

# Growing in FAITH™

Discovering hope and joy in the Catholic faith.

December 2024

## One Minute Meditations

### St. John of the Cross

Born in Castile, Spain, St. Juan de Yepes lived in poverty. St. John embraced poverty and suffering throughout his life. In 1563, he entered the Carmelite Order. He befriended St. Teresa of Ávila, who encouraged and supported him in his efforts at reform. He faced opposition and he was imprisoned in a tower. From this experience came the mystical poetry and inspired writings on the interior life that made him a Doctor of the Church.



### Close to the Infant Jesus

"You are nowhere but close to the Infant Jesus, trembling with cold in the stable of Bethlehem...Therefore, I beg you to love the crib of the Child of Bethlehem...stay close to him and be sure that Jesus is in the midst of your hearts more than you could believe or imagine." St. Padre Pio

*"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory"*  
(John 1:14).



## The best gifts come on Christmas

Christmas brings a joy that goes beyond presents—it's a season rich with the gifts God offers: love, hope, family, and the promise of Heaven. These gifts touch every heart, young and old, and hold profound meaning.

**The gift of love.** God chose to come into the world as a baby, sharing in our human experience. His love surpasses anything we could imagine. He invites us to embrace His love and let it transform us.

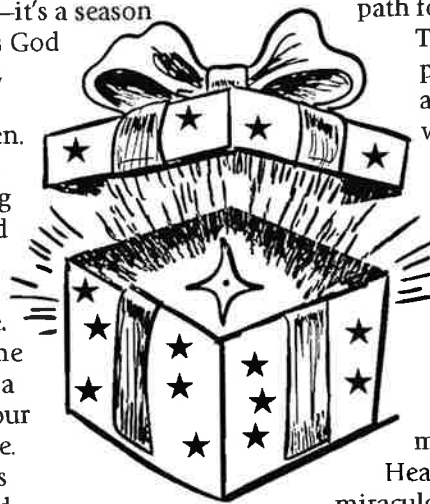
**The gift of hope.** Although we have moments of sin and can turn from God, the Child born on that first Christmas offers freedom from sin and the hope of a brighter future. This hope

renews us and promises a better path forward.

**The gift of family.** Family provides strength, comfort, and support. Baptism welcomes us into Christ's divine family, where we are bound by an unbreakable

connection. *"See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God"* (1 John 3:1).

**The gift of Heaven.** The most awesome gift is Heaven itself. Without Jesus' miraculous birth, Heaven would be out of reach. He bridged the gap between Heaven and Earth, offering the promise of eternal joy. This Christmas, we can cherish the enduring gifts of love, hope, family, and Heaven that make the season truly meaningful.



## Why Do Catholics Do That?

## Why do Catholics display nativity scenes?

The tradition of displaying nativity scenes began with St. Francis of Assisi, who was awed that God humbled Himself to be born in humility and poverty. To illustrate, he displayed a manger scene in a cave near the Franciscans' chapel —



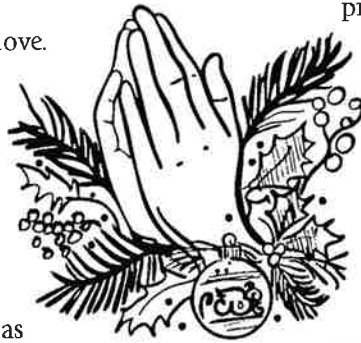
complete with donkey and ox. He celebrated Christmas Mass and, according to an eyewitness, the wax figure of the Christ Child came alive. This pious tradition continues, reminding us that *"the*

*Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14).

## Two Advent practices for a joyful Christmas

Each Advent, God invites us to deepen our friendship with Him and draw closer to His love. The key to a joyful Christmas lies in responding to this invitation by dedicating daily time to God and helping those in need.

**Do the one thing needful:** Pope Francis encourages us to “waste time” with God through prayer, even for just 15–20 minutes. This could be offering daily prayers for a special intention, meditating on the Christmas Story a verse at a time, or simply being peacefully



present to Him, who is always present to us. Continue spending time with Him after the season ends.

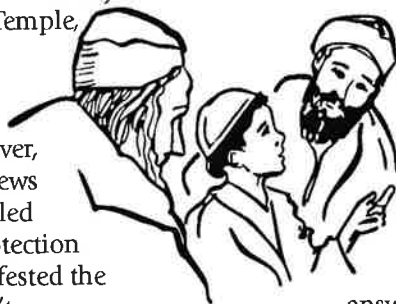
**Go in haste to love:** Just as Mary went “with haste” (Luke 1:39) to serve her cousin Elizabeth, we, too, are called to act quickly in love. While no one can do everything, everyone can do something. When we serve others even in small ways, we receive a greater gift in return (Matthew 25:40).

Embrace these practices for a deeper, more joyful Christmas open to God’s love.

### from Scripture **Luke 2:41-52, Love and obedience**

The Feast of the Holy Family (December 29) includes the story of finding Jesus in the Temple, a story of love and obedience. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover, as was the custom for Jews of that time. They traveled in a large group for protection against bandits who infested the hill country. So it wasn’t surprising that His parents didn’t miss Jesus as they started the return trip. Upon discovering Him missing, they hurried back to Jerusalem.

On the third day of searching, they found Jesus in the Temple. He was



questioning the priests and amazing them with His understanding.

However, Mary asked how He could have caused His parents so much worry and Jesus replied, “Did you not know I must be in my Father’s house?”

Though they were puzzled by His answer, Mary and Joseph took Jesus back to Nazareth. He remained there in obedience to His parents until it was time for His public ministry. We learn from this story to obey not only God but also those in valid authority over us.

### Feasts & Celebrations

**December 1 - First Sunday in Advent.** We anticipate Christ’s birth and His coming on the Last Day. Catholics everywhere light candles in an Advent wreath to signal the coming of the light of Christ.

**December 4 – St. John Damascene (749).** A Doctor of the Church and the last of the Greek Fathers, St. John was born in Muslim-ruled Syria and was counselor to the caliph. He is known for his writings in favor of the use of sacred images for devotion.

**December 9 – Immaculate**

**Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.** We commemorate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne’s womb without original sin, preparing Mary to be the Mother of God. Pope Pius IX declared this doctrine in 1854. This year, it’s still considered a holy day of obligation and Mass attendance is required.

**December 28 – Feast of the Holy Innocents (1st century).** Today, we remember the infants massacred by King Herod’s soldiers (Matthew 2:16-18). We also pray for the safety of unborn children.



### Q & A How do I use an Advent Wreath?

The Advent Wreath is a circle of evergreen branches, symbolizing God’s eternal and unending love. It includes three purple (violet) candles and one pink (rose) candle. On the first Sunday of Advent, and each night that week, the first purple candle, known as the Prophet’s Candle, is lit to symbolize hope. On the second Sunday and throughout that week, light both the first and second purple candles.



The second candle, called the Bethlehem Candle, represents faith. The pink candle, lit during the third week, symbolizes joy and marks Gaudete Sunday. During the fourth week of Advent, all three purple candles and the pink candle are lit. The fourth candle, known as the Angel’s Candle, represents peace.

Consider meditating on Scripture as you light the candles. Week 1 (hope) - Isaiah 9:2-7, week 2 (faith) - Micah 5:2-5a, week 3 (joy) - Luke 2:8-14, and week 4 (peace) - Luke 1:26-38.

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To provide practical ideas that promote faithful Catholic living.

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(540)662-7844 (540)662-7847 fax  
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(Unless noted Bible quotes and references are from the Revised Standard Version and the New American Bible)