



What's What

A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.

Christmas

The actual date of the birth of Jesus is unknown. None of the gospels state the date, nor do we have any early traditions that tell us the birth date of Christ. Scholars can tell us Jesus was probably born 8-6 B.C.E. but that's as close as we can get. As we all know, the Western church celebrates the birth of Christ on December 25, and the Eastern church celebrates his birth on January 6.

The early Christian church did not celebrate the birth of Christ, instead they focused on the weekly celebration of the mystery of his death and resurrection. It wasn't until the 4th century that a Nativity feast began. Christmas became very popular during the Middle Ages, and along with it many of the religious traditions still associated with it. As people from the barbarian tribes of Europe began to celebrate Christmas,

they brought with them elements from their own pre-Christian winter traditions, many of which we maintain today.

As time went on the popularity of Christmas began to outweigh the importance of Easter. As part of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, some groups began to react to this problem. For example, the Puritans in England outlawed any observance of Christmas under the pain of punishment.

In the US many of our Christmas tradition were brought here during the 1800's from Ireland and central Europe. The idea of a Christmas tree was brought from Germany; the Irish put lights in the windows of their homes; Catholic immigrants brought the popularity of Midnight Mass and displaying a Nativity scene. A blending of tradi-

tions from many denominations evolved into how we celebrate Christmas today.

The Catholic church doesn't celebrate Christmas on just one day, instead there is an entire season dedicated to Christmas: December 25, through the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (which occurs on Jan 13 this year). During the Christmas season we celebrate many Feast days including: the Feast of St Stephen (the first Martyr); the Feast of St John, the apostle; the Feast of the Holy Innocents; the Feast of the Holy Family; and Epiphany. During this time we continue to sing Christmas songs at liturgies and remember the story of the birth of Jesus. Consider extending your celebration of Christmas through the next few weeks. As schedules ease and demands are less, you may be able to find more meaning in the Incarnation.

Issue 4 — Christmas

December 23, 2007

Things to talk about:

- What's your earliest Christmas memory?
- What is your favorite part of the Christmas season?
- Which part of the Christmas story is your favorite?
- How could you share the true meaning of Christmas with someone who doesn't know what it is?



"The Twelve Days of Christmas"

There is an urban legend that says in England during the years 1558-1829, persecuted Catholics used the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" as a tool to teach about the Catholic faith. Several people have attempted to debunk the legend and several people have tried to prove it. In reality, there is very little evidence either

way. Even though we may not be able to prove it's use as a Catechetical tool hundreds of years ago, we can surely use it as a tool today.

- * Each gift mentioned is a gift to us from God, referred to as our "true love" in the song
- * *A partridge in the pear tree* is the Son of God

- * *Two turtle doves* are the Old and New Testaments
- * *Three French hens* are the tree theological virtues: faith, hope, and love
- * *Four calling birds* are the four Gospels
- * *Five golden rings* are the first five books of the Old Testament—the Pentateuch
- * *Six geese a-laying* are the six days of creation
- * *Seven swans a swimming*

- are the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit and the 7 Sacraments
- * *Eight maids of milking* are the eight beatitudes
- * *Nine ladies dancing* are the 9 fruits of the Holy Spirit
- * *Ten lords of leaping* are the Ten Commandments
- * *Eleven pipers piping* are the 11 faithful apostles
- * *Twelve drummers drumming* are the 12 points of doctrine in the Apostles Creed.



Saint in the Spotlight — Saint Stephen, the First Martyr

All we know of Stephen is found in Acts of the Apostles, chapters six and seven. It is enough to tell us what kind of man he was:

At that time, as the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenist (Greek-speaking) Christians complained about the Hebrew-speaking Christians, saying that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table. Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task, whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit.... (Acts 6:1-5)

Acts says that Stephen was a man filled with grace and power, who worked great wonders among the people. Certain Jews, members of the Synagogue of Roman Freedmen, debated with Stephen but proved no match for the wisdom and

spirit with which he spoke. They persuaded others to make the charge of blasphemy against him. He was seized and carried before the Sanhedrin.

In his speech, Stephen recalled God's guidance through Israel's history, as well as Israel's idolatry and disobedience. He then claimed that his persecutors were showing this same spirit. "[Y]ou always oppose the holy Spirit; you are just like your ancestors" (Acts 7:51b).

His speech brought anger from the crowd. "But [Stephen], filled with the

holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God....' They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him....As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit....Lord, do not hold this sin against them'" (Acts 7:55-56, 58a, 59, 60b).

www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay

Advent Connections to Doctrine & Tradition

- Jesus Christ is the incarnate love of God (DCE 12)
- Mary and Joseph typify saintly faith, courage, and compassion (NDC 29; CCC 1812-1829)
- Mary submitted to God's will to conceive by the Holy Spirit (CCC 484-507)

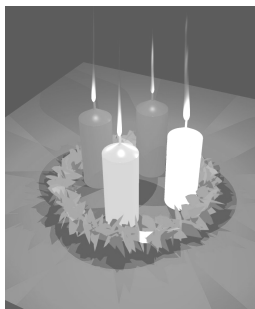
CCC: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; GS: *Gaudium et Spes*; NDC: *National Directory for Catechesis*; DCE: *Deus Caritas Est*. These documents can be found online at www.vatican.va or www.usccb.org.

Want to know more?

Would you like to know more about Advent? Check out the following books or websites for more information:

- *Catholic Customs & Traditions*, Greg Dues, Twenty-Third Publications, 2003
- Advent and Christmas Videos on YouTube <http://youtube.com/americanatholic>
- <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>

These are just suggestions. In providing these we assume no responsibility for, nor do we necessarily endorse these books or websites, their content, or their sponsoring organizations.



**Lord God,
we praise you for creating man,
and still more for restoring him
in Christ.
Your Son shared our weakness:
may we share his glory,
for he lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.**

*Opening Prayer from December 25,
Nativity of the Lord: Mass During the Day*

"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement [Draft]:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.