

10. The Incarnation & Christmas

In Jesus, God has truly become one of us to save us and reveal to us the depth of the Father's love. Christ was truly God and truly man. He enables us to partake in God's own nature.

Key terms:

Incarnation:	'to take on flesh'. The Son of God assumed a human nature by his conception in a virgin, Mary, by the power of the Holy Spirit; as Jesus Christ, he is truly and completely both God and man.
Nature:	The essence of a being considered as the source of activities.
Person:	Who a being is (divine, angelic, or human); a rational nature that is responsible for actions.
Sacred Heart:	The human heart of Jesus, the primary symbol of the love of Jesus for us.
Christmas:	Festival celebrating the birth of Jesus.
Octave:	The octave of Christmas is celebrated as an eight-day feast which begins on the Nativity, Dec. 25, and continues to January 1, the Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God.

God the Father's plan (Gen. 3:15)

- Following the sin of our first parents, God promises a saviour who will be born of a woman.
- God prepared his Chosen People for the coming of a Saviour, his Anointed One, the Messiah.
- Prophets foretold how the Saviour would be recognised.
(Is. 7:14, 9:6-7; Mic. 5:1-3; Jer. 23:5-6; Hos. 11:1)
- Many expected a political saviour; no one expected that God himself would come as Saviour in the way he did.

The Incarnation of the Son (Lk. 1:26-38)

- God the Father brings his plan to fruition by sending an angel to ask a virgin, Mary, to become the Mother of God.
- The Holy Spirit overshadows Mary and the Son of God takes on human flesh as Jesus.
- The Son of God, the Word of God, has been sent to keep the Father's promise.

The four reasons for the Incarnation

- The Son of God became man to reconcile us to God by dying for our sins (Jn. 3:16-17):
 - We, as finite creatures, could not make sufficient reparation to God for our sins.
 - Jesus, the God-man, became the perfect offering for our sins.
 - Only Jesus could restore us to friendship with God.

- Jesus remains present to us in his Church, especially in the Eucharist, to heal each willing soul of sin.
- The Son of God became man to show us the depth of God's love for us (Rom. 5:8).
- The Son of God became man to show us how to be holy (Mt. 11:29-30 and Jn. 14:6).
- The son of God became man so that we might become God's adopted children and participate in his own divine nature (Gal. 4:4-5 and 1 Pt. 1:3-4)

Theology of the Incarnation (Phil 2:5-7 and Heb. 2:14-18)

- Jesus is one divine Person with two natures, divine and human, and is fully God and fully Man.
- The Son of God assumed a human nature, including a human body, a human soul with intellect and will, true human knowledge; he was completely human in every way but sin.
- All Jesus' actions were done by his divine Person; everything he did was done by God and so it is correct to say that God, in his humanity, died on the cross.

The Incarnation and the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Jn. 19:34 and Jn. 20:20)

- At his death, Jesus' human heart was pierced for our sins.
- The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the primary symbol of Jesus' love for the Father and for all of us.
- Devotion to the Sacred Heart is a work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, moulding us in the image of the pierced one.

CHRISTMAS AND ITS CUSTOMS

When is it celebrated?

Christmas is always celebrated on the 25th of December,

Why is Christmas on Dec. 25?

It wasn't until three-and-a-half centuries after Christ's birth that the date Dec. 25 was chosen to celebrate his birthday. Pope Julius I picked the date in 350 AD, and it was formalized in 529 AD, when Roman Emperor Justinian declared Christmas to be a civic holiday. Many historians believe that both the Pope and the Emperor chose this date because it coincided with the pagan festivals celebrating the winter solstice on Dec. 21 or 22.

Why is it called Christmas?

The word Christmas comes from Cristes maesse, Old English for "Christ's Mass," which references the Catholic tradition of celebrating Mass to honour the birth of Jesus.

Christmas Customs

1. Nativity Scene (Crib)
2. Christmas Carols
3. Christmas Tree
4. Christmas Flowers

5. Remembering Those in Need
6. Christmas Wreath
7. Nollaig na MBan
8. St. Stephen's Day and the Wren

EXPLORE!

Explore with candidates the various ways their family celebrated Christmas.
How has the commercialisation of Christmas affected the message of the incarnation?
Discuss the relationship between Christmas and Easter.

The Incarnation & Christmas — Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. If Adam had not sinned, would God the Son have become incarnate?
2. How does the fact that Jesus is human and divine help us in our difficulties and suffering?
3. How do we know that Jesus was truly human?
4. How is Jesus' incarnation, becoming God in human form, an essential part of the Christian faith?
5. How does the old covenant set up God's perfect plan for the new covenant?
6. Could God become flesh without ceasing to be God?

PRAYER

Using the lyrics of your favourite Christmas hymn, speak the hymn in prayer.

or

Gospel Reflection: Third Sunday of Advent

Year A Mt. 11:2-11

Year B Jn. 1:6-8, 19-28

Year C Lk. 3:10-18

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

The Incarnation & Christmas

Scripture

- Gen. 3:15 God promises a Saviour, born of “the woman”, who will conquer Satan.
- Ex. 3:1-15 At the burning bush, God tells Moses his name: “I AM”.
- Is 7:10-14 God will give a sign to the king: the virgin birth of a child called Emmanuel.
- Mi 5:2 Israel’s future ruler, the Ancient of Days, will be born in Bethlehem.
- Mt. 1:18-25 Jesus is conceived of Mary by the Holy Spirit and will save all from their sins.
- Mt. 2:1-12 Jesus is born in Bethlehem and is worshipped by the Magi.
- Lk. 1:26-38 Jesus is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit within a virgin, Mary.
- Lk. 9:23-24 Following Jesus means being transformed in him, bearing suffering, and giving him our lives.
- Jn. 1:1-14 God the Son, the Word of God from the beginning, became man.
- Jn. 3:16-17 Out of love, God sent his Son to save the world and give us eternal life.
- Jn. 8:12-59 Jesus proclaims his mission from his Father and claims the name of God: “I AM”.
- Jn. 10:30 Jesus states his identity with the Father.
- Jn. 14:6 Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and is our only path to God.
- Jn. 20:26-29 The risen Jesus confronts Thomas, and Thomas worships him as God.
- Rom 5:8 God’s love for us was so great that his Son died for us while we were still sinners.
- 2Cor 5:18-19, 21 Christ reconciled us to God and took on our sin so that we might become holy.
- Gal 4:4-5 The son, born of a woman, was sent that we might be God’s adopted children.
- Phil 2:5-11 Jesus, although God, humbly took our human form and is to be worshipped.
- Col 2:9 In Jesus is the fullness of divinity.
- Heb. 4:14-15 Jesus, our High Priest, is like us in every way but sin.
- 2 Pt. 1:3-4 God has called us to everlasting life and to partake of his own nature.

Catechism

- 422-424 The Son of God has come to us, has taken our nature, and died for us.
- 430-450 Jesus is Saviour, Christ, the Son of God, and Lord of all.
- 456-46- The four reasons for the Incarnation.
- 461-477 The Son of God took on our human nature he is truly God and truly man.
- 478 The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the chief sign of his love for us.
- 512 All Jesus did and taught is seen in light of the incarnation and Paschal Mystery.
- 606-607 Jesus came to die for us; the Paschal mystery is the reason of the Incarnation.