



## Thoughtful Moments

### Christmas homecoming

Even if you don't go every Sunday, you are welcome at Christmas Mass. *"I tell you ... there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance"* (Luke 15:7). Then offer weekly Sunday Mass as your gift to the Baby.

### Make Christmas last

Celebrate all of the true Christmas season. Light candles during Advent (starting Dec. 2). Attend Mass for the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8). Gather with family on the Feast of the Holy Family (Dec. 30). Pray for peace on the Solemnity of Mary (Jan. 1). Give a gift on the Epiphany (Jan. 6). Read Luke 2:32 on the feast of the Presentation (Feb. 2).

*"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them"* (Isaiah 11:6).



## Offer children the full joy of Christmas

Most of us have never met a shepherd, seen a king, and may be pretty far from the closest manger. How then, can we make the wonder of Christ's birth real to our children? Try these ideas to help them feel the full joy of Christmas:

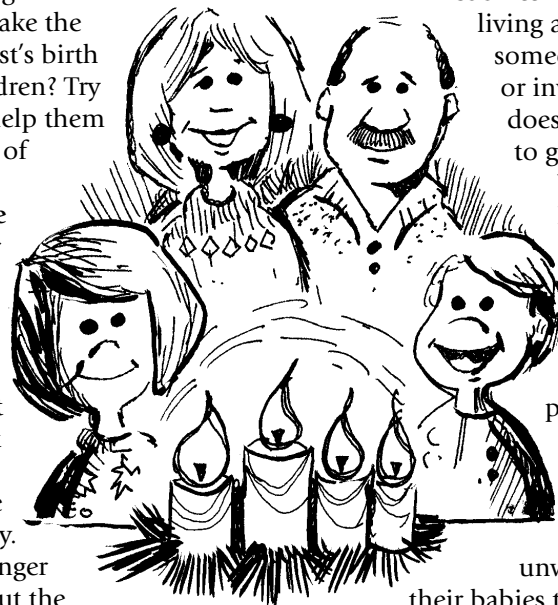
**Watch for the Star.** On a clear night, go outside and look up at the stars. Try to imagine what it was like to spot the star that guided the wise men to the Baby. Set up your manger scene and act out the story of the Nativity with the figures.

**Offer shelter to the Family.** Talk about how lonely and friendless Mary and Joseph must have felt trying to find shelter in a strange town. In turn,

offer some kind of shelter to someone else this Christmas. Make Christmas cookies for a neighbor living alone, visit someone homebound, or invite a person who doesn't attend church to go with you.

**Welcome the Baby.** Jesus was born into difficult circumstances but was cherished by his parents nonetheless. As a family, collect baby items for a home for unwed mothers and their babies to help each baby be welcomed and cherished.

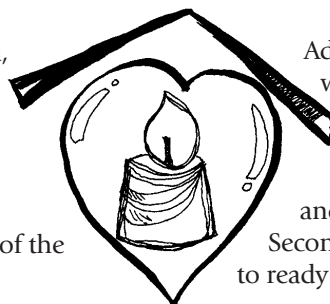
**Silence the night.** Sit quietly together in front of your Christmas tree or lighted Advent wreath to soak up the wonder of the season.



## Why Do Catholics Do That ?

## Why do we observe Advent?

John the Baptist said, *"Prepare the way of the Lord"* (Mark 1:3), which is the central theme of Advent. We prepare our hearts and homes for the coming of the newborn Savior.



Advent also reminds us that Jesus will come again. Yes, Jesus came and the kingdom has been established. Certainly we will meet Jesus at our own death, and we anticipate the triumphant Second Coming. Advent reminds us to ready our hearts for that time.

## Faith doesn't require understanding

Throughout history, God has given people mysterious messages that defy reason but require faith. When Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God (Luke 1:26-38), she couldn't help but wonder how that could happen. The angel's explanation hardly clarified things. Instead of asking more, she simply said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Children are used to trusting adults and



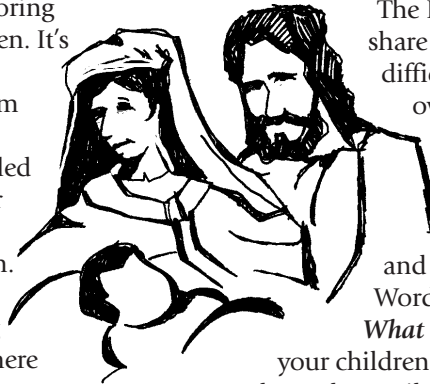
know that faith doesn't require understanding. In the same way, we don't have to understand what God wants from us to know that it is for the best. Very little in the angel's message was logical but Mary didn't pretend to get it. She said, "Yes," because she had complete faith in God.

This month is the perfect time to talk with children about Mary's example of faith. When we are worried or uncertain, we can do what Mary did because good things always happen to people who say, "Yes," to God.

### Scripture LESSON

**Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23,  
God protects the family.**

Nativity scenes usually show Mary and Joseph calmly kneeling at Jesus' crib surrounded by adoring shepherds and wise men. It's a peaceful scene – and probably pretty far from reality. Mary and Joseph traveled in the last stages of her pregnancy from Nazareth to Bethlehem. On foot or donkey, it was a dirty, exhausting journey. Once there, there was nowhere to stay except a stable with animals. After a short time, they had to flee to Egypt with a newborn to escape danger, and stayed there for



several years without family or friends.

The Holy Family had a share of pain and difficulties much like our own experience. Yet Scripture tells us that Mary and Joseph found strength from their faith in God and were guided by his Word. We can do the same.

*What can a parent do?* Tell your children that Jesus' birth and the Holy Family's escape to Egypt is further proof that God always keeps his promises. When we lean on him, God will always lead us to safety.

### Parent TALK

I grew up in a troubled home with very few happy Christmases. So I vowed to make Christmas perfect for my own children. In fact, I became



obsessed. The tree had to be perfect, decorations beautifully displayed,

and Christmas cookies baked just so. It was the year that I found myself decorating the tree alone that I realized something was wrong.

The next year, I let the kids pick the tree. It was lumpy and lopsided but they thought it was gorgeous. Instead of carefully placing color-coordinated ornaments, we piled them on and admired our handiwork.

When we baked, dough and sprinkles got everywhere, but the cookies were delicious. And Tessa was delighted that I agreed to display St. Nick in the bathroom so she could see him every night before bedtime.

Our Christmas that year was messy, chaotic, and simply joyful. I finally got my perfect Christmas.

### Feasts & Celebrations

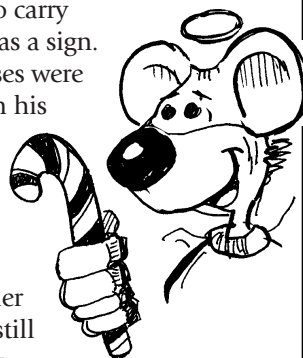
**Dec. 2 – First Day of Advent.** The new Church year begins this day.

**Dec. 6 – St. Nicholas (350).** St. Nicholas had a generous heart and gave away most of his fortune. He is credited with saving three girls from being sold into slavery to pay their father's debt. His frequent anonymous acts of generosity helped him become the patron saint of children.

**Dec. 8 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.** On this day we commemorate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne's womb without original sin. In addition to attending

Mass, praying a joyful rosary is a wonderful way to celebrate.

**Dec. 12 – Our Lady of Guadalupe (1531).** The Blessed Mother appeared to St. Juan Diego. To prove her visitation to the bishop, she asked Juan Diego to carry roses to him as a sign. When the roses were emptied from his tilma (cape) before the bishop, it retained the image of the Blessed Mother where it can still be seen today.



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