of the Jews?" In due course they are sent on to Bethlehem: the star moves ahead of them and then halts over the place where the child is. Going into the house they saw the child and his mother, "and falling on their knees they did him homage . . . [and] offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh."

The first reading begins with the image of light: "Arise, shine out, your light has come," and this light is "the glory of the Lord." The second, and predominant, image is that of all the nations come to Judea to worship: "the nations come . . . [and] the kings." They bring gifts: "the riches of the sea . . . the wealth of nations . . . gold and incense," and all shall "sing the praise of the Lord."

The responsorial psalm includes the verse, "The kings of Tarshish and the sea coasts will pay [Israel's king] tribute. The kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring him gifts. Before him all kings shall fall prostrate, all nations shall serve him."

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains that though the mystery of God's love in Jesus Christ "that has now been revealed through the Spirit" was not known in previous generations, it is now revealed to all. This "means that pagans now share the same inheritance [as us], that they are parts of the same body."

The opening prayer speaks of the past, the present, and the future.

God of mystery,
on this day you revealed your only Son to the nations
by the guidance of a star.
We know you now by faith;
lead us into that presence
where we shall behold your glory face to face.
The prayer over the gifts and the prayer after communion see a parallel between the gospel story of the magi before the infant Jesus and the eucharistic worship that we are now celebrating:

Lord,
accept the offering of your Church,
not gold, frankincense and myrrh,
but the sacrifice and food they symbolize,
Jesus Christ, who is Lord for ever and ever.

Father,
guide us with your light.
Help us to recognize Christ in this eucharist
and welcome him with love ....

The preface tells what God has done for humanity in Christ.

Today you revealed in Christ
your eternal plan of salvation
and showed him as the light of all peoples.
Now that his glory has shone among us
you have renewed humanity in his immortal image.

The gospel message is summarized in the gospel acclamation

We have seen his star in the east;
and have come to adore the Lord.

and communion antiphon.

We have seen his star in the east,
and have come with gifts to adore the Lord.

The psalm response sums up the message of the first reading and psalm:

All nations shall fall prostrate before you, O Lord.

The entrance antiphon picks up on the gospel image of Jesus as king:

The Lord and ruler is coming; kingship is his,
and government and power.

The reading for evening prayer 1 is one of the three places in which Paul uses the word “epiphany” (epiphaneia), here translated “appearing.” God’s “grace had already been granted to us, in Christ Jesus, before the beginning of time, but it has only been revealed by the Appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus.”

At evening prayer 2 the reading also speaks of the time “when the kindness and love of God our savior for humanity was revealed,” adding that “it was for no reason except his own compassion that he saved us.”

Isaiah 52: 7-10, read at morning prayer, brings a number of images together: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of one who brings good news;” “they see they Lord face to face as he returns to Zion;” “God is consoling his people;” “all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”
The psalm antiphons tell the Good News in their own way.

Begotten of the Father before the daystar shone or time began, the Lord our Savior has appeared on earth today.

The star burned like a flame, pointing the way to God, the King of kings; the wise men saw the sign and brought their gifts in homage to their great King.

Seeing the star, the wise men said: This must signify the birth of some great king. Let us search for him and lay our treasures at his feet: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The wise men opened their treasures and offered to the Lord gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, alleluia.

Jerusalem, your light has come; the glory of the Lord dawns upon you. Men of every race shall walk in the splendor of your sunrise, alleluia.

He is come in splendor, the King who is our peace; he is supreme over all the kings of the earth.

A light has shone through the darkness for the upright of heart; the Lord is gracious, merciful and just.

All the people, whom you have made, will come and worship before you, Lord.

The responsory echoes:

All peoples will be blessed in him, men and women of every race. All nations will acclaim his glory.

and the intercessions begin:

Today our Savior was adored by the Magi. Let us also worship him with joy as we pray . . . .

The intercessions for morning prayer describe some of the consequences of the epiphany of the Lord.

Christ, you revealed yourself in the flesh, sanctify us through prayer and the word of God.

Christ, your witness was the Spirit, free our lives from the spirit of doubt.

Christ, you revealed yourself to the angels, help us to feel the joy of heaven on earth.

Christ, you were proclaimed to the nations, by the power of the Holy Spirit open the hearts of all.

Christ, you generated faith in the world, renew the faith of all believers.
Baptism of the Lord

The three gospel readings for mass (for cycles A, B and C of the liturgical calendar) tell of the baptism of Jesus according to Matthew, Mark and Luke. Both Mark and Luke begin by quoting John the Baptizer, “Someone is coming, some more powerful than I. I baptize you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Mark then says directly, “Jesus . . . was baptized in the Jordan by John.” Matthew, however, tries to explain why Jesus — the Savior — should be baptized by John. “John tried to dissuade [Jesus], ‘It is I who need baptism from you . . . and yet you come to me.’ But Jesus replied, ‘Leave it like this for the time being . . . .’” The passage continues by saying, “At this, John gave in to him,” but does not actually refer to the act of baptism. Luke too does not actually describe Jesus’ baptism by John.

All three accounts move to the moment immediately following the baptism of Jesus:

No sooner had he come up out of the water (Mark)
As soon as Jesus was baptized he came up from the water (Matthew)
While Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer (Luke)

Then the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, like a dove. And a voice spoke from heaven saying, “You are my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on you” (Mark, Luke). Matthew says, “This is my Son, the Beloved; my favor rests on him.”

The first reading (Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7) quotes from the first Servant Song: “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights.”

The responsorial psalm includes the verse, “The Lord’s voice resounding on the waters . . . . the voice of the Lord, full of splendor.”

In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles (10: 34-38), Paul preaches, “You must have heard about the recent happenings in Judaea, about Jesus of Nazareth . . . . God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power.”

The opening prayer speaks first of Jesus’ baptism and then of our own, and makes a parallel between ourselves and Christ.

Almighty and eternal God,
when Christ was baptized in the River Jordan,
the Holy Spirit came upon him
and your voice declared him your beloved Son.
Keep all who are reborn of water and the Spirit
as children in whom you are well pleased.

The prayer over the gifts states that today “we celebrate the revelation of Christ your Son who takes away the sins of the world,” and the prayer after communion asks that we may “become your children in name and in fact.”

150
The preface:

You celebrated your new gift of baptism by signs and wonders at the Jordan. Your voice was heard from heaven to awaken faith in the presence among us of the word made man.

Your Spirit was seen as a dove, revealing Jesus as your servant, and anointing him with joy as the Christ, sent to bring to the poor the good news of salvation.

The gospel message is summarized in the entrance antiphon

When the Lord had been baptized, the heavens opened and the Spirit came down like a dove to rest on him. Then the voice of the Father thundered: This is my beloved son, with him I am well pleased.

and the gospel acclamation.

The heavens were opened and the Father’s voice was heard: this is my beloved Son, hear him.

The communion antiphon, however, quotes from John’s gospel (John 1: 32, 34):

This is he of whom John said: I have seen and have given witness that this is the Son of God.

The readings for evening prayer 1 and 2 (Acts 10: 37-39) are closely related to the second reading for mass (Acts 10: 34-38). Paul’s words begin, “You must have heard . . . about Jesus of Nazareth.” In verse 39, not used at mass, Paul testifies, “Now I, and those with me, can witness to everything he [Jesus] did throughout the countryside of Judaea and in Jerusalem itself.”

Isaiah 61: 1-2a, 10-11, read at morning prayer, begins, “The spirit of the Lord God has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me.” It continues by describing his mission: “He has sent me to bring good news to the poor” and goes on, “I exult for joy in the Lord.’

The antiphons encapture the message of the liturgy:

John was in the wilderness baptizing and proclaiming a baptism of penance for the forgiveness of sins.

I baptize you with water, but the one who is coming will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he came out of the water, and the heavens opened before him.

The soldier baptizes his king, the servant his Lord, John his Savior; the waters of the Jordan tremble, a dove hovers as a sign of witness, and the voice of the Father is heard: This is my Son.

Springs of water were made holy as Christ revealed his glory to the world. Draw water from the fountain of the Savior, the Christ our God has hallowed all creation.
The Father's voice resounded from the heavens: This is my Son in whom I delight, listen to what he says to you.

The intercessions begin:

Our Redeemer desired to be baptized in the Jordan by John; let us make our petition to him.

Several antiphons focus more on the salvific consequences of Christ's baptism.

Our Savior came to be baptized, so that through the cleansing waters of baptism he might restore the old man to new life, heal our sinful nature, and clothe us with unfailing holiness.

You burned away man's guilt by fire and the Holy Spirit. We give praise to you, our God and Redeemer.

Christ is baptized, the world is made holy; he has taken away our sins. We shall be purified by water and the Holy Spirit.

The responsories pray:

O Lord our God, hear the cry of your people.  
Open for them the spring of living water.

Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on us.  
Today you revealed yourself to us.

Christ comes to us. He comes in water and in blood.  
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Weekdays of Christmastime

Though the season of Christmas is defined and celebrated primarily through the liturgies of its solemnities and Sundays, the weekdays of this period are of significance as well.

In part the weekdays continue and develop the basic message already proclaimed through the gospel readings of the solemnities and Sundays. This is the case, for example, for December 29, 30 and 31, the fifth, sixth and seventh days within the octave of Christmas. Here part of chapter two of Luke's gospel is retold.

Scripture passages other than the gospel and most of the liturgical texts for the weekdays before and after Epiphany also continue to tell the Christmas story.

The saint's days develop the Christmas message in a quite distinct manner. St Stephen (December 26), St John (December 27) and Holy Innocents (December 28) are, each in their own way, witnesses to Jesus Christ, whose birth has just been proclaimed. These feasts also celebrate the salvation he has brought.
The gospels assigned for the weekdays of the Christmas season from January 2 through Saturday after Epiphany are quite unique. They break away from the basic Christmas story as told on the solemnities and Sundays, and provide a somewhat different view of Christmastime.

This set of twelve readings is based on the view that the Epiphany (nominally January 6), is simultaneous with the revelation to the magi, the baptism of Jesus, and his first "sign," the miracle at the wedding at Cana. This view of the calendar, which is an ancient one, is stated explicitly in the antiphon for the Canticle of Zechariah for Epiphany, and the antiphon for the Canticle of Mary at evening prayer 2 of the same solemnity.

Today the Bridegroom claims his bride, the church, since Christ has washed her sins away in Jordan's waters: the Magi hasten with their gifts to the royal wedding; and the wedding guests rejoice, for Christ has changed water into wine, alleluia.

Three mysteries mark this holy day: today the star leads the Magi to the infant Christ: today water is changed into wine for the wedding feast: today Christ wills to be baptized by John in the river Jordan to bring us salvation.

The readings for the first four days of this period (January 2, 3, 4 and 5) are from chapter 1 of John's gospel, following on from the prologue (1: 1-18) that is used on Christmas Day, December 31, and the Second Sunday after Christmas.

- John 1: 19-28 John the Baptist's testimony to himself
- John 1: 29-34 John the Baptist's testimony to Jesus
- John 1: 35-42 The first disciples: Andrew and Peter
- John 1: 43-51 The first disciples: Philip and Nathanael

On January 6 (when it is not Epiphany) the same gospel is read that is used on the Baptism of the Lord, cycle A: Mark 1: 6-11.

On January 7, the "third epiphany" is proclaimed, the marriage feast at Cana: John 2: 1-12.

From this point the weekday gospel readings assume that Jesus has been baptized, and they begin to describe the first phases of his public ministry, using passages from all four gospels.

- Matthew 4: 12-17, 23-25 Return to Galilee; Jesus preaches and heals the sick
- Mark 6: 34-44 First miracle of the loaves
- Mark 6: 45-52 Jesus walks on water
- Luke 4: 14-22a Jesus at Nazareth
- Luke 5: 12-15 Cure of a leper
- John 3: 22-30 John bears witness for the last time

This arrangement of weekday gospels anticipates the scheme of the Sunday gospels, in which the baptism of Jesus is celebrated on the Sunday after Epiphany (Baptism of the Lord), and the beginnings of his public ministry are related on subsequent Sundays.
John 1: 29-34 (January 2 and 3) is read on the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A; John 1: 35-42 (January 4) is used on the Second Sunday, cycle B; and John 2: 1-12 (wedding at Cana, January 7) is used on the Second Sunday, cycle C.

Matthew 4: 12-23 (cf Monday after Epiphany) is read on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle A; Luke 4: 14-21 (with Luke 1: 1-4) is used on the Third Sunday, cycle B. The other gospel readings are not used on Sunday.

Today, for our sake, the King of heaven chose to be born of his virgin mother, to reclaim lost men for the heavenly kingdom. All the angels cry aloud with joy, for God has come himself to save mankind. Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth. 

Christmas, office of readings, responsory

Today true peace came down to us from heaven. Today the whole earth was filled with heaven’s sweetness. Today a new day dawns, the day of our redemption, prepared by God from ages past, the beginning of our never ending gladness. 

Christmas, office of readings, responsory

How blessed are you, Virgin Mary, for you carried within you the Lord, the Creator of the world. Mother of your Maker, you remain a virgin for ever. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.

Mary, Mother of God, office of readings, responsory

O pure and holy Virgin, how can I find words to praise your beauty? The highest heavens cannot contain God whom you carried in your womb. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Mary, Mother of God, office of readings, responsory
Having described the individual solemnities, Sundays and weekdays that constitute Christmastime, we may now consider aspects of these liturgies that cut across this diversity and that establish the unity of this season - the factors that make Christmastime a season and not simply a number of individual celebrations.

The principal unifying factor is Jesus Christ - his revelation and incarnation, the rich and diverse Christology which the liturgies of the Christmas season express and celebrate. Before exploring these areas, however, two other unifying factors may be considered: the way scripture is used, and the person of Mary, Mother of God.

The Use of Scripture

The liturgies of the Christmas season are characterized by their frequent use of the first sections of all four gospels, by reading large portions of the prophet Isaiah, and by the extensive use of the letter to the Colossians and the first letter of John. Passages from other New Testament letters are read as appropriate. Many readings are used more than once, and this repetition constitutes another unifying factor within the season.

Gospels

A major unifying factor is the use of the first and second chapters of Matthew's gospel, the second chapter of Luke's gospel, and the first chapter of John's gospel through most of the season. The pattern of usage is as follows:

- Matthew 1: 1-25
- Matthew 2: 1-12
- Matthew 2: 13-15, 19-23
- Matthew 2: 13-18

Christmas Vigil mass
Epiphany
Holy Family A
Holy Innocents, December 28

- Luke 2: 1-14
- Luke 2: 15-20
- Luke 2: 16-21
- Luke 2: 35-40
- Luke 2: 41-52

Christmas Midnight Mass
Christmas Mass at Dawn
Mary, Mother of God
Holy Family B
December 29, Fifth Day of Octave
December 30, Sixth Day of Octave
Holy Family C
The accounts of the baptism of Jesus from Matthew, Mark and Luke are proclaimed, and in the week between Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord, later sections of the gospels.

Other New Testament Readings

The Acts of the Apostles and letters of Paul are used as follows on the solemnities and Sundays.

Christmas vigil mass: Acts 13: 16-17, 22-25
Christmas midnight mass: Titus 2: 11-14
   Titus 2: 11-14; 3: 4-7 is also used on the Baptism of the Lord C, mass
Christmas mass at dawn: Titus 3: 4-7
   Titus 3: 4-7 is also used on Epiphany, evening prayer 1 and 2
Christmas mass during the day: Hebrews 1: 1-6
   Hebrews 1: 1-4 is used on Christmas, morning prayer;
   Hebrews 1: 1-2, on Second Sunday, morning prayer; and
   Hebrews 1: 1-2, on December 29, morning prayer

Mary, Mother of God: Galatians 4: 4-7
   Galatians 4: 3-7 is used on Christmas, evening prayer 1; and
   Galatians 4: 3-7, on Mary, Mother of God, evening prayer 1

Second Sunday: Ephesians 1: 3-6, 15-18
Epiphany: Ephesians 3: 2-3, 5-6

Baptism of the Lord A: Acts 10: 34-38
   Acts 10: 37-39, is used on Friday before Epiphany, evening prayer; and
   Acts 10: 37-39, on Baptism of the Lord, evening prayer 1, 2

First Letter of John

From December 26 (Saint Stephen) until the Saturday after Epiphany, the first letter of John is read at mass on all weekdays. With a few small exceptions it is read straight through.

Other uses of 1 John during Christmas time are as follows:

1 John 1: 1-3 Christmas, evening prayer 2; and Second Sunday, evening prayer 2

1 John 1: 5-7 December 26, evening prayer;
   Tuesday before Epiphany, evening prayer; and
   Thursday after Epiphany, evening prayer
Colossians

The letter to the Colossians is read straight through in the office of readings on the three days preceding the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God (December 29, 30, 31) and the four days following this solemnity (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday before Epiphany).

Other uses of the letter to the Colossians are as follows:

Colossians 1: 13-16 Monday before Epiphany, evening prayer
Colossians 1: 13-16 Wednesday after Epiphany, evening prayer
Colossians 1: 12-20 Christmas, evening prayer (canticle)
Colossians 3: 12-21 Holy Family A, mass

Old Testament

The book of the prophet Isaiah provides most of the Old Testament readings for the Christmas season. The pattern of usage is as follows:

Christmas vigil mass: Isaiah 62: 1-5
    Isaiah 62: 1-12 is also used on Tuesday after Epiphany, office of readings
Christmas midnight mass: Isaiah 9: 1-3, 5-6
    Isaiah 9: 5-6 is used on December 30, morning prayer;
    Isaiah 9: 5-6, on Saturday before Epiphany, morning prayer; and
    Isaiah 9: 5-6, on Monday after Epiphany, morning prayer
Christmas mass at dawn: Isaiah 62: 11-12
    Isaiah 62: 10-12 is used on Tuesday before Epiphany, morning prayer; and
    Isaiah 62: 1-12, on Tuesday after Epiphany, office of readings
Christmas mass during the day: Isaiah 52: 1-10
    Isaiah 52: 8-10 is used on Epiphany, morning prayer
Epiphany, mass: Isaiah 60: 1-16
    Isaiah 60: 1-22 is used on Epiphany, office of readings
Baptism of the Lord A, mass: Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7
    Isaiah 42: 1-8 is used on Friday before Epiphany, morning prayer; and
    Isaiah 42: 1-9, on Baptism of the Lord, morning prayer
Baptism of the Lord C, mass: Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11

Other Readings from Isaiah

Isaiah 4: 2-3: December 31, morning prayer; and
    Tuesday after Epiphany, morning prayer
Isaiah 45: 22-25 Wednesday before Epiphany, morning prayer; and
    Friday after Epiphany, morning prayer
Isaiah 49: 8-10 Monday before Epiphany, morning prayer; and
  Wednesday after Epiphany, morning prayer
Isaiah 49: 1-9 Baptism of the Lord, office of readings
Isaiah 61: 1-2a, 10-11 Friday before Epiphany, morning prayer; and
  Baptism of the Lord, evening prayer 1
Isaiah 61: 1-11 Saturday before Epiphany, office of readings
Isaiah 61: 1-11 Monday after Epiphany, office of readings

Additional passages are used only in the office of readings:
Isaiah 11: 1-10 Christmas
Isaiah 63: 7-10 Wednesday after Epiphany
Isaiah 63: 19b – 64: 11 Thursday after Epiphany
Isaiah 65: 13-25 Friday after Epiphany
Isaiah 66: 10-14, 18-23 Saturday after Epiphany

Psalms

Other patterns occur in the use of the psalms. Most of the responsorial psalm verses used at mass during Christmastime, for example, are taken from psalms 72, 96, 98, and 147.

Mary, Mother of God

The person of Mary, Mother of the infant Jesus, Mother of God – Theotokos, and faithful disciple of her Son also unifies the Christmas season as a whole. Though she is especially honored on January 1, the solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, she is a central figure throughout Christmastime.

Pope Paul VI describes her role in the Christmas season as follows:

The Christmas season stands as a continuing remembrance of that divine, virginal, and salvific motherhood by which “without losing her virginity Mary gave the world its savior.” On Christmas itself, as it adores the Savior, the Church also honors his glorious Mother. On Epiphany, as it celebrates the universal call to salvation, the Church gazes on the Virgin, the true Seat of Wisdom and Mother of the King, presenting for the Magi’s adoration the Redeemer of all peoples. On the feast of the Holy Family . . . the Church, full of reverence, reflects on the home life at Nazareth of the Son of God and Son of Man with his Mother Mary and with the just man Joseph. 1

Mary is present in the gospel readings for all of the solemnities and Sundays except the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. She is present as well in the weekday gospels for December 29, 30 and 31 (Presentation in the temple; Finding the boy Jesus in the temple). Finally, Mary is an important part of the story of the marriage at Cana, the gospel for the Saturday after Epiphany.

1 Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation Marialis cultus, on rightly grounding and increasing Marian devotion (1974), n. 5. DOL 467, 4097

158
The antiphons for the canticle of Mary at evening prayer also tell her story, explicitly or implicitly, for most of the period following January 1. For the Monday through Thursday before Epiphany, these antiphons refer to the infancy narratives of Matthew and/or Luke. During the following week, they refer to the story of the magi. Mary continues to be in the background of the story, even when not mentioned by name.

Many antiphons do refer explicitly to Mary, and tell her story in a wonderful way.

Antiphons for the Canticle of Mary

- Virgin Mary, all that the prophets foretold of Christ has been fulfilled through you: as a virgin, you conceived, and after you gave birth, a virgin you remained. (December 27)
- The holy Virgin gave birth to God who became for us the frail, tender baby she nursed at her breast. Let us worship the Lord who comes to save us. (December 28)
- The King of heaven humbled himself to be born of a virgin, that he might restore man to the kingdom he had lost. (December 29)
- We sing your praises, holy Mother of God: you gave birth to our Savior, Jesus Christ: watch over all who honor you. (December 30)
- In his great love for us, God sent his son in the likeness of our sinful nature, born of a woman and subject to the law, alleluia. (Mary, Mother of God, evening prayer 1)
- Blessed is the womb which bore you, O Christ, and the breast that nursed you, Lord and Savior of the world, alleluia. (Mary, Mother of God, evening prayer 2)
- By the power of the Holy Spirit the Virgin Mary has conceived a child: she carries in her womb this mystery which she cannot comprehend (Second Sunday, evening prayer 1)
- Blessed is the womb that bore the Son of the Eternal Father, and blessed are the breasts that nursed Christ the Lord. (Second Sunday, evening prayer 2)

Psalm Antiphons: Mary, Mother of God

- O marvelous exchange. Man’s Creator has become man, born of a virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.
- By your miraculous birth of the Virgin you have fulfilled the Scriptures: like a gentle rain falling upon the earth you have come down to save your people. O God, we praise you.
- Your blessed and fruitful virginity is like the bush, flaming yet unburned, which Moses saw on Sinai. Pray for us, Mother of God.
- The Virgin has given birth to the Savior: a flower has sprung from Jesse’s stock and a star has risen from Jacob. O God, we praise you.
- Mary has given birth to our Savior. John the Baptist saw him and cried out: This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, alleluia.
Mary has given birth to a King whose name is everlasting: hers the joy of motherhood, hers the virgin's glory. Never was the like seen before, never shall it be seen again, alleluia.

Other antiphons:

Trusting in the Lord's promise, the Virgin Mary conceived a child, and remaining a virgin, she gave birth to the King of kings.

The Virgin believed in the Lord's promise: as a virgin she gave birth to the Word made man, and yet she remained a virgin. Let us praise her and say: Blessed are you among women.

Arise, shine forth, Jerusalem, for now your light has come:
the glory of your God has risen upon you.
All nations will walk in your brightness,
and kings in the splendor of your dawn.

Epiphany, office of readings, responsory

This is glorious day on which Christ, himself, the Savior of the world, appeared; the prophets foretold him, the angels worshiped him.
The Magi saw his star and rejoiced to lay their treasures at his feet.
God's holy day has dawned for us at last; come, all you peoples, and adore the Lord.

Epiphany, office of readings, responsory

Today in the Jordan the Lord was baptized, the heavens opened and the Spirit in the form of a dove rested upon him; the voice of the Father was heard:
This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.
The Spirit descended in visible form as a dove, and a voice from heaven was heard:
This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.
Baptism of the Lord, office of readings, responsory
Revelation and Incarnation

Central to every feature of the season of Christmas is the revelation of the true identity of Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine. The liturgies of Christmastime express and celebrate this revelation and the incarnation in a variety of ways.

Revelation of Jesus Christ

Who is Jesus? During Christmastime we celebrate the revelation of the identity of Jesus Christ. One of the central questions of the gospels is, Who do you say that I am. At a deeper level the question is, Who does God reveal Jesus to be?

When was his identity revealed? We may also ask, When was the true identity of Jesus revealed? When did the proclamation of the Good News — in the broadest sense — really begin? The Christian scriptures give several answers to these questions. All are correct, but they reveal different insights, perspectives and depths of understanding.

Resurrection: The earliest answer to the question when the true identity of Jesus was revealed, is the resurrection. This is the high point of all four gospels and the core of the apostolic preaching: This Jesus that God raised up . . . , God has made him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2: 32, 26). By his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord was designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness (Romans 1: 4).

- The death and resurrection of Jesus is assumed at Christmastide, and it is always in the background; in the texts of our eucharistic prayers it is made explicit. The scriptural narrative, however, is reserved for Eastertime.

Four answers: The gospels for Christmastime give four other answers to the question, When was the true identity of Jesus revealed? Working backwards in Jesus’ life, the answers given are the baptism of Jesus, the beginning of his adulthood, his birth, and the very beginning of time.

Baptism: Mark calls the baptism of Jesus, when he was about thirty years of age, the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ (chapter 1), and all three synoptic gospels tell us that Jesus is designated by divine revelation as God’s Son at his baptism. The Holy Spirit descends on him and stays with him during the public ministry.

Beginning of Adulthood: Luke (2: 41-52) tells us about Jesus at age twelve, listening and asking questions in the temple; all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. He himself declares his true identity when he replies to Mary, Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?
**Birth:** The infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus was God's Son during his entire life, beginning with his conception through the Holy Spirit and his birth from Mary. The infant Jesus cannot speak for himself, but his true identity is recognized and proclaimed by the angels, the magi, and by Anna and Simeon.

**The Beginning:** The prologue to John's gospel takes the story of Jesus back even further, to the very beginning, when the word was with God and the word was God. John then jumps to the moment when the word became flesh; the gospel then moves on to the baptism of Jesus.

**A single message:** The gospels of the solemnities and Sundays of Christmastime, then, tell of various moments in the life of Jesus Christ, but they speak but a single message: Jesus is God's Son as well as the son of Mary and the son of David.

**Liturical texts**, as well as the scripture readings, also speak of the Christmastime season as a great feast of revelation of Jesus Christ.

- God of mystery,  
  on this day [Epiphany] you revealed your only Son  
  to the nations  
  by the guidance of a star.
- Father, your Son became like us  
  when he revealed himself in our nature.
- God, when the Spirit descended upon Jesus  
  at his baptism in the Jordan,  
  you revealed him as your own beloved Son.
- Father, your only Son revealed himself to us by becoming man.
- Lord, as we celebrated the revelation of Christ your Son . . . .

**Revelation of God's Love**

Christmastime is not only the revelation of Jesus Christ by God, but also of the revelation of God through the incarnation, as the following texts from prefaces and antiphons show.

- In the wonder of the incarnation  
  your eternal word has brought to the eyes of faith  
  a new and radiant vision of your glory.  
  In him we see our God made visible  
  and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see.  
- Today you fill our hearts with joy  
  as we recognize in Christ the revelation of your love.
- God's love for us was revealed when he sent his only Son into the world.  
  God, you give us a new vision of your glory  
  in the coming of Christ your Son.
- Son of God, you have shown us the Father's love.  
  You are the fullest revelation of God to men and women.  
  Christ, through your baptism you revealed to us the Holy Trinity.
The Holy Spirit

The season of Christmas is also a celebration of the Holy Spirit. The gospels tell us that it is by the Holy Spirit that Mary has conceived this child (Christmas vigil mass), that Simeon was inspired by the Holy Spirit to recognize Jesus (Holy Family B; December 29), and that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism (Baptism of the Lord; January 3; and January 6).

The Holy Spirit is also referred to in a number of epistle readings, for example: “the proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts” (Mary, Mother of God). The Spirit is also spoken of frequently in the first letter of John, which is read throughout the Christmas season.

Liturgal texts also refer to the Holy Spirit, especially on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

Christ, Savior of mankind, the Father anointed you with the Holy Spirit for the ministry of salvation.
You burned away [our] guilt by fire and the Holy Spirit.
Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit open the hearts of all.
Christ is baptized, the world is made holy; he has taken away our sins. We shall be purified by water and the Holy Spirit.

Incarnation

Throughout most of the season of Christmas the focus of our liturgical celebrations is on the incarnation – the becoming flesh, becoming truly human – of Jesus. Liturgical texts express the meaning of the incarnation through a rich variety of images.

Conceived:
• the Virgin Mary conceived a child
• as a virgin, you conceived
• By the power of the Holy Spirit the Virgin Mary has conceived a child. She carries in her womb this mighty mystery which she cannot comprehend.

Begotten:
• this day I have begotten you

Born:
• The Savior of the world is born for you
• a little child is born for us today
• Mary gave birth to Jesus
• the virgin has given birth to the Savior
• she gave birth to the King of kings
• the Lord is born for us

163
Comes:
• he comes in splendor
• the day of the world's salvation has come
• Daughter of Zion, your king is coming
• the Lord is coming
• he who comes in the name of the Lord
• today you will know the Lord is coming
• the Lord God has come to his people

Visits:
• God has visited his people

Appeared:
• the Lord our Savior has appeared on earth today
• God has appeared on earth
• the Savior has appeared
• eternal salvation has appeared on the earth

Is Seen:
• we have seen a newborn infant
• in the morning you will see his glory
• he was seen on earth

Sent:
• he sends forth his word to the earth
• God sent his only Son into the world
• God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful nature
• I have not come of myself, but the Father sent me

Given:
• God gave his only son
• a son is given us

Made known:
• the Lord has made known . . . his saving power
• today you will know the Lord is coming
• this thing which the Lord has revealed to us
Become human; made flesh:
• man's Creator has become man
• the word of God became man
• the word was made flesh
• the word was made man
• God becomes man
• as a virgin she gave birth to the word made man

Lived with us:
• our God has lived among men
• the word of God lived among us
• he lived among men and women
• humbled, he lived among men

Emptied; humbled:
• the eternal word emptied himself and became man
• Christ humbled himself to share in our humanity
• humbled, he lived among men
• the king of heaven humbled himself to be born of a virgin

Descended:
• true peace has descended from heaven
• your all-powerful word leaped down from heaven, from your royal throne

Speaks:
• now [God] speaks to us through his Son

Star:
• a star has risen from Jacob

Dawn:
• a light has dawned for the just
• the radiant dawn shines
• the glory of the Lord dawns upon you
• the dawn from on high shall break upon us

Great light:
• the people have seen a great light
• today a great light has come upon the earth
Light in darkness:
• a light has shone through the darkness for the upright of heart
• the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, on those who lived in the showdown of death, light has shone

Shining light:
• a light will shine on us this day
• Jerusalem, your light has come
• the Lord God shines on us
• glorious, he [Christ] shone in the heavens

Marriage:
• when the sun rises in the morning sky, you will see the king of kings coming forth from the Father like a radiant bridegroom from the bridal chamber
• you came forth from the womb of Mary, your mother, like a bridegroom from his marriage chamber

Rain:
• like a gentle rain falling upon the earth, you came down to save your people

Flower:
• a flower has spring from Jesse's stock

River:
• the Lord has refreshed [Jerusalem] like a river of peace

Prophet:
• a great prophet has risen among us

The Incarnate Christ and the Significance of the Incarnation

Many liturgical texts tell us how Christ became fully human, save for sin. The "other side" of the story is the ennobling effect that Christ's incarnation has for humanity. Often these two themes are combined in our liturgical texts.

You wonderfully created human nature
and even more wonderfully
restored its dignity in Christ.
Give us the grace to share in his divinity,
for he has come to share in our flesh and blood.
God has become one with man,
and man has become one again with God.
Your eternal word has taken upon himself
 our human weakness,
giving our mortal nature immortal value.
So marvellous is this oneness between God and man
that in Christ man restores to man
the gifts of everlasting life.

Your only Son revealed himself to us by becoming man.
May we who share his humanity
come to share his divinity.

The richness of our liturgies is virtually inexhaustible. What a resource of preaching, teaching, prayer and contemplation!

---

Past, Present and Future

In our observances of the Christmas season, we simultaneously celebrate the past, the present, and the future; this is true of all liturgical celebrations, of course.

Past: Because of the familiarity of the story of the birth of Jesus, we readily recall the past – though perhaps in a selective fashion. This needs no further attention.

Present: Christmas is also a time of Christ's presence with us today – not the infant Jesus of course, but the Risen Christ. The Christmas liturgies emphasize that the mystery that is being celebrated is present to us here and now. For example:

God our Creator,
who made this most holy night radiant
with the splendor of the one true light,
grant in your mercy
that as we celebrate on earth the
mystery of that light,
we may also rejoice in its fullness
in heaven. We ask this . . . .

Lord our God,
with the birth of your son,
your glory breaks on the world.
Through the night hours of the darkened earth
we your people watch for the coming of your
promised son.
As we wait, give us a foretaste of the joy that you
will grant us
when the fullness of his glory has filled the earth....
Almighty God and Father of light,  
a child is born for us and a son is given to us.  
Your eternal Word leaped down from heaven  
in the silent watches of the night,  
and now your Church is filled with wonder  
at the nearness of her God.  
Open our hearts to receive his life  
and increase our vision with the rising of dawn,  
that our lives may be filled with his glory and  
his peace . . . .

It is also no accident that the word “today” is heard throughout the Christmas season; the following antiphons are used repeatedly:

- Today you will know that the Lord is coming to save us and in the morning you will see his glory.
- Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.
- A light will shine on us this day.
- Today a great light has come upon the earth.

Faith: Our present experience of the presence of Christ is an experience in and of faith. This too is referred to in our liturgical texts:

- the new light of your incarnate Word has broken upon us;  
  By faith it glows in our hearts.
- Give us grace to proclaim our faith . . .
- We believe that . . .
- Keep us unshakable in this faith
- Shine upon your faithful people
- We know you now by faith
- The eyes of faith

Future: Finally, we look forward to Christ’s second coming, to the future establishing of his Reign, and to life with Christ in heaven. This is implicit through the season, but is referred to explicitly in a number of liturgical texts:

- may we face him with confidence when he comes as our judge
- may we also rejoice in its fullness in heaven
- welcomed with joy into your home in heaven
- live in the hope of lasting glory
- that we may reach the glorious reward that you promise
- so we may share new life with him in the kingdom of grace
- lead us into that presence where we shall behold your glory face to face
- come at last to the radiance of our eternal home
• by his grace enter into light everlasting
• lead mankind from exile into your heavenly kingdom

Isaiah: In addition, many of the Old Testament readings look to the future. We sometimes think that the many passages of Isaiah that we read at Christmas are chosen because they point to the coming of Jesus Christ, which for Isaiah was in the future; this is one Christian liturgical interpretation of these passages. However, they may also be interpreted as looking to our future as well, to the future Second Coming and establishment of the Reign of God in its fullness. Seen in this light, the Isaian prophecies are the basis for much joy and hope.

---

**Christmastime and Easter**

*Every liturgy* is a celebration of the dying and rising of Jesus Christ, and hence is related to Easter. What is the relationship between the liturgies of the Christmas season and those of the Three Days of Easter? There are a number of connections.

**Light:** Christmas has its glory of the Lord shining round as the angel proclaimed Christ to the shepherds, and its star leading the magi to Jesus. Easter has its paschal candle, exsultet, and pillar of fire leading the people through the sea. For both feasts, Christ is our light. This theme has already been considered above.

**Exodus:** The story of the flight in Egypt and return again to Israel is proclaimed on Holy Family, cycle A. Jesus and his family are reenacting the original exodus from Egypt. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem during which Jesus and his parents were separated took place at Passover. The epistle for the Christmas vigil mass refers to the exodus. The entrance antiphon at the Christmas vigil mass, "Today you will know that the Lord is coming to save us and in the morning you will see his glory" (Exodus 16: 6-7) is from the story in which God feeds the pilgrim people in the desert with quails and with bread (manna).

**At Easter:** The exodus is also central to the celebration of Easter, as a key paradigm for the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. Portions of the exodus account are proclaimed at the Easter Vigil, and short texts and allusions abound in the Easter liturgies.

**Emptying:** The passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians which sings that Christ Jesus, though divine, did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave . . . is read on Passion Sunday. It is also the new Testament canticle at evening prayer every Sunday, and is used at evening prayer for Christmas. The image of emptying is one of those used to interpret the incarnation.

**Rejection and Suffering:** The second reading for the Christmas mass at midnight speaks of Christ sacrificing himself for us to redeem us, and the gospel for the mass during the day says, "yet the world did not know who he was . . . and his own did not accept him." Simeon tells Mary, "This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed."
There is the flight into Egypt for fear of Herod, and the slaughter of the inno­
cent children of Bethlehem. In the Epiphany gospel, Herod is threatened when
the magi ask, "Where is the infant king of the Jews?" The martyr Stephen has
followed his Savior to a violent death.

**Baptism:** References to baptism occur throughout the Christmas liturgies,
though the feast of the Baptism of the Lord is especially important in this
regard. The epistle for the Christmas Vigil mass says, "John heralded the com­
ing of Jesus by proclaiming a baptism of repentance to all the people of
Israel," and that for the Christmas mass at dawn tells us that "he saved us
through the baptism of new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Whenever
we hear of John the Baptist, as at the Christmas mass during the day, Decem­
ber 31, Second Sunday, and in many antiphons through the season, we think
of baptism.

**The first letter of John,** read on weekdays through Christmastime, often
refers to baptism, or being begotten by God, or being children of God, or being
adopted by God — and other images and concepts related to baptism. The
gospel for January 6 is Mark's account of the baptism of Jesus, and the water
of the miracle at Cana (January 7) reminds us of baptism. The gospel for the
Saturday after Epiphany speaks of both Jesus and John baptizing.

**Salvation:** The liturgies for the Baptist of the Lord speak very forcefully of the
salvific consequences of the baptism of Jesus; they almost sound like the litur­
gies of Easter. This is especially true of the liturgy of the hours. For example,
the antiphons for the canticles of Mary and Zechariah proclaim:

- Our Savior came to be baptized, so that through the cleansing waters of
  baptism he might restore the old man to new life, heal our sinful nature, and
  clothe us with unfailing holiness. (Mary, evening prayer 1)

- Christ is baptized, the world is made holy; he has taken away our sins. We
  shall be purified by water and the Holy Spirit. (Zechariah)

- Christ Jesus loved us, poured out his blood to wash away our sins, and
  made us a kingdom and priests for God our Father. To him be glory and
  honor for ever. (Mary, evening prayer 2)

**Psalm antiphons** for the Baptism of the Lord also speak eloquently:

- Springs of water were made holy as Christ revealed his glory to the world.
  Draw water from the fountain of the Savior, for Christ our God has hallowed
  all creation.

- You burned away man's guilt by fire and the Holy Spirit, We give praise to
  you, our God and Redeemer.

- In the Jordan river our Savior crushed the serpent's head and wrested us
  free from his grasp.

- A wondrous mystery is declared to us today: the Creator of the universe
  has washed away our sins in the waters of the Jordan.

**Finally, the intercessions declare:**

- Christ, through your baptism you cleansed us of every blemish and made
  us children of your Father; bestow your spirit of adoption on all who seek
  you.
Christ, through baptism you have consecrated creation and opened the door of repentance to all who prepare for baptism; make us servants of your Gospel in the world.

Christ, through our baptism you revealed to us the Holy Trinity when the Father called you his beloved Son and the Holy Spirit came down upon you; renew the spirit of adoption among the royal priesthood of the baptized.

Our liturgical texts provide a great treasure of rich theology.

Today the heavens opened and the waters of the sea became sweet and fragrant; the earth rejoiced, the mountains and hills exulted, because Christ was baptized by John in the Jordan. What has happened that the sea has been put to flight, and the Jordan has turned back upon itself? Because Christ was baptized by John in the Jordan.

Baptism of the Lord, office of readings, responsory

The fullness of divinity lives in Christ's humanity; he is the head over every power and authority. In baptism we were buried with Christ, and in baptism we have risen to a new life with him through our faith in the power of God.

December 31, Seventh Day in the Octave of Christmas, office of readings, responsory

This is my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom I take delight. All nations will hope in his name. My Spirit will rest upon him, and he will teach the nations the meaning of justice.

Friday before Epiphany, office of readings, responsory
Who is this Jesus Christ who is revealed to be the incarnate Son of God? The liturgical texts and scripture readings of the Christmas season do not stop with the name Jesus. Instead, they give us a wide range of names, titles and images. Among these are the following:

Jesus: His name is Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph, the child Jesus, the boy Jesus, Lord Jesus.

Child: He is the baby, a newborn infant, the child, a little child, O radiant child.

Son: Jesus is the (my, his) Son, the only Son, the only-begotten Son, the Son of the living God, the Son of the eternal Father, my beloved Son, my Son the Beloved, Son of the Virgin Mary.

Word: He is the word, the eternal word of the Father, the word of God, the almighty word, your all-powerful word, the consubstantial word of the Father.

God: Jesus is called our God, God from God, and God-with-us.

King: He is the infant king of the Jews, King, the King of kings, the King of heaven, the King of heaven and earth, King of glory.

Christ: Jesus is the Christ of the Lord, Christ, Christ the Lord, Christ our God, O Christ, the infant Christ.

Lord: He is the Lord, Lord and ruler, Lord of all men, Lord of heaven, Lord of life.

Savior: Jesus is the (our) Savior, the Savior of the world, Savior of mankind.

Lamb: He is the Lamb, the Lamb of God, the sinless Lamb, the spotless Lamb.

Other images: Jesus is also the First born, the Creator of the universe, the Holy One, the Bridegroom, Emmanuel - God-with-us, Light from light, Wonder-Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace, Lord of David and son of David, Sun of Justice, Father of the poor, our life, light eternal, Redeemer of all, Founder of the human race, Servant of God, Chosen One of God, our hope, our Peace.

Multiple names and images: Sometimes the liturgical texts bring several names, titles and images together: our great God and Savior Christ Jesus, Jesus Christ our Savior, Lord and Savior of the world; Christ, Son of the living God; the Lord, the Son of God and King most high.

Descriptions: Jesus is also described using expressions that do not include these names and images: He who was from the beginning; the one who is to save his people from their sins; the one who is coming; he who comes in the name of the Lord; great prophet; the one of whom Moses and the prophets wrote.

Several names, titles and images are used particularly frequently in the liturgical texts of Christmastime. Among these are king, Savior, word, and light.
Christ the King

Both Christmas Day and Epiphany are feasts of Christ the King. This title is used on many weekdays of the Christmas season as well.

Christmas evening prayer 1: "He comes in splendor, the King who is our peace . . ." (antiphon 1). "When the sun rises in the morning sky, you will see the King of kings coming forth from the Father like a radiant bridegroom from the bridal chamber" (antiphon, canticle of Mary).

Christmas vigil mass: The responsorial psalm (Ps 89) and second reading (Acts 13: 16-17, 22-25) refer to David the king. The gospel refers to Jesus Christ, son of David (and the other kings of Israel), and the gospel acclamation proclaims, "Tomorrow . . . the Savior of the world will be our king.

Christmas midnight mass: The first reading and gospel refer to king David several times. The psalm response is "He shall rule the world . . . ."

Christmas morning prayer: "You are the King of heaven and earth who sent messengers to announce peace to all" (intercessions).

Christmas mass at dawn: The entrance antiphon tells us that "He shall be called . . . Prince of Peace; and his Kingship will never end." "Your King is coming, the Holy One, the Savior of the world" is the communion antiphon.

Christmas mass during the day: "Dominion is laid upon his shoulder," says the entrance antiphon, while the psalm response is "Sing joyfully before the King, you lands."

Christmas evening prayer 2: "He . . . brought us into the kingdom of his beloved son" (canticle); King from all eternity . . . (intercessions).

Epiphany evening prayer 1: "The star burned like a flame, pointing the way to God, the King of kings; the wise men saw the sign and brought gifts in homage to their great King" (antiphon 3). "Seeing the star, the wise men said: This must signify the birth of some great King . . . ." (antiphon, canticle of Mary). The intercessions are addressed to the King of the nations, the King of glory, the King of ages, and the King of justice.

Epiphany mass: We begin (entrance antiphon) by acclaiming," The Lord and ruler is coming; kingship is his, and government and power," and the central question of the gospel reading is "Where is the infant king of the Jews?"

Epiphany evening prayer 2: "He comes in splendor, the King who is our peace; he is supreme over all the kings of the earth" (antiphon 1).

Whatever human kings may be now, or have been in the past, its use for the infant Jesus turns all human expectations upside down. Our king is a helpless infant, nursed, changed, carried, taught. This imaging of Christ as king is very much like that celebrated on the feast of Christ the King, when he is shown as hanging on a cross, dying in agony.

At baptism we are likened to Christ as king (and prophet and priest), and all ministry in the church is described in terms of priest, prophet and king. Because of the way king is used in human history and society, we Christians need constantly to be on guard to recognize and fully accept the gospel interpretation of this title: helpless infant, one crucified and dying.
Christ the Light

Light is an important element of the first readings at the Christmas midnight mass and on Epiphany. “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone” (Christmas midnight). “Arise, shine out, for your light has come, the glory of the Lord is rising on you . . . . The nations come to your light and kings to your dawning brightness” (Epiphany). The gospel for Christmas midnight mass tells us that “the glory of the Lord shone round” the shepherds when the angel appeared. The gospel for Epiphany speaks of the star which led the magi to Jesus in Bethlehem.

Some texts in the liturgy of the hours speak of Christ as light: You came as the Sun rising over the earth; Light from Light; Christ, Sun of justice; Christ, light eternal; Christ, Rising Sun; Christ, light to the nations.

Light is also a regular theme in the opening prayers for the weekday masses after Epiphany. For example:

let the brightness of your sovereign light

shine within our hearts

that we may pass beyond the

darkness of this world

and come at last to the radiance of

our eternal home.

In your Son Jesus Christ

you raised up an unfailing light

for all the nations to see.

Grant that your people may know and confess

the full splendor of their Redeemer,

and by his grace enter into light everlasting.

Christ the Word of God

The prologue of John’s gospel (1: 1-18), proclaims the message that the Word who was with God in the beginning has become fully human, and “we have seen his glory.” It is read at the Christmas mass during the day, on December 31, and on the Second Sunday of Christmas (which in Canada is always replaced by the Epiphany). In addition, the Word of God is also referred to often in the first letter of John, read on weekdays during the Christmas season.

Several opening prayers and prefaces also refer to the word of God:

the new light of your incarnate Word has broken upon us.

Make us faithful to your word,

that we may bring your life to the waiting world.

In the wonder of the incarnation your eternal Word has brought to the eyes of faith a new and radiant vision of your glory.

Your eternal Word has taken upon himself our human weakness,

giving our mortal nature immortal value.
Various short texts from morning and evening prayer also speak of the Word of God:

The eternal Word, born of the Father before time began, today emptied himself for our sake and became man.

The Word of God existed before the creation of the universe yet was born among us in time.

In the beginning, before time began, the Word was God; today he is born, the Savior of the world.

The Word was made man; full of grace and truth, he lived among us. From his fullness we all have received gift upon gift of his love, alleluia.

Let us glorify the word of God who was revealed in the flesh, appeared to the angels, and was proclaimed to the nations.

Word of God made flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, you entered this world.

In the fullness of time, the eternal Word was begotten of the Father. He is the child who is born for us, the son who is given to us.

Let us praise the Word of God, for he has come to cast our sins into the sea.

Christ our Savior

The predominant image of Christ in the liturgies of the Christmas season is that of Savior. This is the root meaning of Jesus’ own name: “you are to name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins;” “this day in David’s city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord.” This title is used almost every day during Christmastime. Related terms such as Redeemer and Liberator are also used, but less often.

Salvation: In addition to this title, liturgical texts often refer to the saving power of God, the saving work of Christ, [Christ’s] saving deed, and his saving power. Prayers refer to the joyful feast of salvation, the treasures of eternal salvation, the ministry of salvation, and the day of the world’s salvation. Christ is the salvation of mankind, offers salvation to all men, and announces (God’s) salvation to the world.

But what is the nature of this salvation? Often it is not explained. Some readings and liturgical texts, however, do provide a variety of images and glimpses.

The epistle for Christmas midnight mass says, “It was . . . our Savior Christ Jesus . . . who sacrificed himself for us, to redeem us from all unrighteousness and to cleanse for himself a people of his own, eager to do what is right.” At the dawn mass the epistle reads, “that we may be justified by his grace and become heirs, in hope, of eternal glory.” At the mass during the day the epistle says, “When he had cleansed us from our sins.”

Other images include these:

• that we may be freed from present evils and live in hope of lasting glory.
• may the light of Christ now rise in our hearts to refresh them and make them new
• he shows us the way of truth and promises the life of your kingdom
• to give freedom to every creature
• he made us your children
• the saving work of Christ made our peace with you
• may our lives may be filled with his glory and his peace
• receive his life and increase our vision
• we ask you to give us a new birth

There is much to meditate upon; much upon which to base our preaching and catechesis.

The Spirit of God rests upon me, for the Lord has anointed me; and he has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim that captivity is now ended and prisoners are set free.

I have come forth from God and have come into the world. I did not come of myself; the Father has sent me.

Saturday before Epiphany, office of readings, responsory

The wise men offered three precious gifts to the Lord on that day, and each of these gifts has a divine significance: gold signifies the power of a king; frankincense, the office of high priest; and myrrh, the Lord's burial.

The wise men came to the stable to worship the author of our salvation, and from their treasures they offered these symbolic gifts:

Gold signifies the power of a king; frankincense the office of high priest; and myrrh, the Lord's burial.

Monday after Epiphany, office of readings, responsory

Today, Jesus, Light from Light, whom John baptized in the Jordan, has appeared to us: we believe that he was born of the Virgin Mary.

The heavens opened above him, and the voice of the Father was heard.

Wednesday after Epiphany, office of readings, responsory
Celebrating
the Christmas Season

Celebrating Christmastime well involves advance planning, giving it a high priority and appropriate energy, calling the unity of this season to mind in preaching and music, including special liturgies or rites, and promoting prayer in households. Music is especially important.

Advance Planning

Seasons: Sometimes further education regarding the whole idea of liturgical seasons would be helpful. The two major solemnities of the year — Easter, Christmas — are preceded by a season (Lent, Advent) that prepares for and leads up to the central feast. Each is also followed by a season (Eastertide, Christmastide) that prolongs and develops the celebration of the central mystery.

More than one day: The celebratory season of Christmastime expresses the view the Christmas is far too rich to be taken in, appreciated, interiorized, experienced deeply and celebrated in a single day.

Contemplation: The contemporary cultural tendency toward instant gratification is countered by the liturgy's insistence on contemplation. We follow Mary, who "pondered all these things in her heart." The hidden life of Jesus as he grew up in Nazareth is one aspect of the Christmas season, and one that has traditionally been a great inspiration to the contemplative orders of the church.

At Christmastime the whole church become contemplative. This season invites us to relax and enjoy Christmas (and its development) for between two and three weeks. This is more humane and enjoyable than trying to squeeze it all into a single day.

Advent: The celebration of Christmastime is also promoted by celebrating Advent well. This means that Advent is respected for what it is - a season of preparation for Christmas; it does not anticipate Christmas or become a preliminary Christmas season. In addition, the differences between the Advent of the church's liturgical calendar and the so-called Christmas season of contemporary society are recognized.

Priority: A decision needs to be made, well in advance, that a high priority will be given to the celebration of Christmastime in the parish.

Energy: Because so much energy, time and attention goes into planning, preparing for and celebrating Christmas Day, some way must be found to devote enough energy to the season of Christmas. In part this is a matter of mental attitude and priorities.
Separate committees: This might also be facilitated by establishing separate planning committees for Christmas Day and for the remainder of Christmastime.

Liturgical ministers: In addition, it is necessary to assign liturgical ministers who are not going to be away on holidays or unusually busy with family responsibilities. They too need to have energy to do a good job. Musicians especially need to be fresh.

Visual and Verbal Dimensions

Decoration: The interior of the church building should look like Christmas for the whole of the Christmas season; it should immediately tell those who enter that this is a special time and that this season has a unity. Decorations – tree, other greenery, flowers, red bows, creche – that are appropriate for Christmas will be put in place on December 24 and remain, at least in part, through the Baptism of the Lord.

- Because the Baptism of the Lord no longer has to do with the infant Jesus, the creche no longer seems appropriate. Greenery, flowers and other decorations put up for Christmas may still be used, however.

Banners: Appropriate banners can help support the unity of the Christian season.

Preaching will respect the unity of Christmastime as well as the distinctive nature of the individual solemnities and Sundays. Good homilies should be prepared for Holy Family and Mary, Mother of God, as well as for the other major liturgies.

Daily mass: Participation in the daily eucharist might be encouraged for the season of Christmas, especially for those who do not ordinarily participate. Brief homilies will be prepared for these liturgies as well. The threads of continuity that are expressed in these masses ought to be brought out, for example the use of the infancy narratives up to January 1, and the reading of 1 John throughout the season. It is also important to point out the distinctive calendar and theology of the weekday gospels after January 1.

Baptism: The solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord is an eminently suitable occasion on which to celebrate baptism for children. Preferably, this should be at mass rather than a separate liturgy in the afternoon. This is the last big baptismal occasion before Easter.

Blessed water: If there are no children to be baptized, then the rite of blessing and sprinkling holy water may be used at the beginning of the eucharist in place of the penitential rite. This rite would also be used at masses other than the one at which baptism is celebrated.

Morning prayer, evening prayer or both might be celebrated during Christmastime, even if they are not prayed regularly in the parish. Evening prayer with light service (Catholic Book of Worship II, no. 62), for example, would be especially appropriate on Epiphany. Evening prayer 1 of Mary, Mother of God might also be a suitable liturgy for the late afternoon or early evening of New Year's Eve.
**Proclamation of Christmas:** The old Roman Martyrology contained a wonderful “proclamation of Christmas” that might be used prior to the liturgies of the day. The traditional text stopped with the birth of Jesus; the version given below has been brought to the present to indicate that Christmas is more than just something that happened in the past: Christ is present today.

The twenty fifth day of December.

In the five thousand and ninety-ninth year of the creation of the world; from the time when God in the beginning created the heaven and the earth;
the two thousand, nine hundred and fifty-seventh year after the flood;
the two thousand and fifteenth year from the birth of Abraham;
the one thousand, five hundred and tenth year from Moses and the going forth of the people of Israel from Egypt;
the one thousand and thirty-second year from David's being anointed king;
in the sixty-fifth week according to the prophecy of Daniel;
in the one hundred and ninety-fourth Olympiad;
the seven hundred and fifty-second year from the foundation of the city of Rome;
the forty-second year of the reign of Octavian Augustus;
the whole world being at peace;
in the sixth age of the world;
Jesus Christ, the eternal God, and the Son of the eternal Father, desiring to sanctify the world by his most merciful coming, being conceived by the Holy Spirit, and nine months having passed since his conception, was born in Bethlehem of Judea of the Virgin Mary, being made flesh.

The Nativity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, according to the flesh.

And in this year of the Lord, Jesus Christ, one thousand nine hundred and ninety:

his having been proclaimed and praised throughout the world since his first coming by:
Mary Magdalene, Peter and Paul,
Catherine of Siena and Francis of Assisi,
John the Twenty-third and Mother Teresa;\(^2\)

one thousand nine hundred and sixty years having passed since his Death, Resurrection, and Ascension;\(^3\)

---

1 This date has to be changed each year.
2 This list can be expanded or changed as seems appropriate in each community.
3 Assuming Christ's death in A.D. 30.
in this our own age, the world not yet being at peace;

Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our friend and brother,
still desiring to sanctify the world by his coming,
is present in Word, in Eucharist, in his Body the Church, and wherever his Holy Spirit moves:
The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ today,
and the promise of his final coming at the end of the ages.

A musical setting for this proclamation (and for the Epiphany proclamation referred to below) may be obtained from Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago.4

Epiphany Proclamation: Another fine old custom is to announce at Epiphany this year's dates for the movable feasts of the liturgical calendar, namely Easter and all the celebrations whose dates depend on that of Easter. This too may be proclaimed or sung before the liturgies of the day. Texts and music may be obtained from Liturgical Training Publications of Chicago.

Music for Christmastime

The music of the celebrations is perhaps the single most important factor in creating and maintaining the spirit of a season such as Christmastime. Unlike the local radio stations, the parish community cannot conclude its Christmas music on December 26; it needs to continue throughout the entire season. Liturgically appropriate Christmas music, used for the opening song, concluding song or at another time, should be sung at each solemnity, Sunday, and if possible, saints' day and weekday.

Within the unity of the Christmas season, particular songs might be especially appropriate for individual solemnities and Sundays. The thematic index of the Catholic Book of Worship, choir edition, provides the following suggestions.

Holy Family:
Joseph be our guide, 618
O Joseph, mighty patron, 619
Once in royal David's city, 473
Sing of Mary, pure and lowly, 613
The God whom earth and sun, 608
Who has known, 476

Epiphany:
As with gladness men of old, 478
Chretians prenez courage, 468
Huron carol, 467
Of the Father's love begotten, 470
Songs of thankfulness, 478

4Liturgy Training Publications, 1800 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622-1101, U. S. A.
The first Nowell, 460
The voice of God, 639
This is the day, 588
What Child is this, 461
What star is this, 477
Who has known, 476

**Baptism of the Lord:**
On Jordan's banks, 443
Songs of thankfulness and praise, 479
The voice of God, 639
When Jesus comes to be baptized, 480

*Glory and Praise contains appropriate songs as well.* These include:

Hail Mary, Gentle Woman, 20
I will sing of the Lord, 24
Rise up, Jerusalem, 44
Emmanuel, 96, 97
Lord, Today, 118
The People that walks in darkness, 133
Song of Jesus Christ, 142
Star-light, 147
Wake from your sleep, 153
With all my heart, 157
The word who is life, 160
He has anointed me, 197
How beautiful on the mountains, 201
Jesus Christ is Lord, 209
Jesus the Lord, 210
A child is born, 255
Something which is known, 267

In addition to songs that are familiar, musicians ought to plan to teach something new each year.

**Effort effort** needs to be made to plan music for the Christmastime liturgies as a whole. Support, encouragement and thanks should be given to musicians at this time, as their responsibilities are especially great.

---

**Other Parish Activities**

The **observance** of the season of Christmas goes beyond the liturgy, of course, and should involve the whole of parish life. The following suggestions are intended to spark the imaginations of local communities to think of other ideas as well.

**Holy Family** clearly is a time for families, and families in the parish might celebrate together by sharing a meal, either at noon or in the evening; this might take place in homes or in the parish hall. As the mothers often have been heavily involved in preparing the Christmas Day festive meal, this might be a time when children and fathers could prepare the food.
Mary, Mother of God might be another time for a parish get-together to celebrate the beginning of the new year in a quiet way and to celebrate the world day of peace. It is a time of hope and might be a time to share dreams for the future.

Epiphany is celebrated as a feast of time in some places. As mentioned above, the moveable feasts of the church year might be proclaimed. Calendars might also be blessed and given to each member or household of the parish following the eucharistic liturgies. Some parishes have great Twelfth Night parties, which might involve guests from other Christian churches. It might also be a time to invite recent immigrants, refugees and visitors from other countries to a meal or celebration.

Baptism of the Lord: If children are baptized this day, the parish might provide refreshments for a celebration for those families and the whole parish.

Celebrating at Home

Christmastime is an important time for celebrations in the home, both social and religious — and both together. Useful resources in this regard are Gertrude Mueller Nelson's To Dance With God. Family Ritual and Community Celebration, and Joan Halmo's Celebrating the Church Year with Young Children.

Gifts: The unity of the Christmas season might be celebrated by saving some gifts so that one gift a day might be exchanged for at least the first twelve days — that is, until Epiphany.

Scripture: A special effort might be made (if this is not the ordinary practice) to read the gospel accounts of the Christmas story each day at home. Either a bible or the lectionary could be used.

Grace: Parishes might distribute texts of one or more appropriate grace before and after meals for the Christmas season, for members to use at home.

Candle: As Christmas is so much a celebration of light, a special candle might be lit on Christmas eve or day, and then relit each day for the main meal or time of family prayer.

Hospitality: Households, whether large or small, might invite guests in throughout the season of Christmas, in honor of the hospitality shown in the various episodes of the Christmas story.

The individual feasts of the Christmas season might also be observed in special ways in households.

6 (New York: Paulist Press 1986)
7 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, and Ottawa: Novalis 1988)
St Stephen: December 26 brings to mind the charity of Stephen, the deacon and, from the carol, Good King Wenceslaus. Families or individuals might follow their example by giving money, clothing or food to a worthy charity.

St John: On December 27 we remember the evangelist whose constant refrain is “God is love.” It is a time to remember how family members show God’s love to one another, and perhaps, how they sometimes fail to do so. It is a time for reconciliation and reexpressing their love for one another.

Holy Innocents: December 28 is a time for children; a party of some kind, special foods, and games would be appropriate. It is also a time for remembering lost innocence of all kinds.

December 29: The gospel is the finding of the boy Jesus in the temple, and this day can be taken as a special one for teenagers. Today is a day to dialogue with the teenager members of the family and neighborhood; what are their questions? what are their answers?

Mary, Mother of God: This is not only the first day of the new year, but also commemorates the naming of Jesus. It might be a time to reflect on our own names, and make this a family activity.

Epiphany: One old tradition is to bless homes – and even each room – on this day. Nelson’s book provides rites for this purpose. Another custom is to bake a cake with one bean (or coin) in it. The person whose piece contains this prize becomes “king” for the occasion, and might speak to the family about the meaning of the magi.

Hospitality: Guests from other countries, especially recent immigrants and refugees, might be invited to one’s home.

Planning: Parishes and households need to plan ahead in order to make the best use of the opportunities provided by the season of Christmas.

I saw the new heaven and the new earth; and I heard a loud voice from heaven, saying:
This is God’s dwelling place among men:
He shall live with them.
The Lord will wipe away every tear from their eyes;
death will no longer hold sway over them, for all that used to be has passed away.

Friday after Epiphany, office of readings, responsory

City of God, you will shine with wondrous light; all the ends of the earth will see your light and adore the Lord. The nations will come to you from afar.
They will come bearing gifts to worship the Lord.
They shall come from the east and the west, from the north and the south.
Saturday after Epiphany, office of readings, responsory
Christmastime and Parish Life

The liturgies of Christmastime have much to say about the life of the parish community in general. They present a program – an agenda – for parish leaders and committees and all the members of the community. They raise many questions and present serious challenges.

A time for action: Late December and early January is not a time to relax before Lent begins, but rather a time for serious reflection and vigorous action. In the middle of the winter, the Christmas season is a time to marshal fresh energy, revitalize parish activities, plan for the future, and begin new programs.

People

The Christmastide liturgies tell us that the incarnation – as well as creation itself – has given human life tremendous value. They also introduce us to a variety of kinds of people who might be overlooked in the usual course of events, or whose lives may be undervalued or threatened. They invite our care and concern for these sisters and brothers.

Who are the pregnant women, new mothers, and young infants in the parish and in the wider community? Do they have the care and support, love, prayer and practical help they need? Are any families living in the modern equivalent of stables? Do any have to travel long distances on a small budget?

Parents: Remember that Mary may have been as young as thirteen or fourteen when she bore Jesus. Who are the pregnant teenagers in the neighborhood and parish? Are they being cared for? Who are the young parents, still adjusting to married life and trying to get through school or find decent jobs? Does the parish reach out to them?

Who are the elderly members of the parish and society, like Anna and Simeon? Are they respected, valued, allowed to contribute their wisdom, piety and insight? Are they brought into homes to be with young children? Do they have adequate food, health care and housing?

Who are the teenagers – boys and girls – who are separated from their parents for long or short periods? Who are the youths with a million questions – and as many answers? Are they taken seriously, listened to, given guidance in a respectful way?

Who are the shepherds – the people who live on the margins of society; the ones who are usually ignored or looked down upon? Does anyone consider them potential vehicles of revelation?
Who are the magi – the wise people from cultures and religions not our own? Are they received with grace? Is real dialogue established between them and us?

Who are the family members who were so important and yet do not appear in our gospel stories: the grandparents of Mary and Joseph, their aunts and uncles, sisters and brothers and in-laws, who helped so much in the raising of Jesus?

Who are those who have to go – or have gone – into exile in another land for fear of their lives? Who are the people in Egypt – or Canada – who help families support themselves while living in exile?

Who are the children and women and men who live in fear of violence in their homes or neighborhoods? Who tries to bring peace into their lives?

The intercessions of evening prayer and morning prayer provide further inspiration and challenge.

• be light now for those who do not see, strength for the wavering and comfort for the troubled of heart
• establish our families in mutual love and peace
• grant children wisdom and grace
• heal and strengthen those who are ill
• give us love for all people.

---

**Christian Initiation**

**RCIA:** Christmastime should be an active time for catechumens, and for candidates for completion of initiation and for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church – and for their sponsors and the other parish ministers who are guiding them.

**Celebration and catechesis:** It is a time for participation in the regular liturgies of the parish, and as well for extra celebrations of the word. The scriptures of the solemnities and Sundays, the saints days and weekdays, and of evening prayer and morning prayer, can provide the focus for rich liturgies of the word and fruitful sharing.

**Questions and reflection:** It is a time for reflecting on and studying the early parts of the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, the first letter of John, and the prophet Isaiah. Christmastime is a season of growing to maturity, of studying, asking questions and pondering deeply in one’s heart. Excitement surrounding baptisms celebrated on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord should stir the hearts of the catechumens, whose baptism is not too far off.

**Jesus Christ:** It is a time for reflecting on Jesus Christ. What do his various names, titles and images mean for the Church and for us personally: Jesus, Christ, King, Savior, Light, Word and the rest? What does “salvation” mean? What is revelation? Who are human beings? Who is Mary and what does she mean to us today?
Ministry: It is a time for engaging in ministry, for reflecting on the example of ministry Jesus gave us, and for thinking about the ministerial character of the Christian life.

The intercessions of the liturgy of the hours provide support to the RCIA:

- make us attentive to your word, and let us ponder it in hearts that are pure and good
- let your Church be gifted with growth
- have mercy on all who are seeking you in good faith
- bestow your spirit of adoption on all who seek you
- teach all to seek first the kingdom of God.

Witness and Evangelism

Be Good News: The liturgies of the Christmas season tell us about the nature of Christian witness and about evangelism, and urge us to be Good News to others, proclaim the Good News, and live the Good News in the world today. Special attention might be given to preaching and to bible study - and a deeper appreciation of these might grow in the parish.

Hospitality, joy, hope, light and truth, and thankfulness should characterize all aspects of the lives of individual Christians and of the parish community. Liturgical celebrations, which are terribly important means of witness and vehicles of evangelism, should be especially well planned and well celebrated. We witness and evangelize when we proclaim by our actions that Christmas is more than the baby Jesus of long ago, and that it is such a great feast that it needs a two to three week season in order to celebrate it properly. Parish members can be urged to invite friends and neighbors to church with them, and to share the Good News with their guests.

Many intercessions at evening and prayer touch on this parish activity; these are but a few:

- make us go forth as witnesses of the good news
- spread your Gospel to places still deprived of the word of life
- increase the number of preachers and hearers of your word
- help those who do not know God but seek your presence in the shadows and projections of the human mind; make them new persons in the light of Christ
- make us servants of your Gospel in the world
- look with favor on all who live outside the church as they seek liberation from the harsh constraints of human existence; may they discover Christ as the way, the truth, and the life.
Ministry and Discipleship

The conclusion of the Christmas season, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, is a celebration and dedication to mission and ministry - for us today as it was for Jesus in his own lifetime. The weekday gospels from January 2 until Epiphany tell not only about John the Baptist - who carried out his special ministry, but also of Jesus' call of his first disciples and their decision to follow him. From Epiphany until the Baptism of the Lord the weekday gospels tell of the early phases of Jesus' ministry and preaching.

Promote ministry: It is a time to encourage, recognize and value the ministry of everyone in the parish community. The gospels tell of the ministry of the shepherds, the magi, Joseph and Mary, angels, the innocent children of Bethlehem, martyrs like Stephen, inspired writers like John, elderly men and women like Anna and Simeon, and others.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit: It is a time to remember the gifts and anointing of the Holy Spirit at baptism, and to nurture, discern, develop and value these gifts. It is a time to value baptism and its relationship to ministry. It is a time to call people forth to minister and give them opportunities and help; it is a time for people to respond to such calls. It is a time to preach, feed, heal – to reach out to those with needs of every kind.

A time for growth: It is a time to ponder the mystery of ministry and Christian discipleship, as Mary did. It is a time to discern the signs of the times, as the magi did – and to respond as faithfully as they. It is a time for growth in ministry and in discipleship, and for looking towards the future.

A smaller number of intercessions consider ministry:

• help us to be faithful to the promises of our baptism
• let all priests be genuine ministers of your saving work
• send laborers into your vineyard; let them preach the Gospel to the poor and announce a time of grace
• let the pope and bishops be faithful channels of your many gifts of grace
• renew the spirit of adoption among the royal priesthood of the baptized

Evangelism and Interfaith Relations

Christmastime is a time to promote Christian unity, good relations with those of other religious faiths, and the unity of the whole human family. The Ecumenical Directory of 1967 says not only that it is fitting that prayers for unity be offered during the week of 18-25 January (the week of prayer for Christian unity), but also on “the days around Epiphany, commemorating the manifestation of Christ to the world and the connection between the Church’s mission and its unity” (n. 22).
Eastern Christians: It is a time to remember our sisters and brothers in the Eastern Churches. In the East Epiphany was the original celebration of the nativity, and today it celebrates the Baptism of the Lord; it is a great solemnity. Armenian Christians focus all of their attention on Epiphany; they do not celebrate Christmas Day. For those Eastern Christians who follow the Julian calendar, Christmas Day is January 7 – and Western Christians should rejoice with them.

One Lord: For all Christians it is a time to recall their common Lord, common faith, and common baptism. Jesus came to proclaim – and be – Good News for us all; our divisions are a scandal. Though the week of prayer for Christian unity comes after the conclusion of the Christmas season, it is related to it in spirit.

Judaism: The Christmas season also reminds us of our Jewish roots: Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the people of Bethlehem, the innocent children – and Herod – were Jews; only the magi were gentiles. The scriptures of the Jewish people have such an important place in our Christmastime liturgies, and provide a profound vision and great beauty.

Jesus came for all people, and all people are valued by him. No person, no culture, no religion is alien to him, though clearly he calls all to himself. Witness and evangelism need to be carried out with respect for others.

Again, intercessions provide inspiration:
- united in prayer with all of our brothers and sisters, we bless God and invoke his name
- united with all Christians in prayer and praise, we entreat the Lord: Father, hear your children
- save the whole people of Israel
- bring all nations to acknowledge the unifying bond of your love

Peace

Christmastime is a time to celebrate peace, pray for peace, and commit ourselves – individually and as a community – to work for peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace; we who follow him are to be ministers of peace wherever we are.

Peace is mentioned frequently in the intercessions of the liturgy of the hours:
- may your birth bring peace to all
- grant the world that peace which the angels proclaimed
- grant freedom and peace to mankind
- give your peace to the world
- we ask you to spread your peace throughout the world.
Justice

Our liturgies also call Christ “our justice,” and they show Christmastime to be a great feast of social justice. Social justice committees should be active at this time, inspired by the liturgy and taking advantage of the support their work is given by the liturgy.

Jesus the poor man: Several texts of the Christmas season call Jesus a poor man, and thereby identify him with the poor of this world. Thus the reading at evening prayer 1 for Holy Family (2 Corinthians 8:9) says, “Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was: he was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty.” At one level this is related to texts that speak of the incarnation in terms of his emptying himself and his humility. By its use on Holy Family, however, and taking it as it stands, it also speaks of economic and social poverty.

Several intercessions also speak of the poverty of Jesus. “You were born into poverty and lowliness;” “You became poor to make us rich; you emptied yourself that we might be lifted up by your lowliness and share in your glory.”

Justice is a central concern of the intercessions:

- look with favor on the poor and comfort them
- direct the hearts and minds of rulers to seek justice, peace and freedom for all nations
- for the poor, for prisoners and for refugees, may they find you, the incarnate Son of God, in our love
- help your faithful people to use the good things of the earth for your honor and glory
- be compassion to the suffering and the afflicted
- release those who are captives and show your care for those in prison.
Brief Notes
New Leadership

There have been a number of changes in the leadership of the liturgical renewal in the Canadian church. The Episcopal Commission for Liturgy (English sector) has a new chair and several relatively new members, and this is also true of the National Council for Liturgy. In addition, a new director of the National Liturgical Office has been appointed.

Episcopal Commission for Liturgy

Most Rev. Raymond J. Lahey, St George's, NF (chair)
Most Rev. Hubert P. O'Connor, OMI, Prince George, BC
Most Rev. Francis J. Spence, Kingston, ON
Most Rev. Matthew Ustrzycki, Hamilton (auxiliary), ON

Thanks and appreciation are due to Most Rev. James L. Doyle of Peterborough, former chair, and to Most Rev. James P. Mahoney of Saskatoon, who have retired from the Commission.

National Council for Liturgy

Mr. Paul Tratnyek, New Hamburg, ON (chair)
Mrs. Marilyn Sweet, Windsor, NS
Sr. Emily Doherty, CND, Kingston, ON
Rev. Renato Pasinato, Winnipeg, MB
Rev. Jack O'Flaherty, London, ON (Ontario Liturgical Conference)
Rev. Martin Moser, OMI, Edmonton, AB (Western Liturgical Conference)
Rev. Floyd Gallant, Summerside, PEI (Atlantic Liturgical Conference)

Again, thanks are due to Dr. Mary Schaefer of Halifax, former chair, and to Sr. Sheila O'Dea, RSM, of St John's, whose terms on the Council have expired.

National Liturgical Office

The Reverend John G. Hibbard has been appointed the new Director of the National Liturgical Office (English sector). Father Hibbard has a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Bishop's University, and a Bachelor of Theology Degree from the University of Ottawa and Saint Paul University. He is a graduate of St Augustine's Seminary, and is currently engaged in graduate studies in liturgy at the University of Notre Dame.

Until his appointment he was the chair of the Liturgical Commission in the Archdiocese of Kingston and Rector of St Mary's Cathedral in Kingston. He also served as Executive Secretary of the Ontario Liturgical Conference.

Many thanks are due to the Reverend Murray Kroetsch, former director of the national office, for his wisdom and hard work during his term of office. He has returned to his home diocese of Hamilton.
Summer Institute of Pastoral Liturgy

The 1991 schedule for the Summer Institute of Pastoral Liturgy at St Paul University in Ottawa has been announced.

Core Courses

Introduction to Liturgy, Barry Glendinning
Sunday Eucharist, Murray Kroetsch
Liturgical Year, Joyce Ann Zimmerman
Pastoral-Liturgical Synthesis, Joyce Ann Zimmerman

Elective Courses

Celebrating the Easter Cycle, Joan Halmo
Psalms in the Liturgy, Jean-Pierre Provost
Liturgical and Devotional Prayer, Laurie Hanmer
Unique challenges to liturgy today: minimal identification with church life – some 20th century cultural factors, William Marrevee
Liturgical Spirituality, Mary Schaefer

For further information, contact:
Summer Institute in Pastoral Liturgy
St Paul University
223 Main Street
Ottawa, ON K1S 1C4

New Resource for Marriage Liturgy Preparation

The Liturgical Commission of the Archdiocese of Edmonton has prepared a videotape resource to aid in the preparation of the liturgy of marriage and in education for marriage. This forty minute video shows most of a wedding liturgy, and models good practices and desirable options throughout. Numbers shown in the corner of the screen refer to pages in an accompanying booklet. The booklet presents other options and alternative texts and gives some background and rationale for planning the liturgy. Many find these resources very helpful in assisting couples prepare for their marriage.

The videotape plus one copy of the booklet costs $50. Additional copies of the booklet alone are $5.

For further information contact:
Archdiocesan Liturgical Commission
8421 - 101 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T6A 0L1
(403) 469-7672
Canadian Studies in Liturgy

• To encourage a deeper understanding of liturgy and its importance in our lives

• To challenge all to better celebration of the liturgy

• To provide ideas, suggestions, questions, and encouragement for all who see the liturgy as the primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit

• For people in parishes who are involved in planning and leading liturgical celebrations: liturgy committee members; readers and communion ministers; musicians and singers; catechists and teachers; religious; seminarians and clergy

• For all concerned about good worship and prayer

New


Forthcoming

No. 5 Culture and the Praying Church: The Particular Liturgy of the Individual Church, by Edward J. Kilmartin, SJ. This is a revised edition of Fr. Kilmartin’s The Particular Liturgy of the Individual Church (Bangalore, India: 1987).

Culture and the Praying Church has been edited by Dr. Mary M. Schaefer, associate professor of Christian worship and spirituality at Atlantic School of Theology, Halifax. 136 pages: $9.95.

Previously Published


No. 2 Ministries of the Laity, by J. Frank Henderson (1986). 48 pages: $2.50

No. 3 Mary in the Liturgy (1988). 48 pages: $3.50

Published by: Publications Service
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
90 Parent Avenue
Ottawa, ON K1N 7B1