

CHRISTMAS



What does the term “Christmas” mean?

The word “Christmas” comes from the Old English “Cristes Maesse,” which means the Mass of Christ. The Latin term is *Dies Natalis*, which means birthday. In this instance, it refers to the birth of Christ.

When is Christmas?

“The season of Christmas runs from Evening Prayer I of Christmas (December 24) until the Sunday after Epiphany or after 6 January, inclusive.” (GNLY, 33)

When does Christmas begin?

It begins with Vespers (Evening Prayer I) of Christmas (Dec 24th).

When does Christmas end?

It ends the Sunday after Epiphany or after January 6th.

How long is Christmas?

Christmas is not just a day! Christmas—the birth of Christ—is so important that Catholics celebrate it for a whole season (about 2 weeks).

What is the purpose of Christmas?

“Next to the yearly celebrations of the paschal mystery, the Church considers nothing more Important than the memorial of Christ’s birth and early manifestations. This is the purpose of the season of Christmas.” (GNLY, 32)

What is the color for Christmas?

White (or gold) is used for all of Christmas with the exception of specific feast days (i.e. St. Stephen and Holy Innocents), which are red.

What are some Christmas traditions?

There are many wonderful Christmas traditions: going to Mass; setting up a manger; decorating a Christmas tree; caroling; putting evergreen wreaths around your home; baking Christmas treats; having Christmas parties DURING Christmas; and much more!

What is an octave?

Octave comes from Latin *octava* (eighth).

What is the Octave of Christmas?

The Octave of Christmas are the eight days from Christmas to January 1 (the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God), inclusive. Unlike the Octave of Easter, these days are NOT raised to Solemnities (except for Christmas and Mary, Mother of God). Therefore, the Friday during the Octave of Christmas does not “lift” the Friday obligation to do some sort of penance, as determined by the conferences of bishops.

What are the different days during the Octave of Christmas?

Sunday within the octave is the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. If there is no Sunday, the feast is celebrated on 30 December.

December 25 – Christmas: Christ is born

December 26 – Feast of St. Stephen, First Martyr and Deacon

December 27 – Feast of Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist

December 28 – Feast of the Holy Innocents, martyrs

December 29, 30, and 31 – Days within the Octave of Christmas

January 1 – Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

What are some Christmas symbols?

Some common symbols are a star, manger, mother and Child, the Holy Family, angels, 3 wise men, Christmas trees, holly and ivy, and poinsettias.

How do we set Christmas apart from Advent?

Use Advent as a time of preparation: pray, go to Confession, and go to Mass. Wait to decorate for Christmas. Put off Christmas parties and gift giving until the Christmas season. Catholics don’t just have a day for Christmas. We have a whole SEASON!