

The Solemnity of Mary

ON January 1, the Catholic Church celebrates one of the most important feast days of the liturgical year: the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God. The feast, which shares the date with New Year's Day, has its roots in the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D.

At the council, Mary was formally given the title Theotokos (Mother of God). The council Fathers declared that Christ's divinity and humanity cannot be separated and exist in one person. Therefore, Mary, as Mother of Jesus, is also Mother of God.

Why the Church focuses on the Mother of God and the Prince of Peace

"The Church puts the feast of this solemnity on the first day of the new year to emphasise the importance of Mary's role in the life of Christ and the Church. We commemorate the various saints on the different days of the year, but Mary is the most prominent of them all" - Pope Paul VI

The Solemnity of Mary Mother of God is a sign of hope to the world. It is a sign that we can give birth to a new vision: the vision of Jesus in the world, a vision of justice and peace, a vision of freedom and liberation from oppression, a vision of social change and concern for the common good, a vision of a world without racism and prejudice, a vision of a world that respects ethnic and racial diversity, a vision of a human community that respects the planet, a vision of a world that can move beyond war and terrorism, a vision of God present in the poor child and the young woman of Nazareth, a vision of God to be found in all the people and things of our world, and especially among the poor.

"She has a special role and mission given to her by God. As Mother of our Redeemer and of the redeemed, she reigns as the Queen at the side of Christ the King. She is a powerful intercessor for all of our needs here on earth. In celebrating her special feast day, we acknowledge this great gift for the Church and world; we call on her to be actively involved in our daily life; we imitate her virtuous life as a great inspiration; and we co-operate with all the graces we get through her." - Pope Paul VI

How can we as a family bring Mary more into the foreground this January 1?

Here are a few simple ways:

- Plan to go to Mass on either the vigil or January 1.
- Talk to the priestly about Mary Mother on her feast day.
- Pray together as a family.



Mary, Mother of God

Humbly Father, I beseech the Virgin Mary with the fullness of grace. She is my model of faith, hope, and love. I give this new year to her intercession and ask for her holy motherly love. With her help, I want my life to grow. Give me an increase in the virtue of hope which enables me to despise. Guide me in understanding Your infinite love. And join my heart, dear Lord, to the Holy Mother's Immaculate Heart, so that I may improve in loving everyone unconditionally, in imitation of my Saviour.

There is an underlying theme that we might also want to note in our observance of the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God. That is peace.

The World Day of Peace also takes place on January 1 in the Catholic liturgical calendar as part of the Christmas season. It was instituted by Pope Paul VI in 1967 upon the inspiration of Pope John XXIII's 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris*.

Pope Paul VI wrote: "It is likewise a fitting occasion for renewed adoration of the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace. For this reason... we have instituted the World Day of Peace, an observance that is gaining increasing support and is already bringing forth fruits of peace in the hearts of many."

"It is our desire then, that every year, this commemoration be repeated as a hope and as a promise, at the beginning of the calendar which measures and outlines the path of human life in time, that Peace with its just and beneficent equilibrium may dominate the development of events to come."

Mary, Mother of Jesus, help us to understand and live every day the fraternity that springs up from the heart of her Son, so as to bring peace to each person on this our beloved earth.

Newsletter comes to an end

THIS is the last issue of this special-edition monthly parish newsletter, which was first published 12 months ago with the modest objective of enhancing the faith education of parishioners.

Just to recap, our previous parish priest Father Lucas Ng, in his message in the inaugural January issue, said the aim of the newsletter was to assist parishioners to deepen their knowledge and understanding of liturgical celebrations and to increase reverence and appreciation for the sacred, especially the Mass, feasts and sacraments. The January issue covered just three topics — Mass preparation, reverence and etiquette; the importance of Sunday Mass participation; and the liturgical year.

Over the following months the newsletter included many other topics "to enhance parishioners' awareness in our mission in building our parish with the consistent teachings of the universal church," as Father Lucas said in his message.

This newsletter tried to include as many articles which it was felt was relevant and topical to people, and it was without a doubt it may have left out many other articles which parishioners felt should have been included.

Most of the stories published were based on Catholic sources from the Internet, and parishioners should make use of this great resource to gain more insight into our rich Catholic faith.

This newsletter initiative was a component of our parish theme for 2015/16 — to be a worshipping, welcoming and caring community — and we thank Father Lucas and our current parish priest Father Andrew Wong for wholeheartedly supporting this project.

It is hoped that this effort has helped parishioners of St Ignatius Church in a little way to strengthen their faith and deepen their reverence, adoration and love of God, and open their hearts to receive the graces of Our Lord Jesus Christ through the intercession of His Mother Mary. — **Newsletter team**

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To be a
**worshipping,
welcoming & caring** community
成为一个敬拜、欢融与关怀的团体



St Ignatius Church, PJ

DECEMBER 2016

Celebrating the birthday of Jesus

THE Catholic Church celebrates Christmas Day, December 25, as the birthday of Jesus Christ. We Catholics celebrate with attendance at an eucharistic celebration or the traditional Midnight Mass, with nativity scenes and cantatas even. That's where the term Christmas comes from, CHRIST Eucharistic MASS. The Church notes it as the Feast of the Nativity and has since the mid-fourth century.

How did the Church arrive at this date? According to the gospel of St Luke, the shepherds were in their fields tending to their flock when the angels appeared to them, heralding the birth of Christ. In ancient Israel, and still now practised in certain farming communities, the shepherds would be out tending their flock in the warm months. From late autumn to early spring, the animals would be in shelters to avoid the cold wet winter months and the shepherds would have returned to their villages. Therefore, Jesus must have been born during the summer months. So why did the Church decide on December 25, in the middle of winter?

The early Church did not commemorate the birthdays of its early leaders, saints and martyrs, only the dates of their deaths. The Easter Triduum was and is still the main feast days of the Catholic Church. It was only in the middle of the 4th century that the early Church leaders fixed December 25 to be the date of Christ's birth. This date is noted in the Chronography of 354, an illustrated manuscript compiled in Rome.

This date is adopted in the present Gregorian calendar which replaced the Julian calendar in 1582. The eastern Churches adhere to the same date but follow the earlier Julian calendar, which corresponds to January 7 in our present Gregorian calendar. This is not a dispute as to the date, just the disagreement as to which calendar to adhere to.

Some say that initially this date may have been chosen as it was nine months after the date of the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord, the date the early Christians believed that Christ was conceived, March 25. This view is certainly popular among many Church scholars and teachers, whose various academic works view March 25 as the date of creation of the Christ in the womb. Hence, they settled on December 25 as the day of Christ's nativity.

The more popular view is that the date may have been chosen by the early Church leaders to coincide with the local customs of the people.

In Roman times there was a feast to celebrate the winter solstice, 'the birthday of the unconquered sun'. The early Church leaders may have Christianised the pagan festival during the reign of Emperor Constantine (306-337), associating Christ with the 'Sun of Righteousness' (Malachi 4:2). The pre-Christian Germanic peoples, including the Anglo-Saxons and Norse, celebrated a winter festival called Yule (hence the modern English Yule, a synonym for Christmas).

It was thought that the early Church leaders incorporated all these customs and hence decided that the nativity should be on December 25. Later Christian writers came to accept these reasons for being the basis for the date of the nativity to be December 25.

As for celebrating the feast, it is interesting to note that the present traditions of gift exchange, carolling, Christmas decorations and lights, and Christmas trees only became popular in the last few hundred years.

Determining Christ's Birthday

The date of Christ's birth is biblically anchored to the Conception of St John the Baptist



The Bible tells us that the Angel Gabriel announced the Conception of St John the Baptist to Zechariah when his priestly division of Abijah (1k 1:5) officiates in the Temple, which is on the eighth rotation (1 Chron 24:5). Immediately after this, his wife Elizabeth conceived.

This took place on the Jewish feast of 'Yom Kippur' (Day of Atonement), which falls between Sept 22-30 in our modern calendar.

Note: Day of Atonement — St John's Mission: to give the Lord's people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sin (Lk 1:77)



The Annunciation to the Virgin Mary, which initiated the conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit, took place six months after the conception of John the Baptist (Lk 1:26)

March 25 is when the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Annunciation.



March 25 + 9 months
(Normal Gestation Period) =

December 25
(Christmas Day)

Feast of the Holy Family



The Gospels tell us very little about the early years of the Holy Family, which includes the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the flight into Egypt and the finding of Jesus in the temple.

The devotion to the Holy Family was born in Bethlehem, together with the baby Jesus. The shepherds went to adore the child and, at the same time, they gave honour to His family. Later, in a similar way, the three wise men came from the East to adore and give honour to the newborn King with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh that would be safeguarded by His family.

We can go further to affirm that in a certain sense Christ Himself was the first devotee of His family. He showed His devotion to His mother and father by submitting Himself, with infinite humility, to the duty of filial obedience towards them. The celebration of the Feast of the Holy Family demonstrates Christ's humility and obedience with respect to the Fourth Commandment, whilst also highlighting the loving care that His parents exercised in His keeping.

The Feast of the Holy Family is not just about the Holy Family, but about our own families too. The main purpose of the feast is to present the Holy Family as the model for all Christian families. This feast is a good time to remember the family unit and pray for our human and spiritual families. We may also take this feast to reflect on the value and sanctity of the family unit, and to evaluate our own family life. What ways may it be improved? What would Jesus, Mary and Joseph do? Finally, we can use this feast to ask ourselves what we are doing to promote the family within our own cultures, neighbourhoods and communities.

The house of Nazareth is a school of prayer where we learn to listen, to meditate, to penetrate the deepest meaning of the manifestation of the Son of God, drawing our example from Mary, Joseph and Jesus. The Holy Family is an icon of the domestic church, which is called to pray together. The family is the first school of prayer where, from their infancy, children learn to perceive God, thanks to the teaching and example of their parents. If we do not learn to pray in the family, it will be difficult to find this gap later.

In the holy habitation of Nazareth, Jesus transformed family life. Already blessed as God's plan for the whole human race and the first society, the Christian family has been elevated in Christ to a sacrament, a vehicle of grace and sign of God's presence. The Church proclaims Christian marriage and the family founded upon it as a

THE Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is a liturgical celebration in the Catholic Church. The feast is usually celebrated on the Sunday after Christmas. If Christmas is on a Sunday, then the feast is celebrated on **December 30**.

Devotion to the Holy Family is a recent development, but one that naturally grows out of a love for Jesus and His family. On October 26, 1921, the Congregation of Rites (under Pope Benedict XV) inserted the Feast of the Holy Family into the Latin Rite general calendar. Until then it had been celebrated regionally. Popes before and including Benedict XV (especially Leo XIII) promoted the feast as a way to counter the breakdown of the family unit.

Brothers and sisters:

Put on as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.

vocation, a response to the call of the Lord. In the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, we learn the way of love in the School of Nazareth.

The Holy Family of Jesus, Joseph and Mary is not only our model, it is the beginning of the new family of the church. In and through the ordinary stuff of daily life we find Jesus, and in the encounter discover ourselves.

We live in church. We were baptised into the Lord and now live in His risen Body as members. The church is a communion, a relationship in Christ. The Christian family is the smallest cell of that Body of Christ. The extended church community is a family of families.

Family life is where we learn the way of discipleship. The family is where progress in the spiritual life can find its raw material: Whether we choose to respond to grace and develop the eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts to accept the hidden invitations to learn to love beneath the surface of that daily "stuff" that is all wrapped up in the mystery of human freedom. Our choices not only affect the world around us, they make us become the people we will become.

When the right choices are made in this life, we change. We are converted. We co-operate with the Lord's invitation to follow Him by exercising our human freedom; we choose to give ourselves away in love to the 'other'. In this life of responding to the Lord's invitations, we are gradually transformed into an image, a living icon of Jesus Christ. This way of holiness is not easy, as anyone who has lived the vocation can attest, but make no mistake; it is a very real path to holiness. It is also a wonderful one!

The challenge lies in the choices we make, daily, hourly and even moment by moment. Through those choices, presented to us from the moment we open our eyes every morning to the time we close them at night, we are invited to learn in the School of Nazareth and, in imitation of the Holy Family, to love, pray and grow in holiness. The first school of prayer and practice, the place where we learn this new way of life, is the first cell of the church, the domestic church of the Christian family.

Family life becomes sanctified when we live the life of the church within our homes by making Christ the centre of our family and individual life. Ways to do this include reading scripture regularly, praying daily, attending Mass at least on Sundays and holy days of obligation, imitating the actions of the Holy Family, going to confession frequently, and so forth, all done together as a family unit.

Epiphany of Our Lord

THE Epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ is one of the oldest Christian celebrations, though, throughout the centuries, it has celebrated a variety of things.

Epiphany comes from a Greek verb meaning "to reveal" and all of the various events celebrated at Epiphany are revelations of Christ to man.

The solemnity of the Epiphany falls on January 6, i.e. 12 days after Christmas, which in 2017 is a Friday (in most countries and dioceses, the celebration is transferred to the Sunday between January 2 and 8). In 2017, the solemnity will be celebrated on January 8.

History

Epiphany was first celebrated in the East, where it has been held from the beginning almost universally on January 6. Today, among both Eastern Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, it is known as *Theophany* — the revelation of God to man.

A four-fold celebration

Epiphany originally celebrated four different events in the following order of importance: 1) baptism of the Lord; 2) Christ's first miracle, changing of water into wine at the wedding in Cana; 3) nativity of Christ; 4) and the visitation of the three Wise Men or Magi. Each of these is a revelation of God to man: At Christ's baptism, the Holy Spirit descends and the voice of God the Father is heard, declaring that Jesus is His Son; at the wedding in Cana, the miracle reveals Christ's divinity; at the nativity, the angels bear witness to Christ, and the shepherds, representing the people of Israel, bow down before Him; and at the visitation of the Magi, Christ's divinity is revealed to the Gentiles — the other nations of the earth.

The end of Christmastide

Eventually, the celebration of the nativity was separated out in the West into Christmas; and shortly thereafter, Western Christians adopted the Eastern feast of the Epiphany, still celebrating the baptism, the first miracle, and the visit from the Wise Men. Thus, Epiphany came to mark the end of Christmastide — the 12 days of Christmas (celebrated in the song), which began with the revelation of Christ to Israel in his birth and ended with the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles at Epiphany.

Over the centuries, the various celebrations were further separated in the West. — catholicism.about.com



Baptism of the Lord



What does Jesus' baptism signify?

Jesus' baptism was the acceptance and beginning of His mission as God's suffering Servant. He allowed Himself to be numbered among sinners and submitted entirely to His Father's will. At Jesus' baptism, the opening of the Heavens with the Holy Spirit descending as a dove upon Jesus, and the Voice declaring of Him, "This is My beloved Son with Whom I am well pleased"; are God's revelation to mankind the mystery that He is Triune.

What does it mean for us?

It is a day for us to remember the graces we received in baptism and to renew our baptismal promises. By our baptism:

1. We share in the death and resurrection of Jesus; we too die in Christ and rise with Christ to new life; and by the baptism waters we are made clean of original sin.
2. We become children of God, marked indelibly that we belong to Him forever.
3. We receive the Holy Spirit and become temples of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. He will be a dear friend and guide who will empower us for our mission as Christians.
4. We become part of the Catholic Church, where we are all sisters and brothers in Christ, we participate in the life of the Church and receive the sacraments and spiritual support we need. We also have a responsibility to be obedient to the teachings of Jesus as taught by the Church, participate in the Eucharist and other celebrations and activities in our parishes. And we are called by Jesus not only to share our gifts, talents and resources to help the Church grow but also to work with all people of goodwill for peace in the world.
5. We share in Jesus' three-fold mission as priest, prophet and king. In His priesthood through our participation in prayers, the liturgy and the sacraments; in His prophetic mission when we proclaim the Good News through our words and action; and in His kingly mission by serving Him and all humanity — to bring God's presence in our midst.