

## The Pope — an influential world leader

**THE Pope** (Latin: papa from the Greek: pappas, a child's word for "father") is the Bishop of Rome and the leader of the worldwide Catholic Church. The primacy of the Roman bishop is largely derived from his role as the traditional successor to St Peter, to whom Jesus gave the keys of heaven and the powers of "binding and loosing", naming him as the "rock" upon which the church would be built. The current pope is Francis, who was elected on March 13, 2013, succeeding Benedict XVI.

The office of the pope is the papacy. His ecclesiastical jurisdiction, the diocese of Rome, is often called the "Holy See" or the "Apostolic See", the latter name being based on the fact that the Bishop of Rome is the successor of Peter the Apostle. The pope is considered one of the world's most powerful people because of his diplomatic and cultural influence. He is also head of state of Vatican City, a sovereign city-state enclave within the Italian capital city of Rome.

The papacy is one of the most enduring institutions in the world and has had a prominent part in world history. Popes in ancient times helped in the spread of Christianity and the resolution of various doctrinal disputes. In the Middle Ages, they played a role of secular importance in Western Europe, often acting as arbitrators between Christian monarchs. Currently, in addition to the expansion of the Christian faith and doctrine, the pope is involved in ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, charitable work and the defence of human rights.

Popes, who originally had no temporal powers, in some periods of history acquired wide powers similar to those of temporal rulers. In recent centuries, popes were gradually forced to give up temporal power, and papal authority is now once again almost exclusively restricted to matters of religion. Over the centuries, papal claims of spiritual authority have been ever more firmly expressed, culminating in 1870 with the proclamation of the dogma of papal infallibility for rare occasions when the pope speaks ex cathedra — literally "from the chair (of St Peter)" — to issue a formal definition of faith or morals.



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## Advent — a time of preparation

IN the Catholic Church, Advent is a period of preparation extending over four Sundays before Christmas. The word Advent comes from the Latin *adventus* ("to come to") and refers to the coming of Christ. This refers, first of all, to our celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas; second, to the coming of Christ in our lives through grace and the sacrament of Holy Communion; and finally, to His Second Coming at the end of time. Our preparations, therefore, should have all three "comings" in mind. We need to prepare our souls to receive Christ worthily.

### First we fast, then we feast...

That's why Advent has traditionally been known as a "little Lent". As in Lent, Advent should be marked by increased prayer, fasting and good works. While the Western Church no longer has a set requirement for fasting during Advent, the Eastern Church (both Catholic and Orthodox) continues to observe what is known as Philip's Fast — from November 15 until Christmas. Traditionally, all great feasts have been preceded by a time of fasting, which makes the feast itself more joyful. Sadly, Advent today has been overshadowed by the "Christmas shopping season", so that by Christmas Day many people no longer enjoy the feast.

### The symbols of Advent

In its symbolism, the Church continues to stress the penitential and preparatory nature of Advent. As during Lent, priests wear purple vestments and the Gloria is omitted during Mass. The only exception is on the Third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday, when priests can wear rose-coloured vestments. As on Laetare Sunday during Lent, this exception is designed to encourage us to continue our prayer and fasting because we can see that Advent is more than halfway over.

### The Advent wreath

Perhaps the best-known of all Advent symbols is the Advent wreath, a custom which originated among German Lutherans but was soon adopted by Catholics. Consisting of four candles (three purple and one pink) arranged in a circle with evergreen boughs (and often a fifth, white candle in the centre), the Advent wreath corresponds to the four Sundays of Advent. The purple candles represent the penitential nature of the season while the pink candle calls to mind the respite of Gaudete Sunday. (The white candle, when used, represents Christmas.)



The Advent Candles



The Advent Wreath



Jesse Tree ornaments

### Celebrating Advent

We can better enjoy Christmas — all 12 days of it, from Christmas Day to Epiphany — if we revere Advent as a period of preparation. Abstaining from meat on Fridays or not eating at all between meals is a good way to revive the Advent fast (not eating Christmas cookies or listening to Christmas music before Christmas is another). We can incorporate such customs as the Advent wreath and the Jesse Tree into our daily ritual — and we can set some aside for special scripture readings for Advent which remind us of the threefold coming of Christ. Holding off on putting up the Christmas tree and other decorations is another way to remind ourselves that the feast is not here yet. Traditionally, such decorations were put up on Christmas Eve and would not be taken down until after Epiphany in order to celebrate the Christmas season to its fullest. Advent this year starts on November 27. — catholicism.about.com

## The Bible — a library of books like no other



John Gutenberg produced the first printed Bible in 1455

The Bible is a library of some of the religious literature of ancient Israel and of the Christian Church. Like any library it contains a great variety of literary forms. There is history, saga, tales of tribal heroes and legends about the beginnings of the world. There is poetry, drama, parables, allegory, prophecy, maxims, proverbs and love stories. The Gospels are a unique literary form of their own. We have letters and apocalyptic writings peculiar to the times when they were written. All the literary forms have rules for interpretation. Biblical scholars have provided those rules for us so that we can get the true meaning from the text. The Bible is not self-explanatory!

The Vatican II Council taught that "the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error the truth that God wanted put into the sacred writings, for the sake of our salvation". The blanket coverage of the inerrancy of Scripture has been removed. It is now limited to only those things pertaining to our salvation. Baronius, an ancient scholar, said the Bible does not tell us how the heavens go but rather how to go to heaven.

### Books of the Bible in canonical order

#### Old Testament

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

#### New Testament

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation

### How was the Bible written and created?

#### Divine inspiration

Contrary to popular belief, the Bible was not written by God whispering into the ears of the human authors to write what he wanted written, but rather the Scriptures are inspired by God. The Holy Spirit guided the authors to be moved in such a way that their writings were of God.

The Bible is the written account of the human experience with God. Many parts of the Bible are oral tradition that was written down. Most people were illiterate and relied much more on their memories to pass on traditions and stories. Oral tradition was the norm long before writing and reading were popular.

#### Historical context

There were two different forms of the ancient Scriptures in use, the Septuagint and the Masoretic texts. The Septuagint has its influence from the Greek Jews in the Diaspora (outside Israel) whereas the Masoretic text was used by the Jews still in Jerusalem.

The Church has always used the Septuagint as its base for the Old Testament. The Septuagint has a few more books than the later established Masoretic texts. In fact, the Masoretic canon was set by the Jews after the Christians accepted the Septuagint version as their Scripture.

The Bible was given to us by the Holy Spirit as discerned by the early bishops of the Catholic Church. There was no Bible for the first 350 years of Christianity. The first official list of Scriptures was done in the year 393 at the Council of Hippo, then again in Carthage in 397 and 419. The Church did not infallibly define these books until the Council of Trent, when it was called into question by the Reformers. In response to the reformers, the Council of Trent (1546) declared as inspired by the Holy Spirit those 73 books with all their parts.

Catholic Bibles do not have extra books, non-Catholic Bibles are missing books.

The Bible came from the Church, not the Church from the Bible. — aboutcatholicism.com

NOTE: The SIC Scripture Studies Group (SSS) organises Bible study courses throughout the year. Those interested can contact Ron Chorn (016-220-7840) or Ronald Hor (012-305-2466).

## Faith of Christ the King



THE Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, commonly referred to as the Feast of Christ the King, is a relatively recent addition to the Western liturgical calendar, having been instituted in 1925 by Pope Pius XI. The date was established as "the last Sunday of the month of October — the Sunday, that is, which immediately precedes the Feast of All Saints".

In 1970 the feast was moved to the final Sunday of Ordinary Time. Therefore, for this year it falls on November 20.

The Feast of Christ the King, which marks the end of the liturgical year, reminds us to continue to await the return of Jesus and the final judgement. However, the image of Christ as a king or judge on the final days is given a counter-cultural twist both for the early Christian communities and for us today. Rather than picturing a king as an overbearing or distant ruler, we are given the image of a caring shepherd.

Christ Himself speaks of His own kingly authority in His last discourse, speaking of the rewards and punishments that will be the eternal lot of the just and the damned. In His reply to the Roman magistrate, who asked Him publicly whether He was a king or not; after His resurrection, when giving to His Apostles the mission of teaching and baptising all nations, He took the opportunity to call Himself King, confirming the title publicly, and solemnly proclaimed that all power was given Him in heaven and on earth. These words can only be taken to indicate the greatness of His power, the infinite extent of His kingdom. What wonder, then, that He whom St John calls the "prince of the kings of the earth" appears in the Apostle's vision of the future as He who "hath on His garment and on His thigh written 'King of kings and Lord of lords'". It is Christ whom the Father "hath appointed heir of all things"; "for He must reign until the end of the world He hath put all His enemies under the feet of God and the Father."

It was surely right then, in view of the common teaching of the sacred books, that the Catholic Church, which is the kingdom of Christ on earth, destined to be spread among all men and all nations, should with every token of veneration salute her Author and Founder in her annual liturgy as King and Lord, and as King of Kings. And, in fact, she used these titles, giving expression with wonderful variety of language to one and the same concept, both in ancient psalmody and in the Sacramental.

In Revelation 19:16, Jesus is given full title "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". The title indicates someone who has the power to exercise absolute dominion over his entire realm. In the case of the Lord Jesus, the realm is all of creation and that, in the end, all other rulers will be conquered or abolished, and He alone will reign supreme as King and Lord of all the earth.

### THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS



#### BAPTISM

**Sacrament of Initiation**  
The Sacrament of Baptism is the first step in a lifelong journey of commitment and discipleship. Whether we are baptized as infants or adults, Baptism is the Church's way of celebrating and marking the rebirth of God.

#### CONFIRMATION

**Sacrament of Initiation**  
Confirmation is a Sacrament of mature commitment and a deepening of baptismal gifts. It is one of the three Sacraments of Initiation. It is most often associated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

#### EUCARIST

**Sacrament of Initiation**  
Catholics believe the Eucharist, or Communion, is both a sacrifice and a meal. We believe in the real presence of Jesus, who died for our sins. As we receive Christ's Body and Blood, we also are nourished spiritually and brought closer to God.

#### HOLY ORDERS

**Sacrament of Service**  
In the Sacrament of Holy Orders, or Ordination, the priest being ordained vows to lead other Catholics by bringing them the Sacraments, by proclaiming the Gospel, and by presiding over means to holiness.

#### MATRIMONY

**Sacrament of Service**  
The Sacrament of Marriage is a public sign that one gives oneself totally to this other person. It is also a public statement about God: the loving union of husband and wife speaks of Father and Son, and also God's values.

#### RECONCILIATION

**Sacrament of Healing**  
The Sacrament of Reconciliation (also known as Penance) has three elements: contrition, confession and absolution. It is a kind of healing, a result of God's unconditional forgiveness, as a result we are called to forgive others.

#### ANONING OF THE SICK

**Sacrament of Healing**  
The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, formerly known as Last Rites or Extreme Unction, is a kind of healing, a result of God's unconditional forgiveness, as a result we are called to forgive others.

## Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

THE Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated every year on November 21, commemorates (in the words of the Liturgy of the Hours, the daily prayer of the Catholic Church) "that dedication of herself which Mary made to God from her very childhood under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who filled her with grace at her Immaculate Conception".

While the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary was not generally celebrated in the West until the 11th century, it appears in most of the earliest calendars of the Eastern Churches.

Derived from accounts in apocryphal literature, especially the Protoevangelium of James, the feast seems first to have appeared in Syria, where the Protoevangelium and other apocryphal books originated. The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary first rose to prominence, however, in Jerusalem, where it was associated with the dedication of the Basilica of Saint Mary the New.

That basilica was built near the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the Protoevangelium of James and other apocryphal works told the story of Mary's presentation at the Temple at the age of three. In gratitude for being granted a child after years of infertility, Mary's parents, Sts Joachim and Anne, had vowed to dedicate Mary to the service of God at the Temple. When they presented her at the Temple at the age of three, she stayed willingly, showing her dedication to God even at that young age.

The Protoevangelium of James, while an extrabiblical document, is the source of many details of Mary's life that became universally accepted by the Church, including the names of her parents, the story of her birth and her age at her betrothal to St Joseph. It also played a large role among Christians, both Eastern and Western, in recognising Mary as the new Temple, the true Holy of Holies. When Mary left the Temple at the age of 12 after her betrothal to Joseph, she remained pure and chaste, and at the Annunciation God came to dwell in her.

The feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary first made its way to the West through monasteries in southern Italy in the ninth century; by the 11th century, it had spread to other locales but was by no means universally celebrated. Under the influence of a French nobleman, Philippe de Mazieres, Pope Gregory IX began celebrating the feast during the Avignon papacy.

Pope Sixtus IV first placed the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the universal calendar in 1472, but in the Tridentine reform of the calendar in 1568, Pope Pius V removed the feast. It was restored 17 years later by Pope Sixtus V, and remains in the Roman calendar today as a memorial. — catholicism.about.com



## Meaning of the Immaculate Conception

THE doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was officially defined by Pope Pius IX in the *ineffabilis Deus* of December 8, 1854. This does not mean that the dogma was invented only 162 years ago. The belief that the Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin had already been accepted since the early years of the Church. The Church through this doctrine formally defined the Immaculate Conception to help and inspire the faithful in their devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Some people think that the term means that Mary was formed in her mother's (St Anne) womb without the assistance of a human father, but that refers to a virgin birth as is the case of Jesus, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, And she conceived by the Holy Spirit! **The Immaculate Conception means that Mary, whose conception was brought about the normal way, was conceived without original sin — that's what "immaculate" means.**

We are all born with the stain of original sin through the action of Adam and Eve, and are cleansed through baptism. Mary was preserved from the stain of sin by the grace of God. From her first existence she was free from the corrupt nature that sin brings. The angel Gabriel addressed her, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). God the father preserved her from the stain of sin so that His son would be conceived in a tabernacle of purity, exempt from defilement and corruption.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception falls on December 8.



"Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception,  
Pray for us!"

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