

# Growing in FAITH™

Discovering **hope and joy** in the Catholic faith.

December 2014

**St. Francis of Assisi Parish**

Rev. Anthony Francis Spilka, OFM Conv., Pastor

## One Minute Meditations

### St. Nicholas

Legends abound about this saint but we know that he was orphaned at a young age when his wealthy parents died. Generous to a fault, he reportedly threw money down a chimney to enable a poor man's daughters to marry. This is the image that makes him the model for Santa Claus. As bishop of Lycia (now Turkey), he fought against heresies plaguing the Church in the fourth century. He was devoted to charity and the protection of the weak.



### Pray for peace

In the midst of your celebration of Christ's birth, please pray that all nations will come to respect life from conception to natural death.

### Believing vs. understanding

When Mary heard she would give birth to the Son of God, she didn't understand but trusted anyway, "*Be it done to me according to your word*" (Luke 1:38). She knew that we don't have to understand to believe that God can do the impossible.



## Give as God gave at Christmas

We give because God gave. God gave us his son, so every December we imitate him by giving gifts to our loved ones. What about gifts for God?

**God gave the gift of himself.** God was the first Christmas gift, lying in a manger. In his image, we are called to give the gift of ourselves to him. Go to Mass every Sunday and in between, too. Kneel in adoration before the tabernacle or in a Perpetual Adoration chapel. Go to Confession to stay connected.

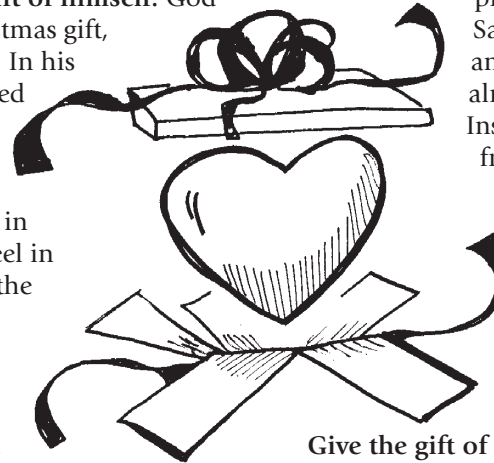
**Give the gift of love.** God loves freely whether or not we love in return. He asks us to share love with others. Give others your undivided attention. Put down the cellphone in meetings,

in conversations, and definitely at Mass. Listen when someone has a problem. Put people before things.

**Give the gift of prayer.** Are your

prayers like a letter to Santa – lists of wants and needs? God already knows all that. Instead, pray for friends or loved ones who aren't active in their faith. Offer Rosaries for those who are sick. Ask God for guidance and thank him for his goodness.

**Give the gift of help.** Don't forget your parish where God's work is done. Help clean the church, teach a class, shovel snow, support a ministry. Without you, God's work won't get done.



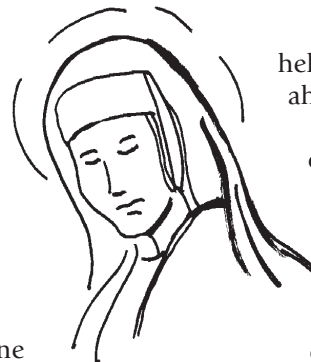
## Why Do Catholics Do That?

### Why do Catholics say Mary was born without Original Sin?

The Catechism teaches that God gave Mary all the gifts necessary for her to become mother of our Savior. In fact, when the angel Gabriel addressed Mary as "full of grace" in Luke 1:28, he means that Mary had the special divine

help necessary for the task ahead.

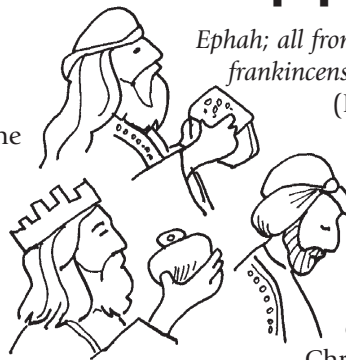
While we are cleansed of original sin at Baptism, Pope Pius IX infallibly affirmed that Mary's role in Jesus' work was so crucial that it kept her from original sin at the outset.



# Christmas is our epiphany

“Epiphany” is defined as a sudden revelation or insight. The celebration we call “The Epiphany” commemorates the moment when three foreign kings visited the newborn Jesus and experienced the revelation that he was a divine king.

The visit of the Magi was prophesied in the Old Testament. *“The kings of Tarshish and the Isles shall offer gifts, the kings of Arabia and Seba shall bring tribute. All kings shall pay him homage, all nations shall serve him”* (Psalm 72:10-11). *“Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and*



*Epiphany; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord”*

(Isaiah 60:6). St. Matthew recorded that they brought three gifts: gold – the gift for a king, frankincense – the gift for a priest, and myrrh – a burial ointment.

The kings witnessed to the presence of the Messiah on Earth, and the fulfillment of God’s promise of a Savior. Christmas is our reminder that God is always faithful.

Christmas is our epiphany into God’s eternal love.

## from Scripture

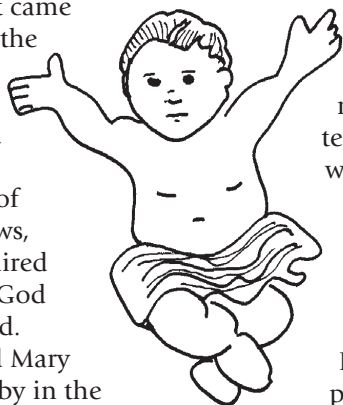
### Luke 2:22-40, Look for the Lord

To the uninformed observer, Jesus’ birth was unremarkable and his family quite ordinary. When it came time to present him in the temple, his parents couldn’t afford the customary offering of a lamb and gave two pigeons as an offering of the poor. As faithful Jews, they did what was required by their faith to thank God for the gift of their child.

Yet, when Joseph and Mary presented their new baby in the temple, Simeon immediately recognized him as the Messiah. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he

prophesied that Jesus was to be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”

Simeon was not alone in recognizing the Lord in the temple. Anna was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Her faith in God’s promises gave her hope. The hope God places in our hearts gives us a desire for the kingdom of Heaven. The Holy Spirit reveals the presence of the Lord to those who want to know him, to receive him, and to be with him forever.



## Feasts & Celebrations

December is when we prepare for and celebrate Christ’s birth and the miraculous events surrounding it.

**December 8 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.** On this Holy Day of Obligation, we attend Mass to commemorate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne’s womb without original sin.

**December 12 - Our Lady of Guadalupe (1531).** The Blessed Mother appeared to St. Juan Diego, also Native American. She asked to have a chapel built for her, and had him carry roses in

his tilma (cape) to the bishop as a sign. When he emptied his tilma before the bishop, it retained the image of the Blessed Mother.

**December 27 – St. John (1st century).** An apostle and friend of Jesus, St. John was known for his fiery temper. He once asked Jesus if he could call down fire from heaven on an inhospitable town. Later in his life, he and St. Peter asked the Holy Spirit to come down on the Samaritans.



## Q & A How long does the Christmas season last?

The Church’s real Christmas season starts on Christmas Day and lasts until the Baptism of Our Lord.



By celebrating the whole season, you can make your Christmas joy last long after you’ve taken down the tree.

Here are some highlights of the season:

**Feast of the Holy Family, December 28th.** Gather for a special meal with family or make contact with out-of-town relatives.

**Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, January 1st.** Dedicate a special rosary to the Blessed Mother asking her to help you grow in love and trust.

**The Epiphany, January 4th.** The example of the Magi honoring Jesus has become a symbol of sharing him with the world. This is our chance to think about the way we live so that we can better reveal Christ to our world.

**The Baptism of Our Lord, January 11th.** Baptism is our entry into the Kingdom. Take time this day to renew your Baptismal vows and decide what you can change in your life to help you live as Christ did.

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