BLESSINGS AND PRAYERS FOR THE Christmas SEASON

CHRISTMAS DAILY PRAYER
Jesus Christ, Word of God, always be on my lips. Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Jesus Christ, Prince of peace, always guide my actions, Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Jesus Christ, Light from light, always illuminate my way, Gloria in excelsis Deo!

TABLE PRAYER FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON
O come, let us adore him!

May the meal shared at this table provide the strength to follow your way as we celebrate your glorious birth, O Christ.

O come, let us adore him!

May the blessing of food be nourishment to proclaim glad tidings as we hear the voice of the herald angels.

O come, let us adore him!

May these Christmas days of grace let your love shine forth in the world as we behold your humble birth.

O come, let us adore him!

Let us adore him, Christ the Lord! May every meal and every life be blessed during this joyful Christmas season. Amen.

EPHAPHANY HOUSE BLESSING
Items needed: chalk and a small bottle of holy water. Gather with family members, friends, and perhaps some neighbors at the front door.

Leader: In the (+) name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us pray: Christus mansionem benedicat. May Christ bless this house, Amen.

With chalk we sign this doorway, along with four crosses of the seasons and the numerals of the new year.

[20 + C + M + B + 18]

Leader (or other Reader):
A reading from the Letter to the Galatians.
So then, while there is time, let us do good for all people, especially those who are of the household of faith.
The Word of the Lord
Each room is sprinkled with holy water.

Living room:
Bring us to live with you one day in heaven.
Bless this room, O Lord. Amen.

Kitchen:
You prepare for us a heavenly banquet.
Bless this room, O Lord. Amen.

Dining room:
Feed us at your celestial feast.
Bless this room, O Lord. Amen.

Bedrooms:
In you alone we rest peacefully.
Bless this room, O Lord. Amen.

Bathroom:
Cleanse us from all uncleanliness.
Bless this room, O Lord. Amen.

All return to the front door to pray together.

Our Father . . .
All are sprinkled with holy water.
Bless this household through all days to come, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

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CELEBRATING SAINT STEPHEN

Tradition tells us that Saint Stephen’s task in the early Church was organizing aid for the poor. Beginning sometime in the nineteenth century, British-influenced countries have observed Boxing Day on December 26th, Saint Stephen’s feast. Families that were better off would offer Christmas boxes full of money, clothing, or food to servants, errand boys, and the poor.

This tradition offers us a chance to shift the focus of the day after Christmas. Instead of braving the malls, why not make this a day to take stock of possessions—to examine what things could be used to bless those who are less fortunate?

Here are some ideas:

**Closets:** Do you or your children have so many clothes that you have to box up out-of-season items? Did you receive new clothing or accessories for Christmas? Can they replace older items that are still in good enough shape to pass on to family members, friends, homeless or children’s shelters, or even donation boxes like USAgain? If not, find a PlanetAid box, which recycles fabric and uses the proceeds to help the developing world.

**Storage:** Some people rent units to keep things they don’t have room for in their homes. Is it time to give some of that away? Do you still have boxes of outgrown baby or kids’ clothes that can bless a children’s shelter or even the school nurse’s office at a school in a low-income neighborhood?

**Kitchen:**
Do you have any non-perishables that could go to a food bank? Do you have a “junk drawer” full of kitchen gadgets you haven’t used? Coffee mugs? Seasonal towels that are always forgotten? Pass them on.

**Toys:**
Do you have broken toys or partial sets that can be recycled? Are there simply too many toys in your home? Use this as an opportunity to teach your kids about sacrifice and charity. Have them choose a given number to donate.

**Mental clutter:**
Examine your ongoing commitments. Have you taken on so much that your mind is constantly buzzing? Is it time to leave some tasks to others?

The feast of Saint Stephen, the first martyr, is a chance to re-orient ourselves after the busyness of the commercial Christmas season. By clearing out the clutter in our own lives, we can make more room for Christ.

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1. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION. If you’ve never considered spiritual direction before, make this the year. Priests, sisters, and even lay people are trained to listen and gently nudge you to see the presence of God working in your life and hear God’s voice calling.

2. DAILY QUIET. In the digital age, every waking moment is filled with stimulation. It’s exhausting, but more importantly, it drowns out the voice of God. Take ten minutes a day, or even five, to “be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

3. ATTEND WEEKDAY MASS ONCE A WEEK. The crazier life is, the more important that brief respite from the things of the world becomes.

4. CELEBRATE THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION MORE FREQUENTLY. The Church asks us, at minimum, to receive the sacrament before Easter, and preferably before Christmas. For many, communal penance services offered during Lent and Advent are less than satisfying. Instead, make time to go to the weekly confession times in your local parish.

5. GET INVOLVED IN YOUR PARISH. If you already volunteer, examine your commitments to be sure you are making the best use of your time and unique gifts. If you have never (or rarely) volunteered, think about your skill set. Can you be a catechist? Provide child care in the nursery? Coordinate an enrichment night for married couples? Be a lector or extraordinary minister of the Eucharist? Visit the sick? Fold letters? If you get stuck, your parish office likely has lots of suggestions!

6. EXPLORE A TEACHING OF THE CHURCH THAT IS DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO ACCEPT. Approach the topic with a mind willing to learn and a heart willing to hear the voice of God. Study the catechism or papal writings, and don’t be afraid to be honest with God in prayer.

7. SET ASIDE SUNDAY AS A TRUE DAY OF REST. In this interconnected age, work often continues through the weekend by email and text, even when it isn’t really necessary. Stay off work email. Minimize shopping, lest Sunday becomes “errand day.” The Sabbath was made for us (Mark 2:27) because we need it. Use it!
This story, like so many others in scripture, is presented to us only as a sketch, leaving much untold. In recent years it has become a lightning rod, attracting controversy in social media circles as the worldwide refugee crisis explodes and Christians struggle to balance prudence with Christian responsibility.

Although the situation of modern refugees does not mirror exactly that of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, we cannot dismiss the comparison altogether. The Holy Family had to leave their homeland to avoid violence and death; they had no certainty of when, if ever, they might be able to return.

In fact, throughout salvation history, the people of God have found themselves displaced. Noah sought refuge from the flood. The Israelites went to Egypt to escape famine and left it to escape slavery, wandering forty years in the desert before finding a home at last.

In the Old Testament, God reminds the Israelites that they were once aliens, and the land of Canaan was given to them as gift—so they must act likewise in their dealings with others. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel consistently urged the Israelites to welcome the outcasts of other countries.

And of course Jesus referred to himself as one without a place to rest his head, and emphasized that at the final judgment, the true disciple will be the one who, among other things, welcomed the stranger (Matthew 25).

Our United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reminds us that in our whenever we encounter immigrants, migrants, or refugees among us, we have encountered Christ.

To learn more about the Church’s official teachings on this topic: 

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Beloved in the Lord:

In the fullness of time, the Word, who was with God from the beginning, came to earth in the flesh, to pitch his tent among us. This is the meaning underneath “and came to dwell among us” in the Gospel account I wrote, and it is the mystery we celebrate during this holy season.

In the days of my forefathers, to look upon the face of God meant death. Yet in these later days, God walked among us, speaking to us, touching us, healing us, becoming one of us in every way except sin. He came as a light in the darkness, a Word of hope to bridge the distance between the Father and his wayward children. He came to teach us a way that would replace that distance with intimacy. He came to call us to a commandment of love far beyond the soulless law that multiplies earthly burdens.

And what is this commandment of love? It is a command to serve. This lesson Christ himself taught us on the night when he removed his robe, wrapped a towel around himself, and then, like any lowly servant, washed our feet.

The story may be so familiar that it fails to surprise, but for those of us who were gathered in that room, what an impression it made! Jesus was our leader, our teacher; we hung on his words, we puzzled over them; we had come to recognize him as the one long promised by God. If anything, we should have been ministering to him. Yet that night, he placed himself below us.

He washed our feet, each and every one—not only Peter, who would lead the Church after the Resurrection, but also Judas, who was hours away from betraying him. We knew in that moment that we were seeing our mission as disciples. We—all of us in that room and you today—are called to do just as he did.

This is why the Word came to earth, why the Word became flesh: he came to show us how to live as we were meant to from the dawn of Creation. He showed us what it means when God takes on human form—the wonder and the beauty, the suffering and the triumph, that can bond humanity to God and God to humanity.

In this season, let us never forget what it truly means that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

John

Christian tradition has long identified John the Evangelist with John the Apostle. His account of the Passion is always read on Good Friday, and extensive portions of his Gospel are read during the same year as the Gospel of Mark. His feast day is December 27th.