

Nativity of the Lord



A Day to Rejoice

O God, who sent angels
to announce joyfully your Son's birth.
Help us to know deep joy on this day.
Let us relax and enjoy your many gifts,
sure that Christ is among us,
and that we are saved.

All our songs and good wishes
welcome him into our midst.

Make us a people
confident of your goodness,
who can say with assurance,
"Let the heavens be glad, and let the
earth rejoice;

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it"
(Psalm 96:11-12a).

We ask this through the same Christ
our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, December 25, 2011 Grace upon Grace

Today's Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6 (3c); Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18. Just like the overture to a Broadway musical sounds themes that will recur in later songs, the Prologue to John's Gospel account (today's Gospel reading) presents ideas that will be developed later. For example, today we hear how God seeks out human beings, making them God's own children. Always, God tries to change human darkness into stunning light.

Reflect for a moment on verse 16: "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." What are the special graces in our lives, spilling over from God's fullness? No matter what worries us: scarcity or loss, unemployment or loneliness, illness or death, today we set them aside and rest

in the fullness of God's overflowing love. We focus on the wonder of God becoming human, uplifting us all to be brothers and sisters of Jesus. Isaiah expresses this good news: "the LORD has comforted his people, / he has redeemed Jerusalem" (52:9). In this case, Jerusalem stands for all of us: redeemed, graced, blessed, joyful.

On this day, we change the prayer space color from violet to white or gold, worship with our faith community, sing carols around the crèche, ring bells, enjoy decorations, laugh, tell stories, savor the feast, and relish Christmas cookies. Called also to hospitality, we welcome all guests as Christ.



This Week at Home

Monday, December 26 Feast of Saint Stephen

Why a violent stoning immediately after the sweetness of Christmas? Because in Acts, Luke draws clear parallels between Stephen and Jesus. Both criticize Israel's rejection of the prophets; both are charged with blasphemy, attacked by angry crowds, and forgive their murderers. Through Stephen's story, we learn that Christians are meant to be another Christ. Seeing the faithful follower, we see Jesus. Today's Readings: Acts 6:8–10; 7:54–59; Psalm 31:3cd–4, 6 and 8ab, 16 bc and 17 (6); Matthew 10:17–22.

Tuesday, December 27 Feast of Saint John

Although the Beloved Disciple ("the other disciple" in today's Gospel) is never named, a long-standing tradition identifies him as John, the son of Zebedee and brother of James. His trusting stance at the Last Supper was to lean against Jesus' chest (John 13:25). From the cross, Jesus gave Mary into his care (19:25–28). He was one of the first believers in the Resurrection (20:8). Many people appreciate that the disciple whom Jesus loved *isn't* named; hence, the beloved could be any of us. Today's Readings: 1 John 1:1–4; Psalm 97:1–2, 5–6, 11–12 (12); John 20:1a, 2–8.

Wednesday, December 28 Feast of the Holy Innocents

Furious that he'd been deceived by the Magi, King Herod ordered the massacre of any boy under the age of 2. Today's feast honors those who died, and prompts Christians to advocate for the most vulnerable members of our society. The number of children living below the poverty line in the United States has soared during the recession. What could you do for children who are abused or neglected, illiterate, poorly clothed, lonely, or hungry? Today's Readings: 1 John 1:5–2:2; Psalm 124:2–3, 4–5, 7b–8 (7); Matthew 2:13–18.

Thursday, December 29 Saint Thomas Becket

Celebrate the optional memorial of Saint Thomas Becket by reading T. S. Eliot's play *Murder in the Cathedral*. It's the fascinating, true story of the English King Henry II, who tried to control the Church by choosing his friend, Thomas, to be the Archbishop of Canterbury. But Thomas's first loyalty was to God. He was murdered by knights trying to please their outraged king. Today's Readings: 1 John 2:3–11; Psalm 96:1–2a, 2b–3, 5b–6; Luke 2:22–35.

Friday, December 30 Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

Jesus could have come to earth any way he wanted: as a Roman emperor, a military leader, a respected judge, or a philosopher. Instead, he came as a vulnerable child, to a humble family. They had to flee the diabolical ruler, Herod, fulfill the religious law, and wonder at the words of Simeon and Anna about the baby. Families today come in many forms, but they still nurture the human being, in which Christ wants to dwell. Today's Readings: Genesis 15:1–6; 21:1–3; Psalm 105:1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 8–9 (7a, 8a); Hebrews 11:8, 11–12, 17–19; Luke 2:22–40.

Saturday, December 31 Reviewing the Year

Any human life is an interplay of light and dark. For New Year's Eve, look back over the year. Where was the light? the dark? What was God telling you through both experiences? John reassured the early Christians in his letter: "you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge" (1 John 2:20). This is true for us as well. Tonight, amid the firecrackers, praise God for the light and the dark, and the knowledge God gives. Today's Readings: 1 John 2:18–21; Psalm 96:1–2, 11–12, 13 (11a); John 1:1–18.

