



What is the real meaning of Christmas?

It certainly is not the crass commercialism of “The Holidays”. Any materialistic emphasis is pretty much the antithesis of the real meaning of Christmas. It isn’t really that our societal celebration of Christmas is that much more consumerist than the rest of the year. The rest of the year is pretty commercial and materialistic also. After all, what makes Presidents Day a good day for a mattress sale? It may not be that much more consumerist than any other holiday, but an authentic Christmas should buck that trend, not perpetuate it.

Neither is the true meaning of Christmas whatever it is that the Hallmark Channel projects as “Christmas”, with their slightly different versions of basically the same Christmastime romance storyline. I know their movies have their die-hard fans, so I’ll say no more for the sake of my own safety.

Some say that Christmas is about family. That is at least getting closer to the truth. Especially for those for whom (Christian) faith is not really central to their lives, Christmas is often about getting together with family and observing traditions: decorations, food, gifts, and songs about cold weather and reindeer (but not Jesus Christ). Now, those things certainly aren’t bad, but they are not inherently about *Christmas*. Folks in the Southern hemisphere, where it’s Summer right now, never experience a “white Christmas”. Well, I suppose if you go far enough south, you get to Antarctica, where they always have a white Christmas, and a white Valentine’s Day, and a white Mother’s Day.

Christmas *is* about family, but not how most of us usually think about it. Christmas is about the family of God, and how that family has expanded through the history of mankind: from Adam and Eve (a couple) to Noah’s family, to Abraham’s tribe, to Moses’ nation, to David’s kingdom (which included non-Israelite peoples). Finally, God sent His Son to bring the entire world into His family.

Through the birth of God the Son, Jesus Christ, God offers us the possibility of entering into an intimate family relationship with Him. Jesus enters our world, our history, our humanity, at a particular place, at a particular time, as part of a particular family, so that people of all places and all times and in every family might accept becoming a child of God the Father. At the first Christmas, Jesus Christ became part of our human family, so that we might become part of His divine family.

It is important that Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, took on our humanity as part of a recognizable human family, with Mary as his mother and Joseph as his (step) father. He did not suddenly appear out of nowhere, nor did He come from the clouds in a blaze of glory. Jesus was born. Born of a woman. Born into a family. Born into a family history. Born into a family’s troubles. Born into a family’s joys. God chose to be born into the fullness of our humanity, so that we might be able to accept his invitation to let him transform and redeem our own particular human reality. Had he appeared in the clouds amidst thunder and lightning, we mere humans would have been afraid, unable to approach Him, unable to engage with Him.

But He came to us in a manner both normal and extraordinary: a baby born of a woman, but a woman who remained a virgin. Jesus Christ *is* God, but he is an approachable God, a God involved in our lives, a God who wants us to share our lives with Him, so that He can share His Divine life with us.

Christmas, then, is about family. A child is born. A child who can bring all mankind together as brothers and sisters. As believers, we are His brothers and sisters, and so siblings to each other. We then are a family, the family of God. Yet we cannot be the family of God by ourselves. Our relationship with God is *never* “just me and Him”. Jesus was born into a family to show us that to have an authentic and life-giving relationship with Him means that we also have a strong relationship with His blessed Mother and with the saints, His brothers and sisters who now live directly in His presence in Heaven. Having a real relationship with Jesus Christ also means that we are in a living relationship with his brothers and sisters still on Earth, with the community of believers in the Church. Again, our relationship with God is not something abstract, just in our heads, but it must be lived out in our own particular place and particular time. It must be lived out, not virtually, but in real life, with real people, sharing real problems, celebrating real triumphs. It must be lived out in a concrete community.

If you have not been active in your local parish community (whether that is IHM or you are visiting from elsewhere), I invite you, rather I plead with you, for the sake of your own ability to receive life from Jesus Christ, to become an active member of your local parish family. Yes, attend Mass regularly on Sundays and Holy Days, but also seek to become woven into the fabric of the life of the parish. As important and powerful as Mass is, it is not the extent of our life of faith. Mass is “the source and summit of the whole Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium* or Dogmatic

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Constitution on the Church *Light of the World*, #11, in some translations “fount and apex”).

Rivers have a source, but the point is that they are rivers; their water does not remain cooped up at the source, but flows to give life downstream. Mountains have summits, but those mountaintops cannot exist without the base of the mountain. To climb to the top, you also have to climb the base. Likewise, in our Christian life, we must allow the graces of the Mass to flow and give life to our world, and we must do the work of climbing: taking part in the other sacraments that prepare us for the Eucharist, praying individually and in common with our family and community, sharing God’s goodness and being instruments of His love in our works of mercy, forming bonds with other believers in our local church so that we can support each other through highs and lows.

In our parish, I see parishioners caring for fellow parishioners in very concrete ways. Some who cannot drive are brought to church or taken to doctor’s appointments and grocery stores by fellow parishioners they met here. I see children being cared for while their parents are at work. I see parishioners who are between homes staying with other parishioners. I see parishioners supporting each other through messy custody battles, and serious illness, and crises of faith. I see a lot of bonds and relationships that have formed because these parishioners didn’t remain anonymous, but choose to become part of our community and became involved in activities, groups and ministries. With Jesus Christ born in their hearts, they have given of themselves, and received the love of God through fellow believers.

Jesus Christ is born at Christmas, not to remain a gurgling baby, but eventually to give of Himself fully, that we might know the love of God. And he asks us to join Him in that work, giving of ourselves and forming tangible, concrete relationships with each other, so that He might work in and through us to share and multiply that Love which transforms our world and brings us to the joy of heaven and into the family of God.

Fr. Marco

MASS IN THE PARKING LOT As a reminder, during IHM’s weekend Masses we have in-parking lot options available. While parked at IHM, if you tune to radio station 99.7 you can hear the Mass broadcasted live. If you park in the second, smaller parking lot, we will bring out Communion at the appropriate time.

ONLINE SURVEY FOR THE SYNOD The entire Catholic Church is called to participate in the upcoming Synod of Bishops! In preparation for the international Synod of Bishops in 2023, Pope Francis wants your input on the topic of “For a Synodal Church, Communion, Participation, and Mission.” People of all ages, Catholics and non-Catholics, are invited to give their feedback on the Church’s mission. To participate in the survey, visit www.adw.org/synod.

LAZARUS COMMITTEE The Lazarus Committee provides funeral repasts for the funerals of active and registered parishioners. If interested in joining the Lazarus committee or for more information, please contact Pat at 301-863-5133 or Linda at 240-298-5264.

IT SHOULDN’T HURT AT HOME The Catholic community cares about families experiencing violence and unhealthy relationships. Visit www.CatholicsforFamilyPeace.org to learn more about this issue, how to help, who to call, and the rich Catholic teaching that supports survivors. If you need help now, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 800-799-7233 (24 hours); 800-787-3224 (TTY); www.ndvh.org to find assistance near you.



ALMOST IMMACULATE IHM THRIFT STORE is in need of help! Please stop by the store during operating hours to check out what we do. Then, if you want to help, please contact Deacon Mike 240-542-8369. We are located in the Kerr House (white building at the street entrance). The thrift store is open Fridays from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, and Saturdays from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm. Donations (no clothing) accepted during those hours. The thrift shop supports the food pantry and our local community, so stop by and see what you can do!

IHM MUSIC MINISTRY If you are interested in sharing your musical talents with the parish, there is a place for you in this ministry! Please call Mary at 240-434-8876 (leave a message!).

BULLETIN DEADLINE Please email your submission to bulletin@ihmrcc.org by Wednesday at 10 am prior to the Sunday of publication. All entries are subject to editing.

SVDP OF IHM GIVING PROGRAM A very grateful thank you to all who participated in the SVDP of IHM giving trees! Sixty-four families received Christmas food baskets and 139 children received Christmas gifts! We are very appreciative of your generosity. Also a very large and grateful thank you to all the SVDP of IHM volunteers who made the Christmas Giving Program a success. It could not have been accomplished without your time and talent! Everyone have a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

DECEMBER 25 & 26, 2021



December 27 — January 2

Monday	1 Jn 1:1-4/Ps 97:1-2, 5-6, 11-12/ Jn 20:1a and 2-8
9:00 am	The Killian Family (L)
Tuesday	1 Jn 1:5—2:2/Ps 124:2-3, 4-5, 7cd-8/ Mt 2:13-18
5:30 pm	Nisha and James Mahler (L)
Wednesday	1 Jn 2:3-11/Ps 96:1-2a, 2b-3, 5b-6/ Lk 2:22-35
9:00 am	Sitch Family (L)
Thursday	1 Jn 2:12-17/Ps 96:7-8a, 8b-9, 10/ Lk 2:36-40
5:30 pm	Nelson Leduna (D)
Friday	1 Jn 2:18-21/Ps 96:1-2, 11-12, 13/ Jn 1:1-18
9:00 am	Cindy Thompson (L)
4:00 pm	All IHM Volunteers
Saturday	Nm 6:22-27/Ps 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8/Gal 4:4-7/ Lk 2:16-21
10:00 am	Mary Stevens (L)
4:00 pm	All IHM Parishioners
Sunday	Is 60:1-6/Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13/ Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6/Mt 2:1-12
8:30 am	Mercedes Aguinaldo (D)
11:15 am	Nora Johnson (L)
1:00 pm	All IHM Parishioners

WEDNESDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY BEGINS IN JANUARY

Come join us as we participate in *33 Days to Morning Glory* in preparation for consecration to Mary, from January 9 to February 12. There will be an introductory meeting on January 5th to explain the program and to pass out materials. If you are interested in participating, please contact Nancy Baysinger at 240-298-4713 by December 28.

NEW TUESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY BEGINS AT IHM

This eight-week bible study called *Mary: The Bible and the Mother of God* will begin on Tuesday, January 11 from 7 pm to 8:30 pm. Subsequent Tuesday meetings will continue through February 22. All meetings will be held in the Large classroom and everyone is welcome to join. If interested, please contact Nancy Baysinger at 240-298-4713 by January 4, so materials can be ordered.

ENROLL IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOL! Interested in learning more about Catholic school admissions, enrollment, and tuition assistance? The Catholic Schools Office will host virtual information sessions on Wednesday, January 12 and Thursday, January 13, 2022 at 7:00 pm. Register for the event at www.adwcatholicalschools.org

FIRST TUESDAY COFFEE The January First Tuesday Coffee will be held on the *second* Tuesday, January 11 from 9 am until 11 am in the parish hall. Bring a friend and a non-perishable item for the food pantry.

FIRST FRIDAY AND FIRST SATURDAY DEVOTIONS The next First Friday Mass is January 7. We will have Mass at 9 am and 5:30 pm. First Saturday Mass is at 10 am on Saturday, January 1st. All three Masses will be followed by confessions and Eucharistic Exposition.

SURVIVING DIVORCE was created to bring hope and healing to those who have experienced the pain and loneliness of a broken marriage. It is for the newly separated and divorced and those still struggling with issues many years later. This group will meet at IHM on Sunday evenings from 6:30 pm until 8 pm starting on January 16, 2022. To register or to learn more about this program, email atthewell@ihmrcc.org or call 240-298-4044. A suggested donation of \$25 covers the cost of materials.

ALTAR FLOWERS/SANCTUARY CANDLES If you would like to donate the Altar Flowers or Sanctuary Candles in memory or for special intentions of a loved one, please call the Parish Office or email at cindy@ihmrcc.org.

SIGN UP TO FORMED! In order to sign up to Formed, the premier site to access Catholic Media online, go to www.formed.org and press "sign up" and then "sign up as a parishioner". Type in the zip code of the parish "20653", follow the directions to make an account, and then enjoy!

PLEASE PRAY FOR

THE SICK

THAT THEY MAY BE RESTORED TO FULL HEALTH

Audrey Somers, Louise Shafer, Helen Daye, Kathleen Floyd, Mary Oliver, Judith Ann Allgood, Vince Guerin, Jane Keyon, Linda F. Gieser, Jim Brown, Ralph Gough Sr., Betty LePore, Dinnette Briscoe, Bill Wagoner, Paula Coxon, Vincent Campanella, Ray Dion, Joseph Hugh Weiland, Rylee Corliss, Rose Marie Weiland, Alan Stapanon, Ruby Garcia, Mia Garcia, Matthew Riddell, Marie C. Williams, Jim Hoffman

Please note: names will remain on this list for two months, unless otherwise notified. To keep a name on the list, please resubmit by contacting bulletin@ihmrcc.org, or call the Parish Office.

PAPAL PRAYER INTENTION FOR DECEMBER

Let us pray for the catechists, summoned to announce the Word of God: may they be its witnesses, with courage and creativity and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Follow us on



December 26, 2021

Written by
THE
FAITHFUL
DISCIPLE

Feast of the Holy Family

Sir 3:2-6, 12-14 | Col 3:12-21 or 3:12-17 | Lk 2:41-52

GROW AS A DISCIPLE | PRAY, STUDY, ENGAGE, SERVE

Some of my fondest childhood memories are of my dad leading my three sisters and me in song as we made the hour-long drive to visit my grandparents every other weekend. Granted, our silly car songs don't qualify as "singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," as Paul advised the Colossians, but I do think they reveal that my dad took to heart Paul's advice about family and faith. Paul writes that in putting on holiness, kindness, gentleness, and forgiving one another, we "put on love, that is, the bond of perfection." Whatever we do, in word or deed, we ought to do in the name of the Lord Jesus. Fathers, mothers, and children are to love one another, seeking and choosing the good for one another, and helping **ALL HM Parishioners** on their journey – on long car trips as well as in a lifetime of situations. On this feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, we honor their perfect holiness and love, and pray that God may continue to perfect us in holiness and love within our own families, that we may bear good fruit for the Kingdom.

GO EVANGELIZE

PRAYER, INVITATION, WITNESS, ACCOMPANIMENT

Three Days? Mary and Joseph couldn't find Jesus for three days! Any parent who has had a child missing for a few seconds understands the anxiety Mary and Joseph experienced in three long days of searching for Jesus. In the end, though, all is well – they find him, and the peace of Christ casts out their fears. It is a remarkable scene: Jesus' parents are *astonished* to see him teaching in the temple, and Jesus is curious as to why they were looking for him – did they not know where he would be? This event marks a sort of milestone in their lives together, as Jesus has hinted at his future public ministry, and his parents have experienced that first bit of soul-piercing that Mary will later fully undergo. For each of them, love is what directed their actions. Joseph and Mary put aside everything to search for their son; Jesus put aside everything to serve his Father; and they joined together in humble obedience to God's will for them. The Holy Family models a way of living for us to imitate, and to witness to others in that imitation.

SERVE/STUDY Perhaps you have some down time in this coming

week between Christmas and New Year's. As a family, choose an activity that allows you to think outside yourselves and serve others. Or make a plan to read the Scripture for each day of the upcoming week; everyone can choose a favorite verse to memorize each day. You may be surprised how often these verses enter your mind throughout the week.