



CHRISTMAS TIME

*Saint Michael the Archangel
Catholic Church
Lake Jackson, Texas
December 2017*

Christmas Season Calendar

12/24/17 - Vigil of Christmas

Masses Sun. 4:00 pm Church (Children's Mass)
6:00 pm Church
9:00 pm Church

12/25/17 - Christmas Day

Masses Mon. 9:30 am Church
11:00 am Church

12/31/17 - Feast of the Holy Family

Masses Sat. 5:30 pm
Sun. 8:00 am, 9:30 am, 11:00 am

1/1/18 - Feast of Mary, Mother of God

Mass Mon. 10:00 am

1/7/18 - Feast of the Epiphany

Masses Sat. 5:30 pm
Sun. 8:00 am, 9:30 am, 11:00 am

Weekday Mass Schedule

Tue. 5:30 pm
Wed. 8:30 am
Thu. 5:30 pm
Fri. 8:30 am

Confession Times

Tue. 5:00 pm
Sat. 4:00 pm

The Christmas Season

The season of Advent, the period of joyful preparation and expectation for the coming of the Lord and his kingdom, gives way on the evening of December 24 to the Church's celebration of the Christmas mystery. The Christmas season begins at dusk on December 24 and includes: The Nativity of Christ, the Feast of the Holy Family, the Feast of Mary, Mother of God, the Feast of Epiphany, and finally the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord.

To many people who are asked what Christmas is about, we might hear "Christmas is about giving." We see the shopping season extended each year to an earlier and earlier date, now beginning even before Halloween. The store hours grow longer and the inevitable countdown of the number of shopping days until Christmas is ever present in the media. We now even see a trend of substituting "The Holidays" for the word "Christmas" in our increasingly secular society.

In the hearts of the faithful, however, Christmas has been, is, and always will be, a celebration of the birth of the Savior. It is a time we hold sacred because it is about the Lord whom we love. In this feast of his Incarnation, we celebrate the mystery of God becoming man, so that human beings could share in the life of God.

In this season, we retell some of our most cherished stories as a faith community. The symbolism of this time is deep and rich with meaning. Jesus was laid in a manger, a food trough for animals; he becomes spiritual food for the whole world. The three gifts of the Magi represent the kingship (gold), priesthood (frankincense), and the humanity (myrrh) of Christ. Some say that the ox and the ass, present at his birth, could symbolize Jews and Gentiles alike at the trough of divine revelation. The Holy Family's search for shelter is a metaphor for the question that we each must ask of ourselves: "Who will take Christ into their hearts and their homes and make him welcome?" Some of our scriptural and musical texts not only are aglow about the baby Jesus, but also hint at the type of death that he would endure to redeem humankind.

Like the song of peace that the angels sang to shepherds, we hear and should work to spread a message of peace to the whole world today. Herod slaughters the innocent first born of his day, and we grieve the senseless death of many due to hunger, disease, and war. While the magi sought the truth by following a star, the Church seeks truth through its pursuit of the Word of God.

The Christmas Tree



With likely origins in European pre-Christian cultures, the Christmas tree has gained an extensive history and become a common sight during the winter season in various countries. The modern custom can be traced to 16th century Germany, when the guilds started erecting Christmas trees in front of their houses. During the 17th century, the custom entered family homes. In the early 19th century, the custom became popular among the nobility and spread to royal courts as far as Russia. By the 1890s Christmas tree popularity was on the rise around the U.S.

The early 20th century saw Americans decorating their trees mainly with homemade ornaments, while the German-American sect continued to use apples, nuts, and marzipan cookies. Popcorn joined in after being dyed bright colors and interlaced with berries and nuts. Electricity brought about Christmas lights, making it possible for Christmas trees to glow for days on end. With this, Christmas trees began to appear in town squares across the country and having a Christmas tree in the home became an American tradition.

The Nativity Scene

A nativity scene, also known as a manger scene or crèche, is the special exhibition during the Christmas season, of art objects representing the birth of Jesus. Nativity scenes exhibit figures representing the infant Jesus, his mother, Mary, and her husband, Joseph. In reenactments called "living nativity scenes," real humans and animals participate. Other characters from the nativity story, such as shepherds, sheep, and angels may be displayed near the manger in a barn or cave intended to accommodate farm animals. A donkey and an ox are typically depicted in the scene, and the Magi and their camels. Saint Francis of Assisi is credited with creating the first live nativity scene in 1223. The scene's popularity inspired communities throughout Catholic countries to stage similar displays. Distinctive nativity scenes and traditions have been created around the world, and are displayed during the Christmas season in churches, homes, shopping malls, and other venues, and occasionally on public lands and in public buildings.



Chrismons

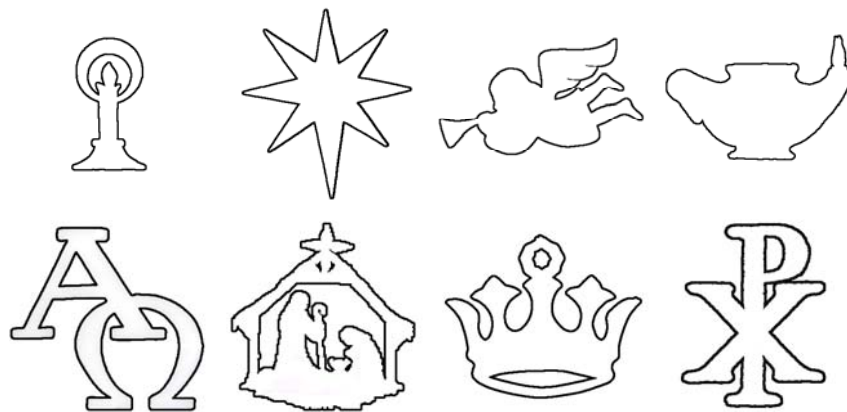
Chrismons are Christmas decorations with Christian symbols on them. They help Christians to remember that Christmas is the celebration of Jesus's birthday. They are often used on Christmas Trees in Churches and Christian homes.

They were first made by Frances Kipps Spencer at the Ascension Lutheran Church in Danville, Virginia, USA. She also thought of the word, Chrismon, which is a combination of Christ and monogram (meaning symbol). The idea quickly spread to other churches. It is traditional that Christian groups can make their own Chrismons with their favorite symbols on them.

Chrismons are traditionally colored white and gold. White is the liturgical (or Church) color for Christmas and symbolizes that Jesus was pure and perfect. Gold symbolizes His Majesty and Glory. Chrismons can be made from nearly anything, but paper and embroidered ones are the most widely used. Any material can be used to make a Chrismon Ornament. The only guideline is that they be made in gold and white. The most important aspect of a Chrismons Ornament is its ability to share Christ's story.

Chrismon Ornaments can be used to decorate a Christmas Tree in a church or in the homes of Christian believers.

Below you can find a small sampling of the Chrismons which will adorn the large Christmas Tree in the sanctuary of St. Michael's during the Christmas Season of 2017-2018. A full display of these ornaments along with descriptions of each symbol can be found on our parish website at: www.smlj.org/chrismons



The Holy Innocents

On December 28th, we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Innocents. In 2017, this Feast falls on Thursday of the Octave of Christmas.

Jesus & Moses

As is so often the case, New Testament stories connect to stories from the Old Testament. Jesus is often referred to as the “new Moses”. Moses led the chosen people of God out of the slavery in Egypt. Jesus freed the chosen people of God from the slavery of sin through his death on the cross and his Resurrection. Both Moses and Jesus were foreseen as potential threats by the secular leaders of their time, resulting in efforts on their parts to kill them by slaughtering entire groups of innocent lives.



The Slaughter of the Innocents in Egypt

When the Israelites dwelled in Egypt, they were fruitful and prolific, becoming great in numbers. Fearful of their growing presence, the Egyptian leader oppressed them into slavery. In order to prevent the Israelites from being a threat to the Egyptians, Pharaoh ordered that all newborn Hebrew males be slaughtered at birth. The mother of Moses was able to hide him for three months before setting him adrift in the Nile River, to be found and taken in by the royal household. Through God's intervention, this man who would lead the chosen people to freedom was spared from the slaughter propagated by Pharaoh.

The Slaughter of the Innocents in Bethlehem

The slaughter of the innocents goes unrecorded in other historical accounts of the period, but it unquestionably fits the personality of the evil and murderous King Herod. After hearing reports of the birth of a new king, Herod first attempts to use the Magi to reveal Jesus' location to him. Failing that, he instead decided to slaughter all boys of less than two years of age in and around Bethlehem. Joseph, having been warned in a dream, fled with Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Once again through God's intervention, His Son, who would save mankind, was spared the slaughter propagated by a murderous earthly leader.

Our Remembrance of This Feast

Our prayers can be for children who lose their lives through abortion, infanticide, neglect, abuse, and hunger. We may take this opportunity to renew our commitment to combat abortion and capital punishment.

The Story of Bethlehem

The little town of Bethlehem (the name means “House of Bread”) appears almost 50 times in more than ten books in the Old Testament. The village is just 6 miles southwest of Jerusalem. In the bible it is called “Bethlehem of Judah” (belonging to the tribe of Judah), to distinguish it from the other Bethlehem, which was in the North in the territory of the Zebulun.

Bethlehem plays a significant part in the Old Testament, in the history of the Israelites, both before they entered Egypt and slavery, and after the Exodus. It appears in the Old Testament as Ephrat, where Rachel the beloved matriarch of the Jewish People, the favorite wife of Jacob, died during childbirth. The Tomb of Rachel, is a pilgrimage place for Jews and Muslims alike.

Bethlehem is also where Ruth and Boaz meet, marry, and bear their son, Obed, the father of Jesse, who was the father of King David. God sends the prophet Samuel to Bethlehem to find the new king. (1 Sam 16:1) and it is there that he anoints David king. Bethlehem remained a city of significance throughout the stories of King David’s life and reign; while fighting the Philistines, who had a garrison at Bethlehem, David requests water from the well of Bethlehem (2 Sam 23:15).

The book of Micah looks forward to a new day when Israel will be led by a ruler from Bethlehem — a ruler from David’s line: “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel” (Mic 5:2). It is this prophecy of Micah that is quoted by Matthew as evidence of Jesus’ messiahship (see Matt 2:6). The last reference to Bethlehem in the Old Testament records how many of the city’s residents returned from the Babylonian exile: 123, according to Ezra 2:21 (see also Neh 7:26).

Following the birth narratives in the Gospels, Bethlehem is never again mentioned in the New Testament. Thenceforth, Jesus is known as Jesus of Nazareth, and it is this town, 15 miles west of the Sea of Galilee, that becomes a fixture in the New Testament. Unlike Bethlehem, Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament.

Christian tradition, perhaps as early as the second century CE, identified a cave as the site of Jesus’ birth. About 338 CE Constantine, the Roman emperor and his mother, Helena, built a church over the grotto and in 527 Justinian the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire resettled in Bethlehem, his reign was one of great prosperity and expansion of churches. The site of the Nativity is a central pilgrimage destination for Christians from all over the world.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

Love Has Conquered The Night



Loving God, you sent your Word to dwell among us and reveal to us your glory. By sending us the Light, your only Son, you have blessed your people who once lived in darkness.

On this great feast of the Incarnation, we lift our voices and give you praise for your awesome deeds. Like your servant John the Baptist, grant us confidence to testify to the gift of your Son, who is our salvation. Send us forth proclaiming the gifts of your mercy and love, which you revealed in your Incarnate Word, so that, all who hear the Good News may come to know Christ.

May we, who received the Light at Baptism, persevere in faith, hope, and love as we forever sing of your saving power. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.



Monday, December 25, 2017

Word Made Flesh

Today's Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18.

On this day, all creation sings out in joy, for the Lord God has revealed to us his mighty deeds. During Advent and Christmas, it is easy to be caught up in the hype of secular society. As Christians, however, we need to reflect upon the “saving power of God” (Psalm 98). What does the Incarnation mean in your life and in the life of the Christian? Praying with Psalm 98, it becomes clear how profound God’s love is for his Chosen People, and this is what we celebrate in unison with every corner of creation.

John’s Gospel recounts the story of the Incarnation in an extended poetic form. Jesus, the Word become flesh, shines in the darkness and is the One who gives life. Every Sunday when we hear the Scriptures proclaimed, the Word is alive and trying to find a home in our hearts. Listen to the Word; hear the Word; allow the Word to rouse your heart to action and transform it so your life becomes a proclamation of the Good News, the Word made flesh.

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THE HOLY FAMILY

Grace Our Families



Good and gracious God, who filled Simeon with the Holy Spirit, we bless you for revealing to us the Light of your salvation. Fill your family with grace and, like Mary and Joseph, may our love for you remain strong so that, filled with the light of faith, your family may grow in obedience to your Word.

Bless and protect all families who seek your embrace. Open their eyes to see the glory of your Son. You have promised the Church unity in faith and love; as you fulfilled your promises by being part of the Holy Family.

Be present in our midst and make us the instruments by which you heal the world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Sunday, December 31, 2017

Wisdom

Today's Readings: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 or Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3; Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5 or Psalm 105:1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8-9; Colossians 3:12-21 or Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; Luke 2:22-40

In today's Gospel, Simeon announces that Jesus is God's salvation for the world, and that many will oppose him. He even tells Mary that she, too, would be pierced, foreshadowing the sorrow that overcomes her during the Passion. On this feast of the Holy Family, the Church is asked to ponder the mystery of salvation. Jesus, who is the Light of the World, will suffer so that all can share in salvation. In this Gospel, we hear again of the fulfillment of God's promise that the prophets foretold.

While today's Gospel is certainly joyful, it also reminds families that suffering is part of the journey. Following the Gospel and working to reveal God's love and mercy in our world are often met with persecution and ridicule. The Holy Family teaches us that faith in God is necessary to endure suffering and to share the light of Christ.

As you discern the ways in which your family lives out the Gospel, take time to identify wisdom figures in your community and family. Listen to their stories and learn the ways their faith grew in the midst of joy and suffering. What can these wisdom figures teach you? Pray that your family remain strong in faith and trust in God's mercy.

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MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Gentle and Loving



Loving God, who is revealed through the simple birth of your Son Jesus, in the gentle and loving touch of Mary and the secure and protecting touch of Joseph, help us to know you this day.

May our lives find a home with you, and our families be secure under your protection. May the blessings of home, parents, family, and community be a spark of new life and profound love.

We ask this 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.



Monday, January 1, 2018

Treasure and Ponder in Your Heart

Today's Readings: Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:16-21.

Mary pondered the words of the shepherds in her heart. With Joseph, she understood the message the angel announced as one of God's love coming into the world. In every family, in every culture, the message of love in the birth of a child is a reflection of the greatest love of God joining our humanity as the infant Jesus. As St. Paul reminds us in his Letter to the Galatians, we are not just children of God—we are God's heirs.

The readings today are a blessing as we begin to understand the depth of the love of God at the birth of Mary's child. Mary shares Jesus' birth with more than Joseph and the shepherds and others who drop by. Mary becomes our mother, too, as she accepts giving birth in a stable on the edge of town, and as she welcomes the curious onlookers and the revelry of shepherds. As we reflect on our blessings, and treasure them in our hearts, may our celebrations in turn be a welcome to others to share in our joy.

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THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

People of Light



O God of all nations, who beckon us to live in the light, you scattered the darkness through the birth of your Son, Jesus.

Prophets of old foretold that your brilliance would cover the earth and draw all peoples into your loving care. Grant that we, who, like the Magi, seek the radiance of your glory are found worthy to proclaim your holy name. Shine brightly within our hearts and illuminate our minds as we faithfully share the Good News.

May all peoples be drawn closer to you by the revelation of your Incarnate Word. Keep us ever in your care, so that, filled with joy, we may always work to build a just and peaceful world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Sunday, January 7, 2018

Revealing Light

Today's Readings: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12.

The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates God's manifestation to all the nations. We are familiar with the story of the three wise men and the song "We Three Kings," but do we stop and think about what the Scriptures tell us today?

In the First Reading, the prophet demands that Jerusalem rise up; God has restored the city, bathing it in light. God's glory is revealed in this thriving city and its renewed people: all the "Nations shall come to your light" (v. 3). Jerusalem reveals the Good News of salvation so that the world can bask in God's redeeming love. In the Gospel, Magi from the East (representing different cultures/places) seek the Christ Child. They follow a star; they are in pursuit of truth. Upon seeing Jesus, they paid him homage. Jesus has come to save all people, and Christ's manifestation transforms the way we see one another. Christ is at the center of our relationships, and he uses our diverse gifts and experiences to reveal the Father. When the visitors from the East find Jesus, they are made part of the story of God's people.

In Baptism, bathed with the Light of Christ, we are delivered from our misfortune and made into the Body of Christ. We are no longer a people of darkness; we must shine out like Jerusalem. Our lives should reflect Christ's Divine Presence, proclaim justice to the poor, release to the captives, and attract all who seek to know truth.

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Season's Blessings