

Growing in FAITH™

Discovering hope and joy in the Catholic faith.

December 2023

Gathered in Christ's Love

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One Minute Meditations

St. Edmund Campion

Born to a Catholic family in 16th century England, St. Edmund left

a brilliant academic career at Oxford to become a Jesuit missionary – a death sentence, since Catholics were being heavily persecuted under Queen Elizabeth I. He traveled around, secretly ministering the Sacraments to English Catholics, until he was betrayed by an informer and arrested. Despite efforts to persuade or threaten him, St. Edmund remained true to his faith. He was martyred with two companions at Tyburn.



Mary's "Yes"

When the angel appeared to Mary and told her what God was asking of her, she didn't have to agree. God gave all of us free will to allow us to make our own choices. Mary said "yes" to God out of love. Her reward (and ours, too) is eternity with her Son.

"And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon Him"
(Luke 2:40).



A "Christ-centered" Christmas is a joyful one

For Catholics, the weeks leading up to Christmas are a sacred time to prepare our hearts for Christ's coming. For a joy-filled Christmas, try these ideas:

Encourage joyful anticipation. As disciples of Jesus, it is our role to help others to believe and hope in the power of God to change the world as He transforms hearts and minds. *"But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me"* (Micah 7:7). Look for opportunities to share your confidence in His love.

Focus on prayer. Become an Advent prayer intercessor praying for every

soul to come home to God, especially at this time of peace. Ask that that He gives everyone the grace to live a new life reflecting glory on the Messiah.

Serve. Pope Francis said during Advent, "We are so busy with all the preparations, with gifts and things that pass, but let's ask ourselves what we should do for Jesus and for others! What should we do?" The pope said we should

continuously ask God what we should do to contribute to the good of the Church and society. We can do "something concrete, even if it is small" to help others. He suggested visiting the lonely, the elderly, the sick or someone in need.

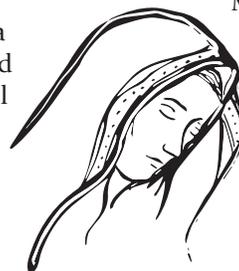


Why Do Catholics Do That?

Why do Catholics celebrate the "Immaculate Conception?"

In 1854, Pope Pius IX proclaimed that Mary, by a special grace, was preserved from original and personal sin from her own conception in her mother's womb, in view of her role as the

Mother of God. This grace bore immeasurable fruit for all of us in Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. On December 8 – a Holy Day of Obligation – we ask Mary to pray for us, so we, too, receive Jesus into our hearts with a faithful love like hers.



Have a peaceful, Merry Christmas!

Do you aim for an idyllic Christmas celebration complete with a warm fire, joyful music, and tinsel-covered tree? For many of us, Christmas comes at the end of weeks spent shopping, wrapping, and spending, and is wrought with family tensions, obligations, and exhaustion. Try these steps to keep your sanity and your Savior in your Christmas celebration:

Be realistic. It isn't the goal of the season to make everyone happy. If you don't overspend and over extend before Christmas, you'll be in a better frame of mind when it arrives.



Soothe the beast. Beautiful music can set a soothing tone for your celebration. Pick your favorite holy hymns to put yourself in the Christmas frame of mind.

Reach out. Want to make your own problems seem small? Take on someone else's. Do at least one good Christmas deed for someone needy.

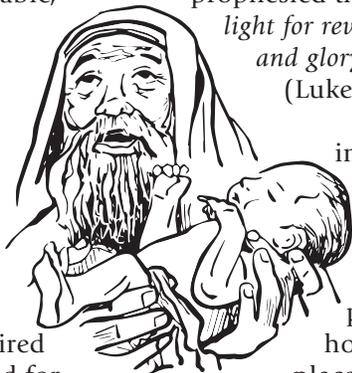
Seek the eternal. Jesus gives us peace, purpose, and perspective. Spend time with Jesus each day of Advent and Christmas to remind yourself of what is most important about Christmas.

from Scripture

Luke 2:22-40, Encountering God in the ordinary

To the uninformed observer, Jesus' birth was unremarkable, and His family was quite ordinary. In fact, when it was time to present Jesus in the temple, His parents couldn't afford the customary offering of a lamb, and instead made the offering of the poor – two pigeons. As faithful Jews, they did all that was required by their faith to thank God for the gift of their child.

Yet, when Joseph and Mary presented their new baby in the temple, Simeon immediately recognized Him as the Messiah.



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

Simeon was not alone in recognizing the Lord in the temple. Anna was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Her faith in God's promises gave her hope. The hope God places in our hearts gives us a desire for the kingdom of Heaven. The Holy Spirit reveals the presence of the Lord to those who want to know Him, receive Him, and to be happy with Him forever.

Q & A How can I make Christmas joy last?

The Church's real Christmas season starts on Christmas Day and lasts until the Baptism of Our Lord. By celebrating the whole season, you can make your Christmas joy last long after you've taken down the tree. Here are some highlights of the season:

Feast of the Holy Family, December 31. Gather for a meal with loved ones, or contact out-of-town friends or family.

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, January 1. Dedicate a Rosary to the Blessed Mother, asking her to help you grow in love and trust.

Epiphany, January 7. The example of the Magi honoring Jesus has become a symbol of sharing Him with the world. This is our chance to think about the way we live so that we can better reveal Christ to our world.

The Baptism of Our Lord, January 8. Baptism is our entry into the Kingdom. Take time this day to renew your Baptismal vows and decide what you can change in your life to help you live as Christ did.

Feasts & Celebrations

December 3 – First Sunday in Advent. We anticipate Christ's birth and His coming on the last day. Catholics everywhere light candles in an Advent wreath to signal the coming of the light of Christ.

December 12 – Our Lady of Guadalupe (1531). The Blessed Mother appeared as a Native American maiden to St. Juan Diego. She asked St. Juan to carry roses to the bishop as proof. When the roses were emptied from his *tilma*, it retained the image of the Blessed Mother.

December 15 – St. Maria di Rosa (1855). Born into a wealthy family in Brescia, Italy, Paula was renowned for holiness, generosity, and concern for the sick. She founded the Handmaids of Charity in 1840. She took the name Sr. Maria Crucifixa di Rosa.

December 27 – St. John the Beloved (1st Century). As an apostle and friend of Jesus, St. John was known for his fiery temper. Scholars believe he is the "beloved disciple" who sat by Jesus at the Last Supper in John's Gospel.



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