

St. Joseph's Family Activities

Advent Saints and Celebrations



<https://www.theannunciation.org.uk/resources/>

The saints are praying for us

This edition focusses on some of the saints in Advent (December Advent) as the saints in the week after Christmas will be featured in a special twelve days of Christmas edition later.

We begin with four holy martyrs – three from the penal times in England and a more recent African martyr. Of course, martyrs are still being made, as in many parts of the world Christians are persecuted and killed for their faith. “Martyr” means “witness,” and whilst not trying to put children off for being strong in their faith, it's important to help them to realise that God gives us the grace to withstand all trials we face for being faithful and witnessing to Him. St. John of the Cross was not a martyr but was persecuted by members of his own Carmelite order and suffered greatly. But by God's grace he wrote the most beautiful poetry. If you can't read Spanish, they are still worth reading in translation.

We celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Loreto on 10th December, and this edition includes the whole of the litany of Loreto. Maybe just use some of it with children. And of course, we have two wonderful saints who are associated with Christmas, St. Nicholas after whom Santa Claus is named, and St. Lucy. These two saints are very “big” in the Netherlands and Scandinavia respectively – but there is no reason why we can't join in with their celebrations!

As ever, please do let me know if there any saints you would like me to mention in future editions.

These activities reflect the four dimensions of our faith, as in everything we do, we are either learning or proclaiming the faith, celebrating it in the liturgy and the sacraments, living it in the context of the family and community and praying it.

Our Blessed Mother is the greatest saint; she is the one who perfectly shows us what it is to be a saint and how to follow Christ. As Advent progresses, we dwell more and more on the first coming of Christ, the reason for all the saints whom we honour this season.



There are three dimensions to the Church: those of us here on earth, journeying to the Father in Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit; those in purgatory whose lives on earth have finished and who are being purified, and those in heaven, sharing in the divine life, for which we have all been created. For them, their joy is complete but because of that, they are eager for us to join them. Close to Our Lord, they intercede (pray) for us. The saints in heaven are more than the canonised saints the Church knows of, as the author of the Book of Revelation says, “I looked and saw a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, tribe and peoples and tongues...” (Rev.7:9).

The saints are our heroes. They come from all walks of life, from all around the world and all ages. We can always find a saint who inspires us and ask him or her to pray for us. So, celebrate your own saints' days, go to Mass if you can as there, the whole Church is united! We can't see the saints, but we join in with their praise in the Holy Holy Holy. Have something special to eat, light your baptism candle or another one if you don't have it, and regard the saints as special members of the family.

1st December - Four Holy Martyrs

Blessed Clementine Anuarite (1939 - 1964): Clementine lived in North Zaire. (Can you find that on a map?) She was baptised Nengepeta but was given the name "Clementine" at 15, she became a nun with the Religious Institute of the Holy Family. She loved being with young children and after becoming a primary school teacher she became matron of a boarding school. In 1964 her community was captured by rebels. The colonel spotted Sr Clementine and decided that she was to become his wife. This she refused to do, considering that as a religious, she was already married - to Jesus! The colonel would have none of it, and so rather than let her go, on 1st December 1964, she was killed by his soldiers for refusing to marry him.

St Alexander Briant (1556-1581): Alexander was born in Somerset in the early years of the Reformation era and was baptised into the church of England. He was clever, so went to study at Oxford when he was a teenager. There, he became a Catholic, and after his graduation, he went to Douai in France to be trained as a priest. After his ordination in 1578 when he was just 22, he was sent back to his own county of Somerset, to serve the Catholic communities in hiding. It was illegal to be a Catholic priest and it was not long before someone told the authorities where he was. He was arrested and taken to the Tower of London where he was tortured very cruelly. His torturers wanted him to cry out the names and hiding places of other Catholic priests, but he refused. He later wrote that God so blessed him that he felt no pain during his torture. He decided that if he was released, he would join the Jesuits. However, it was not to be... He was tried and condemned to death on 1st December 1581 along with Sts. Ralph Sherwin and Edmund Campion.

St Ralph Sherwin (1550-1581): Ralph was born in Derbyshire and was also converted to Catholicism as a result of his studies in Oxford. He too went to Douai to train to be a priest and after that went to Rome to join the Jesuits. On returning to England with others, including Edmund Campion and Robert Persons, he travelled around the London area, supporting Catholics and converting others. He was arrested and was tortured but would not give up any secrets. When in prison he made many converts - he would not give up! At his trial he said, "The plain reason of our standing here is religion, not treason." On 1st December he was hanged for His defence of His faith.

St Edmund Campion (1540-1581): Edmund was born in London and swung between being a Catholic and a member of the church of England. Being in the Church of England was tempting and he would have had a good career, but he realised that it was not what Jesus was calling him to. So, he repented and trained to be a priest in Douai and then walked to Rome as penance for "changing sides back and forth". Eventually, he was part of the Jesuits' English Mission which began in 1580. St. Edmund lived a hunted life - the authorities tried to find him, and eventually found him hiding in a house near Wantage. During his trial Edmund was offered great wealth if only he would abandon the Catholic faith, but he refused to do so, despite being tortured. Eventually he was condemned to death and spent his last days in prayer, praying for England.

We may not face the same trials, but we are still challenged to stand up for our faith whatever the circumstances. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to give us the grace to be strong in our faith, especially when with our friends who may ridicule us for being Catholics

Stonor House where Campion's secret printing press was in the room above the entrance.



3rd December, St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552)

St. Francis came from the Basque country of Spain and went to study in Paris. There he met St. Ignatius Loyola, who founded the Jesuits. St. Francis was one of group of 7 men who vowed themselves to the service of God in 1534, the original "Jesuits" who would go wherever the Pope sent them. Francis was sent by the Pope to India, and spent the rest of his life in the East; in India, Goa, Malacca (Malaysia), Sri Lanka and Japan. He had hoped to travel to China, but this was full of difficulties as China was closed to foreigners. He persuaded a Portuguese ship to take him secretly but, on the way, he became very ill. He was secretly put ashore on the island of and landed secretly on the island of Shangchwan just off the coast of China and here, on the sands of the wins-swept beach, with a lighted candle in his hand, he died with the name of Jesus on his lips. His body was taken firstly to Malacca, and then was taken to Goa where he still lies in the Church of Good Jesus.

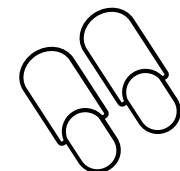
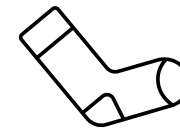
St. Francis was a fiery preacher and drew many people to Jesus though his convictions and faith. However he was also highly regarded by the natives of the lands he worked in because he treated them with love and respect unlike many of the other Europeans who had "conquered" these lands.

Can you find all these places on a map? Many of the people in India, Goa, and these other far eastern countries hold St. Francis Xavier in great respect because of his work of telling their ancestors about Jesus. Tell one person today that Jesus whose birthday we are about to celebrate, is the same Jesus who died on the Cross for them so that they can go to heaven. The more people you tell, the more people will know and love Jesus, just as St. Francis did.

6th December, St. Nicholas of Myra (4th Century)

St. Nicholas was a bishop in what is now Turkey. The legend is told that there was a poor man in the town who had three daughters who wanted to get married. However, in those days, girls could only get married if their father gave some money to the husband, which was called a dowry. Sadly, the poor man did not have enough money, but Bishop Nicholas heard about this. In the middle of the night, he climbed onto the roof of the poor man's house and dropped three purses of money down the chimney for the girls as a dowry. The girls had left their stockings hanging up to dry by the fire and the money fell in the stockings! Fr. Christmas has copied this idea ever since!

St. Nicholas was at the very first general (ecumenical) council of the Church in Nicaea (from which we get the Nicene Creed) in 325. He was known for his holiness and was much mourned at his death. He was buried in his cathedral at Myra.



Why don't you do what the Dutch do, and put sweets or another surprise in family member's shoes for them to find in the mornina?

7th December, St. Ambrose (340-397)

St. Ambrose was born in Trier but when his father, who was prefect of Gaul (France) died, his mother took him and his siblings to Rome to live. Ambrose worked hard at his studies and eventually sent him to Milan to rule over the country there. The local bishop had just died and there was a lot of arguing about who would be bishop after him and the people decided that they wanted Ambrose who was a good and wise governor. The [problem... Ambrose was not a priest and in fact was not even baptised! So, after trying to avoid being made bishop Ambrose probably had one of the fastest RCIA programmes and was baptised, ordained and consecrated bishop in quick succession. Because he did not know much about theology, Ambrose set to work to study the faith and as well as running his diocese very wisely and with great faith, he spent a lot of time studying the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. It was a difficult time for the Church as many people were still not sure about Christians and laws were often made to prevent Catholics from gathering and meeting. But through it all, Ambrose was firm but respectful of all people. One of his most famous converts to the faith was a man called Augustine, who had spent most of his life running away from God. Ambrose showed him that Jesus was calling him to be baptised and so one day, Augustine agreed. He is now known as St Augustine and is one of the Church' greatest saints!

St. Ambrose wrote: "Let your words be rivers, clear and flowing... by the grace of your words you will win people for Jesus." The message for us all is to take care of how we speak - speak clearly and kindly and people will see that Jesus is guiding us in all that we say and do.

8th December, Feast of the Immaculate Conception

The Immaculate Conception is when **Mary was conceived without sin in the womb of her mother, St. Anne.** It is not about Jesus' conception in her womb which is celebrated at the Annunciation in March. Mary was saved from all sin at the moment of her conception in her mother's womb and was therefore FULL of grace. Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us.



Grace is the amazing "stuff" that comes to us in Baptism and all the sacraments, and we need grace to help us to live as Jesus wants us to. We pray "Hail Mary full of grace..." It was because Mary was full of grace that she could say yes to the Angel Gabriel and yes to the Father, and give birth to Jesus, the Son of God. Grace helps us to do amazing things.

We can "top up" on grace in all the sacraments, especially Reconciliation. Why don't you go to Confession this week to prepare for Christmas and receive a "top-up" of grace.

10th December Our Lady of Loreto

This has been a feast which has gained importance over the centuries. Tradition says that the holy house of Loreto, which was traditionally said to have been the house in Nazareth in which Our Lady was born, grew up and where the Annunciation happened, was miraculously carried by angels to Loreto in Italy, on 10th December 1294. From then on it became a place of pilgrimage where kings and saints honoured Our Blessed Mother. Modern minds may be sceptical, but in 1985 the Vatican archives acknowledged the discovery of documents in 1900 that in the 13th century during the times of the crusades, a noble Italian family called "Angeli" (which means angels) rescued materials from the house in Palestine which had, since the 3rd century, been revered as Mary's home and around which a Church had been built.

Excavations of the house in Loreto led to the discovery of coins of the Angeli family of the same date, in the foundations. (It used to be traditional to place the family's own coins in the foundations of any property to show who had built it.) Further excavations in the 20th Century revealed that the stones of the lower part of the house were from Palestine and had the same kind of finish used in that region in the first centuries. So, it seems that "angels" (the Angeli family) did indeed carry stones from Nazareth to Loreto.

Many Popes have had high regard for the holy House of Loreto, including the great Pope St John Paul II who said in 1993 that it was the "foremost shrine of international import dedicated to the Blessed Virgin." Many of the treasures of the shrine had been plundered by Napoleon in 1797, but the greatest treasure of the house of Loreto is the fact that the very stones seemed to have witnessed the moment when Our Lady gave her consent to become the Mother of God.



Litany of Loreto

This is a litany of praise to Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary which was composed about the time that the Holy House was brought over from Palestine. It was formally (definitively) approved by Pope Sixtus V in 1587 and has been added to ever since by other popes as only a pope can do. Praying the litany of Loreto (on the next page) has been a very effective prayer of protection for many centuries. Why don't you pray some of this together for protection, this Advent.

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/40109/did-angels-really-carry-the-holy-house-of-mary-to-loreto-italy>;
<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/devotions/litany-of-loreto-246>; <https://aleteia.org/2020/10/28/how-did-the-holy-house-of-mary-get-to-loreto/>

Litany of Loreto

Lord have mercy R/:Christ have mercy.

Lord have mercy on us R/:Christ hear us. Christ graciously hear us.

God, the Father of heaven R/:Have mercy on us.

God the Son, Redeemer of the world R/:Have mercy on us.

God the Holy Spirit R/:Have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, one God R/:Have mercy on us.

*To all the invocations of Mary,
the response is "pray for us"*

Holy Mary

Holy Mother of God

Holy Virgin of virgins

Mother of Christ

Mother of the Church

Mother of Mercy

Mother of Divine Grace

Mother of Hope

Mother most pure

Mother most chaste

Mother inviolate

Mother undefiled

Mother most amiable

Mother admirable

Mother of good counsel

Mother of our Creator

Mother of our Saviour

Virgin most prudent

Virgin most venerable

Virgin most renowned

Virgin most powerful

Virgin most merciful

Virgin most faithful

Mirror of justice

Seat of wisdom

Cause of our joy

Spiritual vessel

Vessel of honour

Singular vessel of

devotion

Mystical rose

Tower of David

Tower of ivory

House of gold

Ark of the covenant

Gate of heaven

Morning star

Health of the sick

Refuge of sinners

Solace of migrants

Comfort of the afflicted

Help of Christians

Queen of Angels

Queen of Patriarchs

Queen of Prophets

Queen of Apostles

Queen of Martyrs.

Queen of Confessors

Queen of Virgins

Queen of all Saints

Queen conceived without original sin

Queen assumed into Heaven

Queen of the most Holy Rosary

Queen of families

Queen of peace

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world

R/:Spare us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world

R/:Graciously hear us, O Lord.

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world

R/:Have mercy on us.

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God

R/:That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray

Grant, we beseech thee, O Lord God, that we, your servants,
may enjoy perpetual health of mind and body;

and by the glorious intercession of the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin,
may be delivered from present sorrow,

and obtain eternal joy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

13th December, St Lucy

St. Lucy was martyred in about 303 AD. (She died because she was told to stop being a Christian and to stop loving Jesus, but she did not want to as she loved Jesus so much). As her name means "light" a lot of stories have grown up about her. One was that she secretly took cakes at night to Christians who were hiding from the Emperor. In order to see where she was going, because her hands were full carrying the cakes, she wore a crown of candles to give her light. In Scandinavian countries, some families make "St. Lucy Cakes" which are saffron buns and are served by the youngest girl in the home. Traditionally she wears a white dress and a crown of candles on her head. We do suggest that if you do this you make cardboard candles! See below for a recipe:



BBC Food ~ Swedish Lucia rolls

Ingredients:

1 tsp saffron threads
250ml/9fl oz tepid milk
500g/1lb 2oz strong white flour
7g/¼oz sachet of fast-action dried yeast
1 tsp salt
50g/1¾oz golden caster sugar
50g/1¾oz unsalted butter, melted
100g/3½oz Quark cheese
1 free-range egg yolk
handful of raisins

Method

Preheat the oven to 220C/425F/Gas 7. Grease a baking tray. Soak the saffron in the milk for 5-10 minutes.

Combine the flour, yeast, salt and sugar in a mixing bowl and make a well in the centre. Stir the melted butter into the milk and saffron mixture and pour into the well. Add the Quark cheese.

Stir together briefly, then bring together as a dough. Knead on a floured surface for 10 minutes, or until smooth. Place in an oiled bowl, cover with oiled clingfilm and leave in a warm place for 1½-2 hours until well risen.

Knock back the dough and divide into 12 pieces. Roll each into a rectangle about 20cm/8in long. Twist each into an 'S' shape, as tight as possible. Place on the prepared baking sheet and cover loosely. Leave for 30-45 minutes or until puffed up. Brush the rolls with the egg yolk, then place one raisin in the centre of each circle (two raisins per roll).

Bake the rolls for 15 minutes, then remove from the oven and set aside to cool on a wire rack.



Recipe taken from <https://www.lavenderandlovage.com/2011/12/st-lucys-day-special-birthday-and.html>

14th December, St John of the Cross (1542 - 1591)

John (Juan in Spanish) was the youngest of three children who with their mother were left destitute when their father died. At first, he became a weaver's apprentice, but quickly realised that he no talent for this. Instead, he was taken on as a servant to the governor of the hospital in Medina and for seven years he studied under the Jesuits part time and practiced living an ascetic life (fasting a lot and living without luxuries). He joined the Carmelites at Medina and was given the religious name, "John of St. Matthias". John asked to join the "discalced" (barefoot) Carmelites; a reformed branch of the order who followed the simplest rules of the order. This attracted the attention of St. Teresa of Avila (see October 15th) who had been given permission to set up two houses of the reformed Carmelites, one for men and one for women. She wanted John to be the leader (prior) of this reformed order, and as he renewed his vows, he took the name "Juan de la Cruz." John was a contemplative which meant that drew closer and closer to Jesus as he entered deeper and deeper into prayer. This was all good for a time, but there were times when he felt completely abandoned by God. He knew that God had not abandoned him, but he received no spiritual blessings in his prayer and the devil tempted and taunted him in all sorts of ways. This has famously been called the "dark night of the soul." However, these periods would always end and each time, and John would be filled with such light and love.

There were arguments between the reformed and the "un-reformed" Carmelites and John, who had been made was prior of a reformed house by the authority of the Pope, was commanded by the prior of his original house to return there. When John refused, he was arrested and put in prison! In his tiny and dark prison cell he was beaten, insulted, and suffered a lot of physical and spiritual pain as he was tempted to give in. But after 9 months, he escaped and returned to a reformed community of Carmelites. Here, John wrote some of his famous poems which some are the most beautiful in the Spanish language. Disagreements between the two different branches of Carmelites existed for years and John often found himself caught between the two. Once again being removed from the office of prior, he escaped to the mountains where he could pray in peace and quiet. The whole of his life was spent either in the joy of deep contemplation or being persecuted by his other Carmelites for his determination to hold fast to what he sincerely believed God was calling him to do. He died in in Andalucía after falling ill when visiting a community in Sevilla. He was canonized in 1726, and was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1926.

We must then dig deeply in Christ. He is like a rich mine with many pockets containing treasures: however deep we dig we will never find their end or their limit. Indeed, in every pocket new seams of fresh riches are discovered on all sides. (St. John of the Cross)

How can we dig deeply in Christ this Advent? Choose one of these "I am" statements of Jesus from John's Gospel and think about it during the day: What does Jesus mean when He says that He is: The Bread of Life (Jn. 6:35); The Light of the World (Jn. 8:12); The Sheepgate (Jn. 10:7); The Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11); The Resurrection and the Life (Jn. 11:25); The Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn. 14:6); The True Vine (Jn. 15:1).

<h1>O Sapienta</h1>	<p>17th December</p> <p>O Wisdom of God. Jesus is the wisdom of God and He guides us and helps us to make the right decisions.</p>
<h1>O Adonai</h1>	<p>18th December</p> <p>O Lord, Jesus is the Lord. "Lord was used instead of saying "YHWH" which is too sacred to say.</p>
<h1>O Stock of Jesse</h1>	<p>19th December</p> <p>O descendant of Jesse! Jesse was King David's father and Jesus descends from David and therefore from Jesse.</p>
<h1>O Key of David</h1>	<p>20th December</p> <p>O King! Jesus is born to be king, an even greater king than his ancestor King David was.</p>

The "O" Antiphons

In the last 7 days of Advent, the Church sings some special praises of Jesus. You must be familiar with the advent carol "O come O come, Emmanuel". The verses of this carol represent the different attributes of Jesus and the "O" is a kind of address used to God, (Such as O God/ O my Jesus....)

Activity: cut these out and fold in half so that the meaning is on the back - colour in and decorate (with glitter if you dare!) so that they are pretty, and hang a piece of ribbon through the hole so that you can hang them on your Christmas tree or maybe on a bare twig. You could do one each day so that by Christmas your branch is colourful and attractive.

O Oriens

21st December

O Rising sun - Jesus is a new dawn o every dawn brings with it hope of a new day and Jesus brings hope of eternal life

O King of the peoples

22nd December

Jesus is not just king of Israel, but king o everyone - His kingdom is not of this world.

O Emmanuel

23rd December

O God who is with us. Jesus is not just a human baby but He is also God. Fully God and fully Man. Christmas is about celebrating that Jesus is God with us

Christmas crib

Set up a Christmas crib if you have not done so already,

How about making Christmas crib figures out of plastic bottles? Scrunch a ball of newspaper, cover with a neutral cloth and tie to the neck of a plastic bottle half filled with water (for stability). Wrap more cloth around the body and then add a head-covering and facial details. You can make as many figures as you like -you can also use cardboard rolls for the figures as with the John the Baptist figure... or use the template in the Liturgy pages... or you can cut out pictures from old Christmas cards and put them on little cardboard stands..



Do send us photos of your own home-made cribs.

