

# Partners in FAITH™



Helping our children grow in their Catholic faith.

December 2017

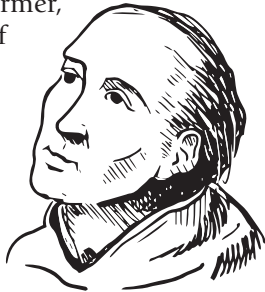
Saint Matthew Catholic Church  
Durham, NC



## Thoughtful Moments

### St. John of the Cross

Mystic, reformer, and Doctor of the Church, St. John was raised by his mother, a poor silk weaver, in Spain. He entered the Carmelite Order in 1563, and was inspired by St. Teresa of Ávila to lead a much-needed reform of his Carmelites. For this, some of his brothers imprisoned him in a tower for almost a year until he escaped. He is also known for his beautiful poetry on the soul's search for God.



### Trust in the Lord

"There is a Person who can keep you going, trust in him! It is Jesus! Trust in Jesus! ...The Lord is always with us. He comes to the shores of the sea of our life; he makes himself close to our failures, our frailty, and our sins in order to transform them." Pope Francis

"Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).



## Open the gifts of Advent

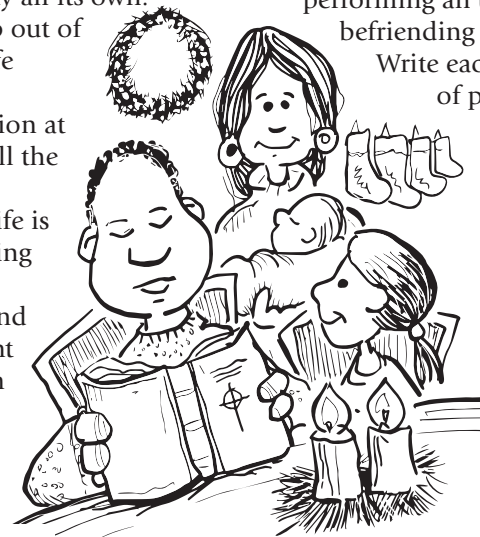
It's hard to compete with the breathless excitement of Christmas but Advent has a beauty all its own. When families step out of the busy pace of life during Advent, the Christmas celebration at the end becomes all the more heartfelt.

**Create rituals.** Life is to be different during Advent – quieter, more reflective – and rituals can help. Light a candle every day in an Advent wreath. Gather to read some of the Nativity story (Luke 1:5-2:40), drawing it out until Christmas. For an hour each night, turn off the lights in your home and work by candle light.

**Make small sacrifices.** The holidays can herald a season of excess. Instead, create a "Sacrifice Stocking" for Jesus.

Encourage each child to make small sacrifices – foregoing dessert, performing an unasked chore, befriending a lonely classmate. Write each sacrifice on a slip of paper and place it in a Christmas stocking in the four weeks during Advent. On Christmas morning, read each "gift" in the stocking offered to the Babe as the first gifts of Christmas.

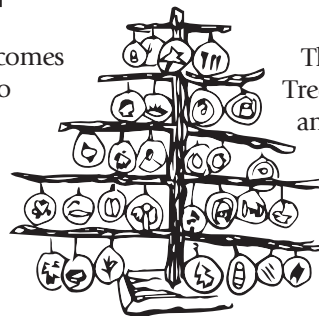
**Let music make the mood.** The right music can help create a quiet mood during the season. Pick a time each day to play only spiritual and religious carols. Choose songs that tell of God's love for us. Or, make up new words to your old favorites.



## Why Do Catholics Do That?

### Why do Catholics create "Jesse Trees" for Advent?

The idea for the Jesse Tree comes from the prophet Isaiah, who said, "a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse ... the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him" (Isaiah 11:1-2). The "shoot" is Jesus, who was born from Jesse's family line.



The ornaments of the Jesse Tree represent Jesus' ancestors and the extraordinary purposes to which God put them. When we seek God and listen to him, he will do amazing things in our lives, too.

# The saints of Christmas

Our present-day Santa Claus has roots in third-century **St. Nicholas**. Orphaned young, he was left rich and gave money generously. A legend involving the saint concerns a desperate man who needed money to pay his debts. Nicholas secretly threw a bag of gold down his chimney. To the Church, Nicholas is a confessor of the faith, and a holy bishop.

**St. Lucy** lived in pagan Sicily around the year 300 during a time of great religious persecution. Lucy refused marriage to a



determined suitor, and he exposed her to authorities as a Christian – a charge resulting in her death. The courage of this young martyr is a guiding light for all young women and men.

**St. Boniface** converted many in Germany and the surrounding area to Christianity. He is credited with taking the fir tree for a Christmas symbol. After encountering pagans about to sacrifice a child tied to a fir tree, Boniface cut down the great tree and used it to preach about the Incarnation.

## Scripture LESSON

### Luke 2:22-40, No ordinary child

Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews and did what was required by their faith to celebrate the birth of their son. They couldn't afford the customary offering of a lamb and presented two pigeons instead to thank God for their son. To the uninformed observer, Jesus' birth was unremarkable and his family quite ordinary.

Yet, Simeon immediately recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he prophesied that Jesus was to be *"a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for*



*your people Israel"* (Luke 2:32).

Simeon was not alone in recognizing the Lord in the temple. Anna was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Her faith in God's promises gave her hope. The hope God places in our hearts gives us a desire for the kingdom of Heaven.

**What can a parent do?** Teach children to look for Jesus in the world. Encourage them to pray to him. Tell them that the Holy Spirit will reveal the presence of the Lord to those who want to know him, receive him, and to be with him forever.

## Feasts & Celebrations

**Dec. 8 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1854).** On this Holy Day of Obligation, we commemorate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne's womb without original sin. In addition to attending Mass, praying a joyful rosary is a wonderful way to celebrate.

**Dec. 9 – St. Juan Diego (1548).** A simple, humble Native American who became a faithful Christian, St. Juan Diego was visited by the Blessed Virgin Mary at Tepeyac Hill in Mexico. She asked him to have the

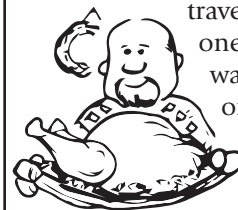
bishop of Mexico build a chapel for her, and had him carry roses to the bishop as a sign. When the roses were emptied from his tilma (cape) before the bishop, it retained the image of the Blessed Mother.

**Dec. 31 – The Holy Family (1st century).** On the feast of the Holy Family, we celebrate the family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph – three people who lived for God. By their love and support of one another the Holy Family is a model for all Christian families.



## Parent TALK

Every year, we have a tradition of visiting my family for Christmas. My parents and siblings live two hours away, so visiting them is special. I was so disappointed last year when a surprise snowstorm prevented us



traveling as usual. It was one of the few times I wasn't with my family on Christmas but I couldn't let my disappointment ruin the holiday

for my own family.

I found out that our next-door neighbors weren't traveling for Christmas, either. They recently moved to the area away from family. So, I invited them for Christmas dinner after Mass. My husband made turkey and fixings, and our guests brought their traditional dishes. We turned on Christmas music and everyone helped finish decorating the Christmas tree. The children played together while the adults chatted.

Looking back, that snowstorm turned out to be providential; we all had a wonderful time and made great friends.

### Our Mission

To help parents raise faithful Catholic children  
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