

# Celebrating the Christmas Season

## Ideas for Catholic Families

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Once Christmas Mass is over, the presents have been opened, and everyone's well fed on treats—well, what's next for Christmas? The Church offers us Catholic families an **entire season to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ**—but what are some practical ideas for continuing the celebration without burning us out or breaking the bank? Here are some ideas for you—one or two for every day of the Christmas season. Just pick a few of them and get the family together for some Christmas festivities!

### CELEBRATING The Season of Christmas

The Christmas season celebrates the mystery of the Incarnation and the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the world:  
*past, present and future*



PHOTO: ST. CHARLES BORROMEO PARISH, TORONTO



The season *begins* with evening prayer on Christmas Eve and *ends* with the feast of the Baptism of the Lord

*“To enable us to know, accept and follow Him, the Son of God took on our flesh... Our faith in the Son of God made man in Jesus of Nazareth enables us to grasp reality's deepest meaning and to see how much God loves this world and is constantly guiding it towards Himself.”*

POPE FRANCIS, *LUMEN FIDEI*, 18

The period after Christmas day celebrates many *feasts* that reflect on various facets of the Christmas event:

- Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
- Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God
- Epiphany of the Lord
- Baptism of the Lord



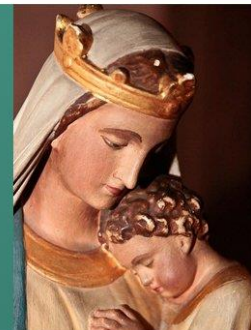
The splendour and glory of the Word-made-flesh makes Christmas a great festival of light. *Jesus is the Light of the world who banishes the darkness.*

During the season of Christmas, we recognize and celebrate the presence of Christ among us today!



The Christmas season contains two holy days of obligation in Canada:

- December 25: *Nativity of the Lord*
- January 1: *Solemnity of Mary*



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SOURCE: CCCB'S BLESSINGS AND PRAYERS FOR HOME AND FAMILY

## December 25—Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord

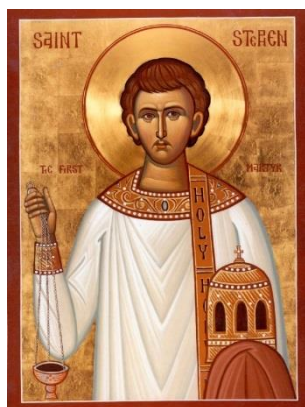
The most important thing we can do on this great day is to **attend Mass**—either in person or virtually depending upon your health situation. Mass is the high point of our spiritual life—the source and summit of worship. Build everything else in your schedule/plans around Mass—put first things first and then all the rest of the day will fall into place (or, if it doesn't, at least you've taken care of the one thing that matters most!).

.....Need a way to calm down in the evening? What about a **family rosary**? Gather around the tree (don't you dare take it down yet!), light candles or a fire, and get everyone together to pray the rosary. Aren't comfortable leading the family in the rosary? Use a recorded version to help get your family started (or renew) this great devotion (this video has the words of the prayers on the screen as well as nice images and video clips to view while you pray):

<https://youtu.be/KhUDecYo67g>



## December 26—Feast of St. Stephen, the First Martyr

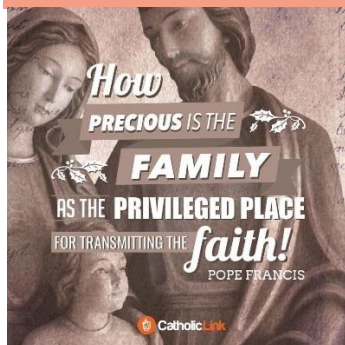


St. Stephen, deacon and martyr, served the early Church in Jerusalem. He was stoned to death after speaking boldly about Jesus Christ to the Jewish leaders. **Read his story together as a family: Acts 6:8-15; 7:51-60.**

We Catholics often make light of the means of death that the martyrs faced—not to belittle the sacrifice of the martyrs, but to proclaim that these things don't scare us or keep us from following Jesus! (We are simply following the lead of St. Lawrence, who told his torturers who were burning him alive: "Turn me over, I'm done on this side.") So, on this day, it might be a perfect time for an **indoor snowball fight**—a kinder, gentler form of stoning! Set up the forts out of your furniture, create 'snowballs' by wadding up paper (or I've used small stuffed animals or even socks made into balls) and distributing them evenly between two teams (or make it a free for all). Put on a Christmas song you all love. I highly recommend Relient K's Christmas album for extremely upbeat versions perfect for snowball fights: here's a link to their "12 Days of Christmas":

<https://youtu.be/Hvc-PsfXhm4>

## December 27—Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph



This being Sunday, put "GO TO MASS" on the Family Calendar *first*—then work in other activities around it. On this feast of the Holy Family, what a **wonderful time to reach out to other families striving for holiness**—especially maybe those with whom you couldn't gather in person. **Writing letters, dropping off treats, doing video calls**—find a way to connect, support and celebrate the families God has put into our lives.

For ideas about prayers for this feast day, here are some options:

<https://prayerist.com/holyfamilyprayers.html>

## **December 28—Feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs**

Right after all the “feel-good” emotions of Christmas, the Church reminds us of the reality of the Cross—this day celebrates the innocent children in Bethlehem who were victims of King Herod’s murderous wrath. What a great day to **let the children be the leader for the day**—perhaps allow each child to decide on one activity for the day (you set parameters about expenses, indoor/outdoor, etc.). Let the children set the menu for dinner and choose a movie to enjoy together. **A great movie for the Christmas season would be The Miracle Maker**—an amazing blend of Claymation and animation that faithfully tells the story of the life of Jesus (it’s about 1 ½ hours long):

[https://youtu.be/Vm\\_uHE1956I](https://youtu.be/Vm_uHE1956I)

## **December 29—Fifth Day within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord**

### **(Feast of St. Thomas Becket, Bishop and Martyr)**

The First Reading for today’s Mass is a beautiful reflection on the light of Christ and the darkness of sin (1 John 2:3-11). The seasons of Advent and Christmas take place in the darkest season of the year—this might be a great time for some “light” games to brighten up the dark and gloom that is around us! Read the First Reading together and talk about how we can shine the true light of Christ for each other—this is a great time for parents to identify specific ways that your children have shone the light of Christ by loving others.



After reflection and sharing, play some light games—flashlight tag is always a hit, or try a flashlight version of 20 questions. In the flashlight version, the person who is “it” thinks of an object in the room. People take turns asking “yes” or “no” questions to try to identify it, then when they think they know what it is, they shine their flashlight on it. We often play a version of “20 Questions” with all the ornaments that we hang from our garlands—this would be perfect to play with flashlights.

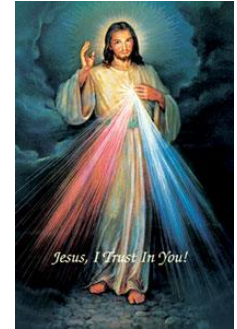
## **December 30—Sixth Day within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord**

As you prepare to celebrate the beginning of the New Year (and, of course, the “Little Christmas” of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God), this is a good time to do some reflecting together about the past year. As Catholics, we don’t want to spend our time complaining! We want to find the blessings and express our gratitude to God for being the One who is always with us and will always work all things to good for us! So: **create a chart or poster or even a “building” of the past year (using a boxes from Christmas that you can cover in craft paper write on—perhaps a tower of one box per month or one box per season?)**—what events happened this year for your family? What blessings/good came out of them that you can identify and thank God for? After talking about the past year and creating your visual art, spend some time in prayer together thanking God for the blessings He brought about through those events. Record your children reviewing the past year with your poster or building, then share the video with grandparents and other family members.



Are things still too difficult and hard this year for your family to find the blessings? Then don't try reviewing the year yet! Allow God time to bring healing and peace and do something else that brings you close to Him. This might be a good day to try **praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet together**. It uses Rosary beads and doesn't take too long to pray (less than 10 minutes). Here is a great version of the Chaplet led by Franciscan monks (it doesn't include the text of the prayers, but they are either ones you'll know or very easy to learn):

<https://youtu.be/s-410S9wPos>



## **December 31—Seventh Day within the Octave of the Nativity of the Lord**

### **(Feast of St. Sylvester I, Pope)**

The Gospel for this day is the great “Prologue” that begins the Gospel of St. John. Read this beautiful passage out loud today—taking turns with the verses. Share some of your thoughts with each other about images or messages from the Gospel that really stood out for you.

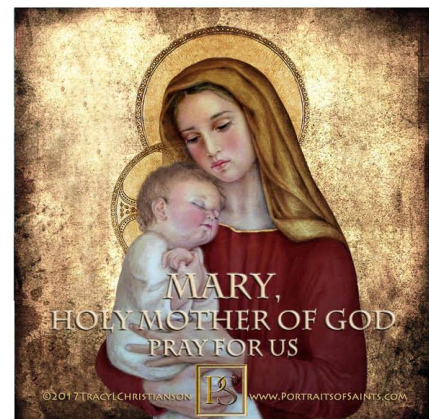
Today is also the feast day of a Pope—Sylvester was elected pope in 314 and reigned until 335. He is the first saint not a martyr to be venerated in the church. As pope, keys are a symbol of his authority—from Jesus’ promise to Peter to give him the keys to the kingdom as a sign of his and his successor’s authority to rule as steward until Jesus’ return. A fun family activity based



on the image of the “keys” of St. Peter might be to **organize a treasure hunt in your home**. First, have the kids sit down with you and read the story of Jesus conferring the keys to the kingdom on Peter: Matthew 16:13-19. Then tell your kids that you have hidden your keys to the car and give your kids the first clue that will send them on a hunt to different places throughout the house. After the kids figure out the clues and locate your keys, it's time for the family outing to... ice cream? Viewing Christmas lights? A park for a walk? You decide on the prize!

## **January 1—Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God**

Happy little Christmas! Eight days after Christmas, the Catholic Church provides us with a concluding feast day for this Octave that lets us relive the beauty, impact and power of Jesus coming among us. This feast day focuses on celebrating Mary as the Mother of God—because if we believe Jesus is truly divine, then this title rightfully fits Mary! We celebrate the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the Octave by attending Mass. This is a great day to gather in solemn, joyful prayer for all God has done for us—especially in sending His Son to die for our sins and lead us to heaven. Gather this day to pray together in your home—a blessing for the new year, a litany or other prayer to honor Mary, or evening prayer. You can find many prayers on the U.S. Bishop’s website: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).



## January 2—Memorial of Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianen,

### **Bishops and Doctors of the Church**

These two great leaders of the early Church (in the late 300's) were famous for their holiness, their preaching and writing, and for their great friendship. What a wonderful opportunity for us to **reflect on the gift of friendship** in our lives! Take time today to reach out to a friend with a letter, phone call or video chat. Write thank you notes together as a family to those whose friendship you value. Talk with your children about how to be a good friend—a friend that encourages and supports others to grow in holiness. Here's St. Gregory's reflection: "Our single object and ambition was virtue, and a life of hope in the blessings to come. ... We followed the guidance of God's law and spurred each other on to virtue."

Need help reflecting on growing in virtue? Holy Heroes has produced some excellent radio drama programs about the lives of saints that can really inspire us to grow in virtue:

<https://www.holyheroes.com/Audio-CDs-s/28.htm>

## January 3: Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

The word "Epiphany" means "showing"—and this is the day we celebrate the fact that Jesus is Lord and Savior for all people, of any nationality, race or ethnicity. ALL are invited to faith and to receive the redemption He won for us on the cross. Praise God! **Before or after going to Mass, read the Gospel from today's Mass: Matthew 2:1-12.** Talk about the gifts of the Magi and reflect on what they declare about Jesus' identity: gold, that He is king; frankincense, that He is God; myrrh, that He came to die. **This is the traditional day to bless your home.** Here is a great version of a house blessing from the Catholic Culture website:

<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/prayers/view.cfm?id=49>

Sundays are days we set aside to relax, play and pray together. This might be a good day for an active game. Here's one suggestion that you can relate to the feast day today: "**Catch the Camels.**" Blow up several balloons (more balloons than people playing if your family is up to the challenge)—and put grumpy faces on them if you want. Clear out the rooms as much as you can so that no one will trip or run into low furniture while playing.

Tell the family that these balloons are camels in the Magi's caravan—and they have all run away and need to be brought back to the "oasis" where the Magi are camping (use a laundry tub or the bathtub or something else as the oasis). Once you toss all the balloons in the air (the camels have run away), the balloons cannot hit the floor! Using your hands (or wooden spoons/spatulas or wrapping paper/paper towel tubes) keep "bopping" them in the air and move the herd of balloon camels to the oasis. You'll have to work together since there are more balloons than people! See if your family can accomplish the task, then use your phone's stopwatch and see how fast you can go. Record your efforts, then challenge another family to beat your time!



There are some great **documentary and faith films on Formed about the Epiphany**. If you haven't done so already, sign up for a free subscription to Formed through our parish website: [www.stmaryspokane.org](http://www.stmaryspokane.org). Then enjoy a movie night and keep renewing that Christmas spirit within you as we continue through the Christmas season!

***Starting this week, the kids go back to school, parents continue with work—but the Christmas season isn't ending until January 10! Find simple and stress-free ways to maintain that Christmas spirit this week. Keep the Christmas music going, keep the tree and lights and decorations up—and make plans for some family time—perhaps revisit or revise some of the activities already mentioned or use some of the ones described below. Keep exploring food and meals that celebrate the Christmas season—and share with friends and neighbors! One website that always has great suggestions for food to accompany different seasons is Catholic foodie: <https://catholicfoodie.com/category/holidays-2/christmas>***

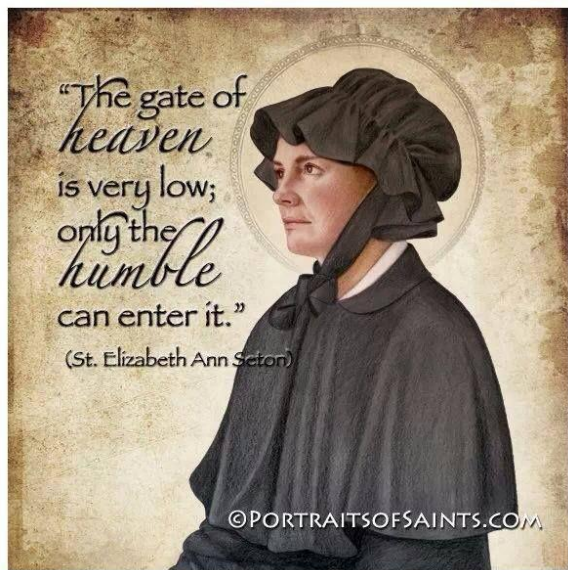
***For more information about the Christmas season, the Teaching Catholic Kids website has a great summary of the season: <https://teachingcatholickids.com/how-long-is-the-christmas-season/>***

***Don't forget to just work in time for reading out loud together as a family—at Christmas, everyone loves children's books! Cozy up in a blanket fort and read!***

#### **January 4: Memorial of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious**

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is our first American-born Saint! This is a special day to celebrate the Catholic Church in America—and to highlight all the contributions of the Catholic Church to our country. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton laid the foundations for Catholic education and she opened orphanages and hospitals and other ministries to the poor. For more information about her life, **your family can watch this video:** <https://youtu.be/ETowIAHQOgg>

Here's a great quote from St. Elizabeth to **discuss as a family:** "What was the first rule of our dear Savior's life? You know it was to do his Father's will. Well, then, the first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills; and thirdly, to do it because it is his will." In what ways could members of your family put this instruction into practice?





## January 5: Memorial of St. John Neumann, Bishop

St. John Neumann, immigrant from Bohemia, was the first US Bishop to be canonized a saint. He worked tirelessly to teach the faith (he learned 12 different languages to reach out to immigrants) and to serve the poor. St. John Neumann introduced the tradition of 40 Hours Devotion to the U.S.—Eucharistic Adoration for 40 hours in a church. **This would be a great day for your family to attend Eucharistic Adoration if possible**—many churches have an adoration chapel, or you can spend time in prayer at home using a Eucharistic theme.

Another way to celebrate the day would be to bake a loaf of a traditional Bohemian Christmas loaf—a tasty and yummy connection to Bishop Neumann’s roots!

<https://www.thespruceeats.com/czech-christmas-bread-vanocka-recipe-1135676>

## January 6: The Twelfth Night!

This is the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas and the traditional day to celebrate the Epiphany. In the United States, the celebration of Epiphany has been moved to the Sunday between Jan 2 and 6, but we can still celebrate the Epiphany on January 6 in our homes on the 12<sup>th</sup> Night. This is a great day to have a **Twelfth Night party for your family**. There are tons of suggestions for food, activities and prayers at the Catholic Culture website:



<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/activities/view.cfm?id=51>

The fish eaters website has a great explanation of the history of the celebration and a delicious King’s Cake recipe for the party:

<https://www.fisheaters.com/epiphanyeve.html>

There are more great ideas at one of my favorite Catholic websites: Catholic Icing. The author has craft, activity and food ideas that really work for busy Catholic families:

<https://www.catholicicing.com/celebrating-the-epiphany-with-catholic-kids/>

## January 10: Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

With this feast day, the liturgical season of Christmas comes to a close: although the Christmas season traditionally doesn’t end until the feast of the Presentation of the Lord at the Temple on February 2—40 days after Christmas.

As you close out the Christmas season and finish putting away all the decorations, this might be a great time for a special dinner to celebrate all your baptisms. Put out mementos (Baptismal certificates, garments, candles and photos) from every person’s Baptism. Talk about the significance of being Baptized and use a Renewal of Baptismal promises on the next page as a family prayer.

## **Renewal of Baptismal Promises**

*At your Baptism, your parents and godparents spoke on your behalf. They promised to raise you according to the Catholic Faith. Every Easter season, you have an opportunity to solemnly renew your Baptismal Promises. You can also renew your Baptismal promises on other special feast days, such as the Baptism of the Lord. The family should gather around a prayer focus that includes baptismal signs (Holy Water, white garment, candle, photos from baptisms, etc.). Begin with the sign of the cross.*

**Leader:** At our baptism, our parents and godparents spoke on our behalf in the presence of God's Church. Today, let us renew the promises we made in baptism, when we rejected Satan and his works and promised to serve God faithfully in his holy catholic Church.

**Leader:** Do you reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God's children?

**All:** I do.

**Leader:** Do you reject the glamor of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin?

**All:** I do.

**Leader:** Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?

**All:** I do.

**Leader:** Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

**All:** I do.

**Leader:** Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

**All:** I do.

**Leader:** Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting?

**All:** I do.

**Leader:** God, the all-powerful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit and forgiven all our sins. May he also keep us faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

**All:** Amen.

**Conclude by sharing a sign of peace, and by making the sign of the cross with Holy Water if possible.**

