Growing in FAITH™

Discovering **hope** and **joy** in the Catholic faith. December 2026

St Mark Church - St James Church

Emporium - Driftwood Pennsylvania

One Minute Meditations

St. Francis Xavier

Imagine being roommates with a saint. Born to a Spanish noble family in 1506, St. Francis Xavier lived a wealthy, comfortable life until he met St. Ignatius of Loyola while studying in Paris. Inspired by St. Ignatius' zeal for mission, St. Francis, along with five other men joined Ignatius' Society of Jesus. In 1541, St. Francis was sent to India and Japan, where he tirelessly served the poor. He died in 1552, having converted thousands to Christ.

The Divine humility

One of the hallmarks of Advent is humility. St. John the Baptist humbly points away from himself towards Christ, repeatedly saying, "I am not Him." The Blessed Mother humbly accepts God's invitation with her humble "Let it be done." Finally, God Himself comes to us in ultimate humility—not in grandeur and glory, but in poverty, weakness, and vulnerability as a newborn infant. Humility isn't about belittling ourselves, but about directing others' focus to Love Himself and inviting them to draw near to Him.

"For to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger'" (Luke 2:11-12).

Come to the Manger with the shepherds

When we look for a model of Christmas spirituality, Mary, Joseph, or the Magi who journeyed so far, may come to mind. Yet the shepherds of Bethlehem, poor and overlooked, were the first to hear the Good News. They teach us to stay watchful, to seek Christ, and to share the joy of finding Him.

Keep watch. The angel appeared to shepherds *"keeping the night watch over their flock"* (Luke 2:8). God often speaks in quiet, ordinary moments. Set aside time each day to be still and listen for Him.

Come and see. The shepherds were given a sign: an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. God still gives signs to those who look for them. Ask Him to show you where He is doing something new in your life (Isaiah 43:19).

Go in haste. The shepherds *"went in haste"* (Luke 2:16), without delay. God continually invites us into deeper friendship with Him. Respond promptly by meeting Him in prayer, in Scripture, in the sacraments, and above all in the Mass.

Adore Him. The shepherds came simply to be with Christ. Consider making a weekly Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament, and be present to the One who humbly makes Himself present to you.

Share what God has done. After finding Jesus, the shepherds *"returned, glorifying and praising God"* (Luke 2:20).

"From [the shepherds] we should learn the inner freedom to put other tasks in second place—however important they may be—so as to make our way towards God."
Pope Benedict XVI

Let your words do the same. Set aside gossip and negativity, and speak instead of the good God has done.

The angel's message was not for the shepherds alone but *"for all the people"* (Luke 2:10). Christ still comes to dwell among us and within us. The shepherds' joy is ours to receive and ours to share.

Why Do Catholics Do That?

Why do we begin the Church year in Advent?

Just as the calendar year has its seasons, the Church has a liturgical year with seasons of its own. The Church year doesn't begin on January 1, but on the First Sunday of Advent, four Sundays before Christmas. Advent prepares us in two ways: to celebrate Christ's birth at Christmas and to await His return in glory at the end of time, when He will *"make all things new"* (Revelation 21:5). Whether you spend more time in prayer, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, serve your community, or set your home in order, Advent is a fitting season for a fresh start.

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God loves first

"It is not enough to know that God exists," Pope Leo XIV said in a recent Angelus address. ". . . The one true God wants to become our God." At Christmas, we celebrate that God came to save us as an infant, like us in all things but sin. Our life of faith is a response to His love.

God seeks us in love. God loves us before we are perfect: *"I have loved you with an age-old love"* (Jeremiah 31:3); *"You are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you"* (Isaiah 43:4); *"While we were still sinners Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).

We respond in love. Above all, God desires our love (Matthew 22:37). Our prayers, works of charity, and penances do not earn His love. They are our response to a love already given.

Our hearts are changed. When we cooperate with His grace, God continually renews our hearts so we can love as He loves (Ezekiel 36:26). St. Paul describes this love: *"Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous,* [love] *is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude"* (1 Corinthians 13:4–5).

This Christmas, receive the gift of God's love, and return it with your own.

from Scripture

Luke 2:22-40, The Holy Spirit reveals God's presence

To an outside observer, Jesus' birth was unremarkable, and His family seemed ordinary. When the time came to present Him in the Temple, Mary and Joseph offered "*a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons*" (Luke 2:24). The Law allowed that offering for families who could not afford a lamb (Leviticus 12:8). As faithful Jews, they fulfilled everything the Law required and thanked God for the gift of their child.

Yet when Mary and Joseph brought the infant into the Temple, Simeon recognized Him at once as the Messiah. Moved by the Holy Spirit, he proclaimed that Jesus would be "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel"* (Luke 2:32).

The prophetess Anna, who had spent long years in the Temple fasting and praying, also recognized the child. She gave thanks to God and spoke of Him to all who awaited Israel's redemption (Luke 2:38). Her faith in God's promises sustained her hope. Hope is a gift from God that fills us with longing for the Kingdom of Heaven. The Holy Spirit still reveals the Lord to those who seek to know Him, receive Him, and remain with Him forever.

Feasts & Celebrations

December 6 - St. Nicholas (343) St. Nicholas was a bishop of Myra known for secret generosity and defense of the Faith. Legend says he left gold for three poor sisters' dowries. His story inspired Santa Claus. He reminds us to give quietly, out of love for Christ.

December 11 – St. Damasus I (384). Born in early fourth century Rome, St. Damasus served as a deacon before being elected pope. A minority group elected an antipope and the scandal resulted in violent fights. He was falsely accused and later cleared. He fiercely defended the faith from heresies, especially Arianism, and authorized St. Jerome to translate the Vulgate.

December 12 – Our Lady of Guadelupe (1531). The Blessed Mother appeared as a Native American maiden to St. Juan Diego. She had St. Juan carry roses to the bishop as proof and asked that the bishop to build a chapel on the site. When the roses were emptied from St. Juan's *tilma,* it retained the image of the Blessed Mother.

December 20 – St. Dominic of Silos (1073). St. Dominic was a Benedictine monk, born around 1000 AD in Navarre, Spain. Recognized for his leadership abilities, he was appointed abbot of St. Sebastian's monastery at Silos. He is the patron saint for whom Blessed Joan of Aza named her son, St. Dominic, the founder of the Order of Preachers.

December 26 – St. Stephen Martyr (First Century). A deacon of the early Church, St. Stephen preached that God can be found everywhere, not just in one place like the temple. He angered the Jewish authorities and became the first martyr of the Catholic Church.

Q & A

Why do we celebrate Christmas on December 25?

Picture ancient Rome in late December. The nights are long and cold, so the city fights the dark with Saturnalia, a week of feasting, gift-giving, and candlelit celebration. By the fourth century, December 25 was also marked as the "Birth of the Unconquered Sun," the day the light began its slow return.

Christians saw something deeper in that turning of the year. They proclaimed that the true light had already come: Jesus, the *"sun of justice"* (Malachi 4:2), who conquered the darkness of sin. Rather than throw a party, they gathered at the altar. That's where the name comes from. "Christmas" is the Old English Cristes mæsse, "Christ's Mass."

However the feast developed, its heart is astonishing: the Son of God, *"the light of the world"* (John 8:12), became a newborn in a manger. Each December, as the darkness deepens, we hear again that "*the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*" (John 1:5). Through His death and Resurrection, Jesus defeated sin, evil, and death itself. He still steps into our darkness today, bringing the light of His presence and the joy of His love.

Our Mission

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