

Growing in FAITH™

Discovering hope and joy in the Catholic faith.

December 2019

ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE PARISH

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One Minute Meditations

St. Maria di Rosa

Born "Paula" in Brescia, Italy,

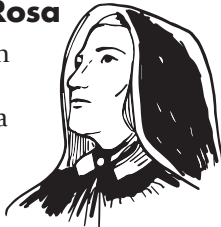
Maria di Rosa

was the daughter of a mill owner and a countess. Coming from a wealthy family didn't spare her from difficulty. She lost her mother when young. At seventeen years old, she left school to work with her father at the mill. During the cholera epidemic of 1836, she cared for the sick. In 1840, she founded the Handmaids of Charity to care for the wounded during the wars.

Agent of change

True conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Salvation and faith are gifts from God – gifts that are not ours to give. Yet, believers are called to join with the Holy Spirit to bring others to God. When we have a strong and personal relationship with Jesus, we can be his agents of change.

"Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."
(Isaiah 40:5).



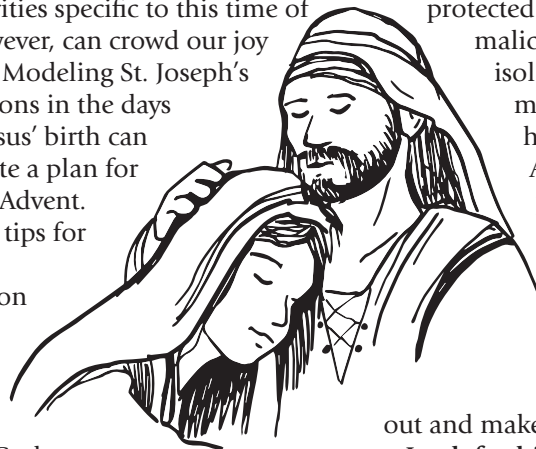
The joyful expectation of Advent

Jesus' birth at Christmas is real and amazing evidence of God's love. The priorities specific to this time of year, however, can crowd our joy and awe. Modeling St. Joseph's preparations in the days before Jesus' birth can help create a plan for our own Advent. Try these tips for joyful expectation of our Savior's birth.

Create silence. God found the quiet he needed in St. Joseph's life to speak and be heard over the noise of the carpenter's shop, the needs of neighbors, the demands of tax collectors. In the silence St. Joseph created just for him, God was able to work miracles.

Keep out the devil. When Joseph found out Mary was pregnant, he protected her from the evil of malicious gossip and isolation. He helped her to make a God-centered home filled with Love. Although the devil is powerful, he cannot go where he is not permitted. When we stay close to the Sacraments and live a God-centered life, we, too, keep the devil out and make room for Love.

Look for him. Can you imagine the joy with which St. Joseph expected Jesus' coming? We celebrate Jesus' arrival in Bethlehem with joy. We can joyfully welcome him into our lives now. And, with joy we can look forward to Christ's coming in glory on the Last Day.



Why Do Catholics Do That?

Why do Catholics celebrate Christmas after December 26?

The Catholic Christmas is not just one day but an entire liturgical season. It begins with the vigil Mass on Christmas Eve and ends on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (January 12th this year). During the celebration of Christmas,



we rejoice in the realization of God's plan for our salvation. God became man to save us. Thus, the Church makes sure we have enough time — almost a month — to fully celebrate such a joyful, hope-filled, destiny-altering event.

Open your heart to the Christmas promise

This time of year reminds us of our hope for a future of peace. But we cannot achieve this peace on our own. We must open our hearts to the promise of Christmas.

“One nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again” (Isaiah 2:4). Violence flourishes if the world accepts it as inevitable. The world can change if the love of the Christmas Child takes root in our hearts. Peace flows from hearts that love.

“The poor will eat their fill; those who seek



the Lord will offer praise” (Psalm 22:27). Peace spreads more easily when all have enough. These days the poor are everywhere and people are struggling to hold onto hope. If we each make our holiday charitable efforts a year-round habit, perhaps the words of the psalmist will come true.

“The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). This Christmas we can once again rekindle our own sense of innocence and hope.

from Scripture

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23, Trust God like St. Joseph did

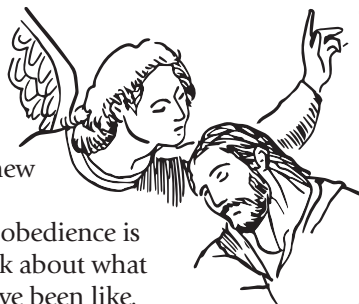
By the time Mary gave birth to Jesus, St. Joseph was used to following orders from God without question. So when the angel appeared to him in his sleep urging him to flee to Egypt, Joseph obeyed immediately. He trusted that God would take care of him and his new family.

Joseph’s unquestioning obedience is remarkable when we think about what the birth of Jesus must have been like. Mary and Joseph had traveled in the last stages of her pregnancy from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Whether on foot or donkey, it was a dirty, exhausting journey.

Once there, there was nowhere to stay except with the animals. After a short time, they fled to Egypt to escape danger, and stayed there for some years without family or friends.

Through it all, Joseph trusted God to protect his family.

Being perfect didn’t shield the Holy Family from experiencing pain and difficulty much like we do. Yet Scripture tells us that Mary and Joseph found strength from their faith in God and were guided by his Word. We can do the same.



Q & A Why does the Church year begin in Advent?

The Church has a liturgical year with its own seasons that help us to mark events that are important to Catholics. However, the Church year doesn’t start

on January 1, or even on December 25 — when we celebrate Christ’s birthday.

Instead, it begins on the first Sunday of Advent, the season before Christmas.



Advent is the perfect season for new beginnings. It’s a season of preparation: the King of Kings is coming! There are three “arrivals” of Christ to prepare for and celebrate: as an infant at Bethlehem, at Mass in the Eucharist, and as the King of Glory at the end of time.

In order to properly greet such a Guest, the Church sets aside this time for us to purify our hearts and souls. Whether that means being with God in prayer, attending Confession, volunteering in the community or cleaning house, Advent is the time for it. The Church wants us to begin the year well by preparing to welcome the King who comes to “make all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

Feasts & Celebrations

Dec. 1 – First Sunday in Advent. During this season, we anticipate Christ’s coming. Catholics around the world light candles in an Advent wreath to signal the coming of the light of Christ.

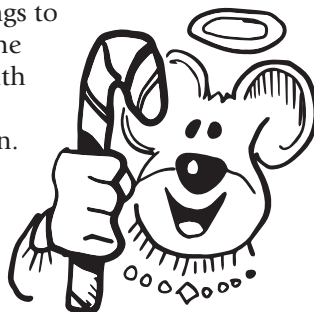
Dec. 9 – Feast of the Immaculate Conception (1854). This feast day commemorates that Mary was conceived in St. Anne’s womb without Original Sin. Attending Mass is a wonderful way to celebrate.

Dec. 9 – St. Juan Diego (1548). St. Juan Diego was visited by the Blessed Mother at Tepeyac Hill in Mexico. She

asked that a chapel be built and sent him to the bishop with roses as a sign. When the roses were emptied from his cloak, it retained the image of Our Lady which can still be seen today.

Dec. 21 – St. Peter Canisius (1597). Born in Holland, he was ordained into the Society of Jesus and worked strenuously through his writings and teachings to safeguard the Catholic faith after the Reformation.

His work, *The Catechism*, is still used today.



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