How will my family celebrate the **HOLIDAY SEASON** this year?

This is a question in our hearts and minds this season as we cope with a world pandemic. We are challenged to celebrate in ways that keep us all safe. While we may not be able to come together in large numbers during these festive months, we continue to remain positive and to practice some of our long-standing traditions in simpler, creative ways. When we “gather” in celebration, we invite God to join our family in prayer, rituals of blessing, conversation, and playfulness. We recall that we are part of Christ’s family - united with our spiritual ancestors - the first imitators of Christ. We unite with our sisters and brothers around the globe as we continue to witness to the Gospel and build upon Christ’s Church. Christ is with us. He waits for us, at the center of our home, our sanctuary. The following blessings & prayers may be adapted to suit your family.

“I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me”. (Philippians 4:13)
“In all circumstances, give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus”. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

A Prayer of Thanksgiving Before a Meal

Heavenly Father,
For the people in our lives, Lord...
we are truly grateful

For the food we are about to share and all who had a hand in bringing it to our table, Lord...
we are truly grateful

For faith in you and trust and courage to be about the life you have before us, Lord...
we are truly grateful Amen!

Blessing of a Catholic Home

Families or individuals are encouraged to bless their home or common living space, even though a priest may not available. If available, prepare these items ahead of time: candle, crucifix, Bible, and holy water. Gather as a family or group in one room. Light the candle to signal the beginning of the blessing ritual.

All: (Sign of the Cross) In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Leader: Peace be with this home and with all who live here. Blessed be the name of the Lord.
All: Now and forever.

Leader: Be our shelter, Lord, when we are at home; our companion, when we are away; and our welcome guest, when we return. And at last, receive us into the dwelling place you have prepared for us in your Father’s house, where you live for ever and ever.
All: Amen. (All make the sign of the cross.)
Reader: Let us listen to the words of St. Paul to the Colossians 3:15-17.

And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.
All: Thanks be to God.
What is the story of the ADVENT Wreath?
The enchanting story is told of a German Lutheran pastor who, in 1839, was known for his work with poor children. The children kept asking, “How many days until Christmas?”. The pastor outfitted an old cartwheel with twenty small red candles and four large white candles. Each day, he lit one small candle, except on Sundays, when he lit one large candle. The custom spread throughout Germany and was brought to the United States by German immigrants in the 1920’s. The tradition was adopted by the Catholic Churches. The Advent wreath is made of evergreens that is bound to a circle of wire. It symbolizes the many years from Adam to Christ in which the world awaited its Redeemer. The wreath holds three purple candles and a pink (or rose) candle, to be lit during Advent in this way:

1st Sunday – purple candle of **Hope**
2nd Sunday - add the purple candle of **Peace**
3rd Sunday - add the pink (or rose) candle of **Joy**
4th Sunday - add the purple cancel of **Love**

A brief prayer may be shared as each candle is lit.
It is customary in some families to place a white candle in the middle of the wreath on Christmas Eve or morning.

Blessing of the Advent Wreath
All: (Sign of the Cross) In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Leader: Our help is in the name of the Lord.
All: Who made heaven and earth.
Reader: Let us listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah 9:1-2, 5-6

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who lived in a land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest, as they exult when dividing the spoils. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, upon David’s throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.
All: Thanks be to God.
Leader: (if available, sprinkle holy water over the wreath as you pray) Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we light the candles on this wreath. May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ’s promise to bring salvation. May he come quickly and not delay. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All: Amen.

(Optional: conclude with one verse of **O Come, O Come Emmanuel**:

Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind In one the hearts of all mankind; Oh, bid our sad divisions cease, And be yourself our King of Peace. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to you, O Israel! (CHB&P pgs. 73-75)
Blessing of a Christmas Tree

When the tree has been prepared and decorated, the household gathers around it. A blessing can take place prior to lighting the tree for the first time.

All: (Sign of the Cross) In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Leader: Let us glorify Christ, our light, who brings salvation and peace into our midst, now and forever.

All: Amen.

Leader: My brothers and sisters, amidst signs and wonders, Christ Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea: his birth brings joy to our hearts and enlightenment to our minds. With this tree, decorated and adorned, may we welcome Christ among us; may its lights guide us to the perfect light.

Reader: Listen to the words of St. Paul in his letter to Titus: 3:4-7

But when the kindness and generous love of God our Savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in the hope of eternal life.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God. (brief silence)

Leader: Let us ask God to send his blessing upon us and upon this sign of our faith in the Lord.

All: Lord, give light to our hearts.

Leader: That the peace of Christ may dwell in our hearts and in the world, let us pray to the Lord.

All: Lord, give light to our hearts.

Leader: Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree. May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts. May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Blessing of a Christmas Manger or Nativity Scene

In its present form the custom of displaying figures depicting the birth of Jesus Christ owes its origin to St. Francis of Assisi, who made the Christmas crèche or manger for Christmas Eve of 1223. The blessing of the Christmas manger or nativity scene may take place on the Vigil of Christmas or at another suitable time. When the manger is set up in the home, it is appropriate that it be blessed by a parent or another family member.

All: (Sign of the Cross) In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Leader: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All: Who made heaven and earth.

Reader: Listen to the words of the holy Gospel according Luke 2:1-8

In those days, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So, all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock.


All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Leader: God of every nation and people, from the very beginning of creation you have made manifest your love: when our need for a Savior was great you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. To our lives He brings joy and peace, justice, mercy, and love. Lord, bless all who look upon this manger; may it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus, and raise our thoughts to Him, who is ‘God with us’ and Savior of all, and who lives and reigns forever and ever.

All: Amen.

(USCCB—CHB&P, pgs. 78-81)
CHRISTMAS
Christ, our Savior, is born!

FESTIVE CHRISTMAS MEAL PRAYER

On Christmas eve or morning, there is a traditional ritual of lighting and placing a white candle in our home. It may also be placed in the center of the Advent wreath. This candle is a visible sign which celebrates Jesus as the Light of the World. Offering a brief prayer before our Christmas meal will focus our family on Christmas as a special day of gratitude and celebration. For Catholics, the Christmas meal is an extension of the celebration of the Catholic Mass. We welcome all who gather at our table, our home altar, where God is always present.

All: (Sign of the Cross) In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Leader: God of love, we gather around this table on this Christmas day to thank you for the Word of God and the Holy Communion which nourish us. We thank you, Light of the World, for your message of hope. Out of Love, Your Son was born as an infant in a poor manger. As the angels announced his birth to the shepherds, we also, the church, the people of God, proclaim his birth to the world as a reminder that you became one of us so that we could become more like you. We receive your gift of peace as we ask you to bless this food, and all of us, in our celebration. We ask this in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Family Prayer

O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practicing the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity, and so, in the joy of your house, delight one day in eternal rewards. We consecrate ourselves and our family to the Holy Family. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

December 27, 2020
Feast of the Holy Family

The Feast Day of the Holy Family falls on the Sunday after Christmas. On this day, we consecrate our family to the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary & Joseph. Each family is diverse, and the one element which is sacred to all families is the call to love. Strong and faith-filled families are the foundation for a healthy and holy community. May we all model ourselves after the love of the Holy Family and ask for their intercession for holiness.
Blessing of the Home and Household on the Epiphany

Whether or not a nativity scene is still displayed after Christmas day, a display of the 3 wise men is encouraged as they “come for a visit” in our home. The Magus represent all of us, God’s diverse peoples, who seek, in wonder and hope, to discover the presence of Christ on earth. Each Magi represents each of us:

- **a bearer of gifts**—that we give in our own time and in our own ways and
- **a receiver of the most treasured gift we receive from God: Himself**!

**Leader:** Let us praise God, who fills our hearts and homes with peace.

**All:** Blessed be God forever.

**Leader:** The Word became flesh and made his dwelling place among us. It is Christ who enlightens our hearts and homes with his love. May all who enter this home find Christ’s life and love.

**Reader:** Listen to the words of the holy Gospel according to Luke 19:1-9:

He came to Jericho and intended to pass through the town.

Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.” And he came down quickly.

and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, “He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.” But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I shall repay it four times over.”

And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a descendant of Abraham.

**Leader:** Lord Jesus Christ, the three kings presented their gifts to you in praise and adoration: grant that those living in this home may use their talents and abilities to your greater glory. May Christ dwell with us, keep us from all harm, and make us one in mind and spirit, now and forever.

**All:** Amen.

(USCCB—CHB & P, pgs. 88-91)