



Silent Night

A young Austrian priest, Fr. Joseph Mohr, wrote the words to one of our most beloved Christmas carols, *Silent Night*, over 200 years ago. The text came as an inspiration in the aftermath of war, and remind us that God is present, even in the darkest hour.

This Christmas promises to be unlike others we have known. We may miss some of our traditions, but the peace and joy of the coming of Christ into the world remains and continually redeems and restores us. Perhaps this year gives us the space to focus more fully on the redeeming love of God made manifest in the tiny infant Jesus.

*Silent night, holy
night, Son of God, love's pure light. Radiant beams from thy holy face, with
the dawn of redeeming grace.
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.*

The Christmas Mystery

Jesus was born in a humble stable, into a poor family. Simple shepherds were the first witnesses to this event. In this poverty heaven's glory was made manifest. The Church never tires of singing the glory of this night (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 525).

Each Christmas we continue to sing of this mystery of faith – Jesus Christ was born for us as a little child and eternal God. This mystery, the distinctive sign of our faith, is a miracle of love. Over the centuries, people have tried to put into words the magnitude of Jesus becoming human to save us. This often takes the form of poems or songs. Our Church has a rich tradition of Christmas hymns that help us to understand the meaning of Christmas – the Incarnation of Jesus that forever changed the world over two thousand years ago.

We encourage you to use the following hymns and activities to explore the mystery that, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Family discussion/activities based on traditional Christmas Carols:

- God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen
 - Celebrate the Liturgies of the Season
- Oh Come All Ye Faithful
 - Family Coloring/activity
- Joy to the World
 - Confirmation Activity/Reflection
- Come, O Come, Emmanuel
 - O Antiphons reflection for adults
- Away in a Manger
 - Family Prayer
- The Nativity Story with Cardinal Gregory



God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

*Now to the Lord sing praises, all you within this place. And with true love and charity, each other now embrace.
This holy tide of Christmas, all others shall replace. O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy.*

For Catholics, the Christmas season does not begin until we celebrate the Nativity of Jesus on December 25. However, we celebrate many Christmas traditions from decorating our homes, to baking cookies, and buying gifts in joyful anticipation. As busy as we are, it is important to pause and reflect on the true source of our Christmas joy. A joy grounded in the distinctive sign of our faith – the Incarnation. The Son of God – Jesus – takes on human flesh through the Virgin Mary to save us.

The joy of Christmas comes in Christ and lives in us through the Holy Spirit. This joy cannot be bought. Christian joy comes from knowing that God is always with us.

The birth of Christ is so important that the Church celebrates Christmas as a season – from December 25 until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (January 10). The Christmas hymn, God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen, highlights Christmas as a season when it speaks of the “holy tide” of Christmas.

Find the comfort and joy of Christmas all season long by celebrating the liturgies of the season as a family.

“
Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved.
Pope Francis
”

Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) – December 25

*Holy Day of Obligation

The Christmas season begins with the birth of Jesus. In Bethlehem, the Son of God enters the world as a baby. Mary, Joseph, and the Shepherds hear the glad tidings of the angels and give praise to our newborn King. Praise the Lord Jesus by praying a blessing over your at-home Christmas manger or nativity scene: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/sacramentals-blessings/objects/blessing-of-a-christmas-manger-or-nativity-scene>.

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph – December 27

Christ was born to a simple, poor family, far from their home. The Holy Family gives us a model of loving relationship with one another that keeps God at the center. Our families can mirror the Holy Family by allowing the love of Christ to guide how we treat one another. Make a list of 25 ways you can show your love for one another in this season of Christmas.

Feast of the Holy Innocents – December 28

King Herod was a selfish and jealous man. He worried the ‘newborn King of the Jews’ would be a threat to his power. Not knowing where to find the Christ-child, he sent soldiers to kill all the infant boys of the region. We remember the lives of those holy children martyred for Christ on the Feast of the Holy Innocents. Celebrate the kingship of Christ by honoring the youngest member of the family. Invite them to be ‘King for a day’ by picking the family meal.

Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God – January 1

*Holy Day of Obligation

The Incarnation was made possible through Mary’s fiat – her ‘yes’ to God – which changed the course of human history. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary became the mother of Jesus. The Church celebrates Mary’s role in God’s plan of salvation on the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God. Meditate on Mary’s motherhood by praying the Joyful mysteries of the Rosary as a family.

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord – January 3

*Holy Day of Obligation

Guided by the light of a star, three wise men seek Christ. When they find Him, they bow down to adore Him. The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates Christ who shows us the splendor and glory of God. Bring the light of Christ into your family by praying the Epiphany blessing over your home’s front door. May this blessing be a reminder of the light of Christ as you come and go: <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/sacramentals-blessings/objects/blessing-of-the-home-and-household-on-epiphany>.

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord – January 10

Though many of the Christmas readings center around the Christ-child, the end of the season highlights the start of Christ’s public ministry. The Christmas season ends with the commemoration of the Lord’s baptism by John the Baptist. Jesus was without sin, He did not need to be Baptized. At His Baptism, the Holy Trinity – God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – are revealed to us. The Baptism of the Lord shows us the essential element of our Christian initiation – Baptism. Consider how the grace of Baptism strengthens you to share Christian joy by bringing Christ to others all year long.

O Come, All Ye Faithful

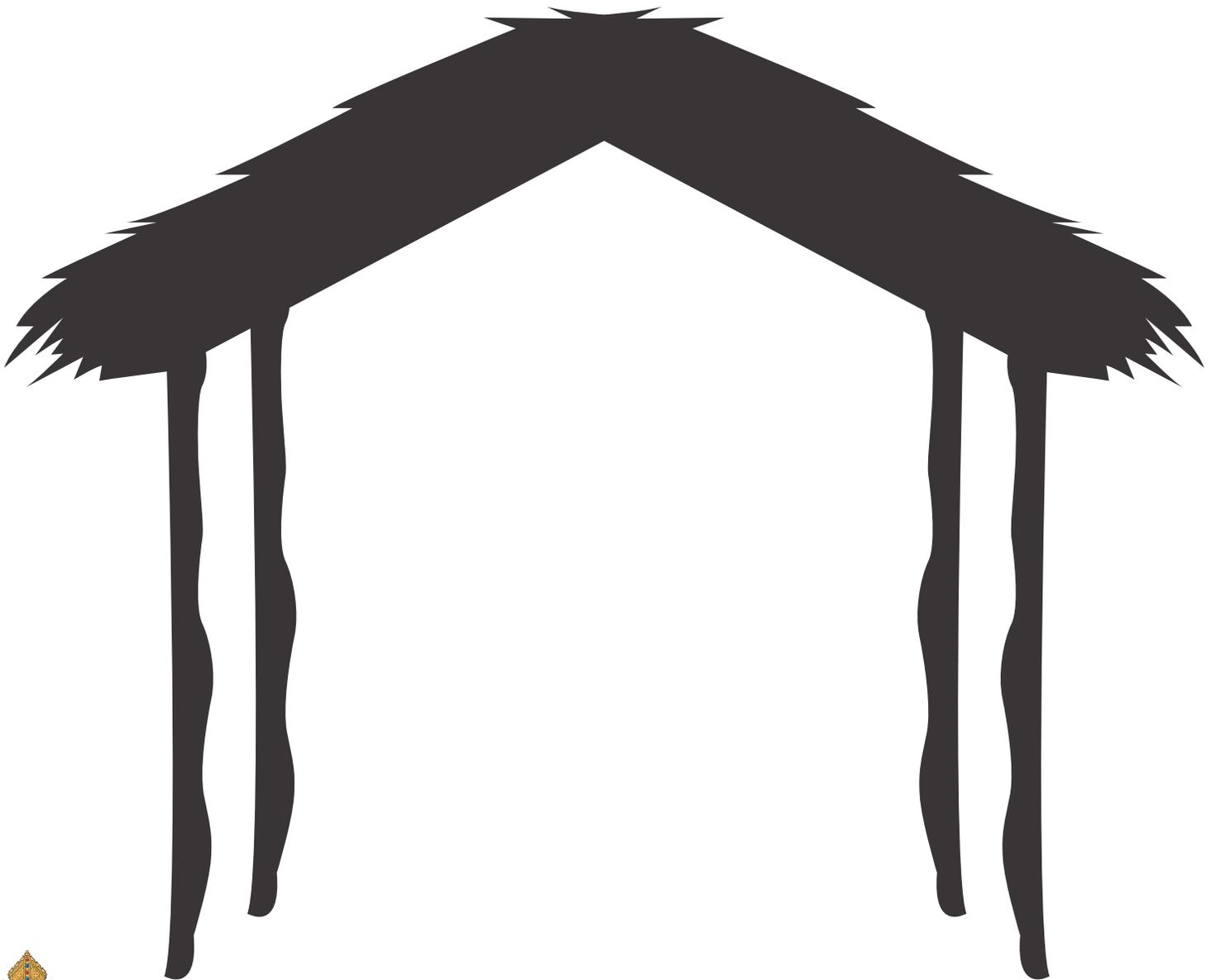
O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant. O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem. Come and behold Him, born the King of angels. O come, let us adore him. O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Like the shepherds, who at the appearance of the angels proclaimed, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us" (Luke 2:15), we are called to set aside busyness of work and school, to come to the stable - to adore Jesus our savior.



In adoration, we acknowledge that God is our creator. We give special honor to the Lord as the "King of Glory" through our respectful silence in the presence of our great and loving God.

Imagine that you were present when the angels appeared to the shepherds and announced the birth of Jesus Christ. Use the space below to draw yourself adoring the newborn Jesus.



Joy to the World, the Savior Reigns!

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And Heaven and nature sing*

Each Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, who enters the world as a baby in a humble manger. This is the mystery of the Incarnation: Jesus became man – even as he remained fully God – in order to save us from sin and reconcile us with God. Too often, we forget the true meaning of Christmas. Many times, we focus our attention more on the gifts, the food, or the family gatherings associated with Christmas than on the reality that Christ loves each of us so much that He came to save us. This does not mean we should not enjoy our Christmas traditions – it means we need to make time for the real joy of Christmas found in Jesus!

Many Christmas carols tell the story of Christ's birth through their lyrics. In the hymn, "Joy to the World," the first verse says that we should make room in our hearts for Jesus. Advent and Christmas are special seasons that invite us to make room in our hearts for the Lord. As you prepare for Confirmation, you are preparing to be joined more closely to God and His mission of love. Through the Sacrament of Confirmation, you will be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Good News of Christ to the world. Sharing the Good News of the birth of Christ is one aspect of the story of God's redeeming love. As a disciple of Christ, you are called – like the angels and shepherds – to go out to the world and proclaim that wondrous love of Jesus. Especially during the busy Christmas season, when many may forget about Christ, each of us has the responsibility to share the joy of the Incarnation with all we meet.

Listen to the lyrics of the song 'Joy to the World' by Pentatonix:

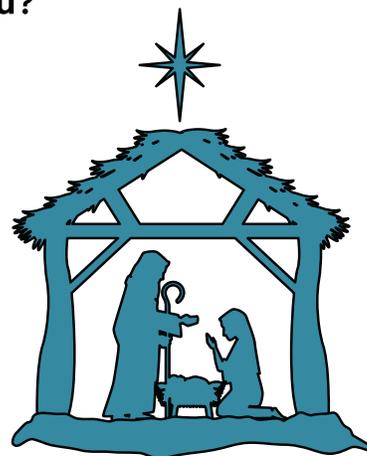
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Xo64Q2ucQ8>

What word or phrase sticks out to you?

Repeat the sounding joy by spreading Christmas cheer and proclaiming the Good News of Christ's birth to all your family and friends.

Give thanks to the Lord for the Incarnation:

Dear Jesus, help me understand the mystery of the Incarnation that I may appreciate the true meaning of Christmas. Strengthen me with your Spirit so that I can share the wonders of your love joyfully with all my family and friends. Amen.





O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

"For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man."

The Nicene Creed

In the *Nicene Creed*, the Church professes the distinctive mystery of the Christian faith – the Incarnation – the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Jesus, the Son of God, took on human flesh to reconcile us with God, that we might know God's love, and to be our model of holiness. The Church celebrates Christmas as the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord Jesus. Naming this as a solemnity marks the birth of Christ as a feast of great importance. To prepare for such a great feast, the Church celebrates a season of preparation before Christmas for the faithful to ready their hearts. The season of Advent is a time of joyful expectation and expresses our anticipation of the arrival of our redeemer and savior, Jesus Christ.

The season of Advent culminates in the Octave (eight days) before Christmas – December 17 through 23. In these final days of waiting, the Church invites us to pray the 'O Antiphons.' The 'O Antiphons' are short prayers traditionally sung during Evening Prayer as part of the Liturgy of the Hours. Each prayer highlights a title given for the coming Messiah in the book of Isaiah.

Many may be familiar with the 'O Antiphons' as they are the inspiration for the familiar Christmas hymn, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. Join the Church in joyful expectation by praying with the lyrics from this song. Meditate on the meaning of each Messianic title. As you pray, consider how these titles represent the Lord, present in your life.

O Wisdom – December 17 – Isaiah 11:2-3

*O come, Thou Wisdom from on high, And order all things far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show, And teach us in her ways to go.*

O Lord of Might – December 18 – Isaiah 11:4-5

*O come, Thou Lord of might, Who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times did give the law, In cloud, and majesty, and awe.*

O Root of Jesse – December 19 – Isaiah 11:1

*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse's stem, From ev'ry foe deliver them
That trust Thy mighty power to save, And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.*

O Key of David – December 20 – Isaiah 9:6; 22:22

*O come, Thou Key of David, come, And open wide our heav'nly home,
Make safe the way that leads on high, That we no more have cause to sigh.*

O Radiant Dawn – December 21 – Isaiah 9:1-2

*O come, Thou Dayspring from on high, And cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night And death's dark shadow put to flight.*

O King of the Nations – December 22 – Isaiah 9:6-7

*O come, Desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid every strife and quarrel cease and fill the world with heaven's peace.*

O Emmanuel – December – Isaiah 7:14

*O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.*

***Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.***



Be near me, Lord Jesus;

I ask you to stay.

Close by me forever,

and love me, I pray.

Bless all the dear children in your tender care.

And fit us for heaven to live with you there.

Amen

(from *Away in a Manger*)

