

Partners in FAITH™



Helping our children grow in their Catholic faith.

December 2015

Church of the Annunciation

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Thoughtful Moments

St. Thomas Becket

St. Thomas enjoyed power and riches as a close friend of England's King Henry II, who appointed him chancellor of England. In 1162, King Henry had St. Thomas named Archbishop of Canterbury. The King tried to pressure him and the other bishops into agreeing to unjust laws, but St. Thomas refused to sign his approval for them. The King exiled him and he fled to France for safety. St. Thomas returned to England and was martyred soon after in 1170.



Jesus is Peace and Joy

It is possible to feel peaceful under stress and chaos. It's even possible to be joyful, even amidst great sorrow. Jesus is the peace and joy we long for. The saints were able to find peace and joy in trials because they knew Christ.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? The Lord is my life's refuge; of who should I be afraid?"
(Psalm 27:1).



Make your Christmas celebration unforgettable

Children anticipate Christmas all year long. We love to see their joy. Changing just one part of your family celebration can make this one unforgettable.

Begin with gratitude. "Every night during the Advent and Christmas seasons, we each list five things for which we are grateful," said Mark. "That shifts the focus off what we want to what we have." As a family, take time to thank God. An attitude of gratitude will increase Christmas joy.

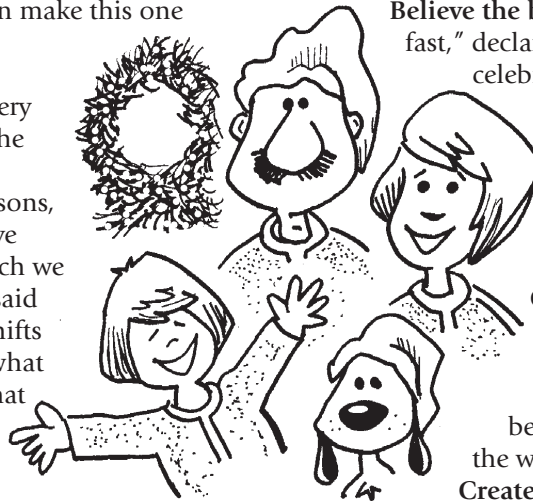
Be awed by creation. Wendy decorates with evergreens and berries at Christmas. "We bring God's beautiful creation indoors to remember who is at the heart of the

season." Place branches of evergreens on the mantle or in a vase. Arrange pine cones on your Christmas tree.

Believe the best. "I go on a worry fast," declared Adam. "I can't celebrate if I am worried about my crazy relatives, money, or meeting every holiday obligation. I focus on my family and let God take care of the rest." Think only positive thoughts and Christmas will be much happier for the whole family.

Create a new tradition.

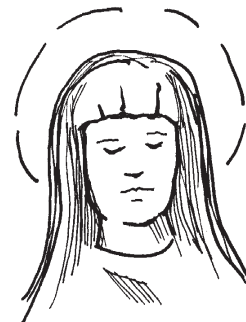
"Every year my mother gave us new pajamas on Christmas Eve," said Kara. "It symbolized a fresh, new beginning and was the first present we opened." Traditions remind us to stop and connect, and they create definable memories.



Why Do Catholics Do That?

Why do Catholics call Mary the "Immaculate Conception"?

The Immaculate Conception actually refers to Mary, not Jesus. The Catechism teaches that from her conception, God preserved Mary from Original Sin because of her role as Jesus's mother. At the Annunciation when the



angel Gabriel calls her "full of grace," (Luke 1:28) he meant that she had all the graces needed for the task ahead. On December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX declared infallibly that Mary's role was so important, it kept her free from sin at the outset.

Minimize holiday stress

The holidays can be so busy that we accomplish tasks but miss moments. Try these strategies to minimize stress and savor joyful family moments.

Multi-task selectively. The busy pre-Christmas pace can rob us of precious moments with our children. So when in the midst of a family activity – baking cookies, stringing popcorn for the tree, watching a concert, reading the Nativity story – drop everything else and focus on the moment.

Make a family Christmas calendar. Make or buy a wall calendar dating from Thanksgiving



through the first week of the New Year. Hang it in a high traffic area. List all invitations, announcements, concerts, and other events you will attend as a family. Watch for and eliminate conflicts and overscheduling.

Steal away. Take a few moments to visit with Jesus during the season. Attend extra Masses, steal away to pray before him in the Blessed Sacrament in church. Bring the whole family. The peace you receive from being in the Real Presence will keep you going through a busy time.

Scripture LESSON

Luke 2:41-52, Jesus in the world

In Jesus' day, adult Jews were expected to observe feasts such as the Passover in Jerusalem whenever possible. Jesus' family made the trip every year but the one when he was twelve was his first trip as an adult Jew.

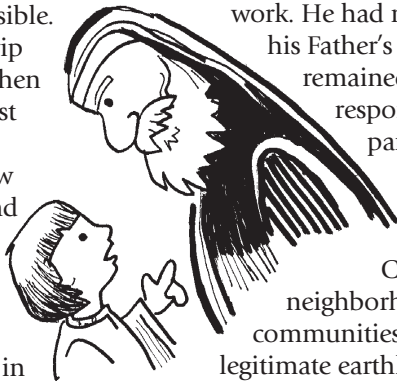
In those days, a Hebrew boy became a man around the age of twelve and was recognized in a ceremony known as a Bar Mitzvah. Then he began formal education in the Torah and Hebrew Scriptures.

This was an important time in Jesus' life. Scripture reports that Jesus stayed behind to talk with the scholars and

teachers. When discovered, he told his parents he was doing his Father's work. He had realized his place in his Father's kingdom, yet he remained mindful of his responsibilities to his parents and obediently left with them.

What can a parent do?

Christians live in neighborhoods, schools, and communities. We are subject to legitimate earthly authority and can't retire from the world to live holy lives. As parents, we have to find ways to teach children to be holy while living in the world.



Parent TALK

For years the only real point to our family Advent observance was to anxiously count the days until Christmas morning. One day when I was having coffee with a friend, I saw little notes on her refrigerator, "Dear Liz,

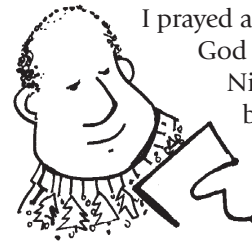
I prayed a Rosary for you.

God bless! Love, St.

Nicholas." On the bathroom mirror:

"Dear Thomas, I saved a cookie for you. Enjoy!

Love, St. Nick."



When I asked Valerie about the notes, she explained that they were imitating St. Nicholas who performed generous acts anonymously. The family picked names out of a hat and spent Advent doing anonymous kindnesses. On Christmas, their St. Nicholas identities were revealed.

Last year, we adopted the custom, too. Being kind in secret was challenging but we learned to be Christ to others. Instead of just "getting through Advent," we waited joyfully to reveal our St. Nicholas identities to each other on Christmas morning.

Feasts & Celebrations

Dec. 7– St. Ambrose (397). As a Roman governor accustomed to a lifestyle of culture, learning, and wealth, Ambrose was shocked when the Emperor requested his nomination as the new bishop of Milan. Though reluctant at first, St. Ambrose was an effective pastor and teacher, and was devoted to care of the poor. He vigorously guarded the Church against Arians, who denied Jesus' divinity.

Dec. 26 – St. Stephen (first century). A deacon of the early Church, St. Stephen preached that God could be found everywhere, not

just in one place like the temple. He angered the Jewish authorities, who dragged him outside Jerusalem to stone him. St. Stephen became the first martyr of the Catholic Church.

Dec. 27 – The Holy Family (1st century). On the feast of the Holy Family, we celebrate the family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph – three people who lived for God. Because of their love and support of one another the Holy Family is a model for all Christian families.



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