



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 11 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.

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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?



A Christmas Quiz

Test your knowledge with this challenging quiz. All the answers can be found in the first and second chapters of Matthew and Luke.

1. In Matthew's Gospel how many generations are recorded between Abraham and the Messiah?
2. How many gifts did the Wise Men bring to Jesus?

3. In the accounts of Jesus' birth how many visits from angels are there?
4. How many months did Mary stay with her cousin Elizabeth while they were both pregnant?
5. How old was Anna the prophetess?
6. How many months had Elizabeth been pregnant

when the angel appeared to Mary?

7. How many different names are given to Jesus in these passages?
8. How many times do angels say 'Do not be afraid'?
6. How many prophecies are quoted from the Old Testament in the Matthew passages?
10. How many days old was

Jesus when he was circumcised and given his name?

1: 42 2: 3 3: 6 4: 3 5: 84 6: 6 7: 12
(Immanuel, Jesus, Messiah, King of the Jews, Christ, Son of David, Son of Abraham, Son of the Most High, Son of God, Lord, Saviour, Nazarene). 8: 4 9: 5 10: 8

Answers

Activity Source: *Feasting for Festivals* by Jan Wilson, Lion Publishing Corporation, Batavia, Illinois, 1990



Saint in the Spotlight — Saint John of Kanty (1390?-1473)

On Tuesday, December 23, the church remembers St John of Kanty.

John was a country lad who made good in the big city and the big university of Kraków, Poland. After brilliant studies he was ordained a priest and became a professor of theology. The inevitable opposition which saints encounter led to his being ousted by rivals and sent to be a parish priest at Olkusz. An extremely humble man, he did his best, but his best was not to the liking of his parishioners. Besides, he was afraid of the responsibilities of his position. But in the end he won his people's hearts. After some time he returned to Kraków and taught Scripture for the remainder of his life.

He was a serious man, and humble, but known to all the poor of Kraków for his kindness. His goods and his money were always at their disposal, and time and

again they took advantage of him. He kept only the money and clothes absolutely needed to support himself. He slept little, and then on the floor, ate sparingly, and took no meat. He made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, hoping to be martyred by the Turks. He made four pilgrimages to Rome, carrying his luggage on his back. When he was warned to look after his health, he was quick to point out that, for all their austerity, the fathers of the desert lived remarkably long lives.

Comment:

John of Kanty is a typical saint: He was kind, humble and generous, he suffered opposition and led an austere, penitential life. Most Christians in an affluent society can understand all the ingredients except the last: Anything more than mild self-discipline seems reserved for athletes and ballet dancers. Christmas is a good time at least to reject self-indulgence.

www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay

Want to know more?

Would you like to know more about Christmas? 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/american catholic>
- <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.

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.

Blessing of a Christmas Tree

God of all creation,
 we praise you for this tree
 which brings beauty and memories and the
 promise of life to our home.
 May your blessing be upon all who gather around this tree,
 all who keep the Christmas festival by its lights.
 We wait for the coming of the Christ,
 the days of everlasting justice and peace.
 You are our God, living and reigning, for ever and ever. Amen

From "Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers" USCCB

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

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement:

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.