

# LITURGY UPDATE

## Liturgical Memos

### November 29:

#### First Sunday of Advent

Beginning the First Sunday of Advent, paid licenses will again be required to reprint readings in English for weekly print and digital liturgical programs. To obtain a license, contact the Confraternity of Catholic Doctrine (CCD) at: [nabperm@usccb.org](mailto:nabperm@usccb.org). For more information, visit the [USCCB website](http://USCCB.org).

### December 10:

#### Memorial of Our Lady of Loreto

When this new optional memorial is observed, the prayers are taken from the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary: II. In Advent, choosing the second option for the Collect. The readings may be taken from the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the following recommendations: nos. 707-7 (Isa 7:10-14; 8:10), 709-5 (R./from Lk 1), 711-1 (Lk 1:28), and 712-4 (Lk 1:26-38). More information can be found at the [USCCB website](http://USCCB.org).

### January 18-25:

#### Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

During this period, special intentions for Christian Unity may be included in the Universal Prayer. Masses for this intention may also be selected from Masses for Various Needs and Occasions (nos. 17, 18, 19), in accordance with liturgical norms (see: *GIRM*, 373-374).



## The Masses of Christmas: Historical Origins and Current Celebration

The first record of the celebration of Christmas on December 25 comes via a Roman calendar dating to the mid-4th century. This document lists the death dates of various popes and martyrs, and, at a certain point, it notes that, “on the eighth day before the first day of January [December 25], there is celebrated the birth of Christ in Bethlehem of Judea.”

Scholars today are not sure why Western Christians adopted the practice of marking the birth of Christ on December 25, especially considering that churches of the East typically celebrated this same event on January 6, and given that Scripture itself does not ascribe a particular date to the Lord’s Nativity. One theory posits

that the impulse for this observance may have come as a Christian response to a feast of the “Unconquered Sun-God,” which was promulgated by the emperor Aurelian in 275. This pagan festival was celebrated on December 25, the date when the winter solstice was observed at the time. Some scholars believe that the Christian Church in Rome established a feast of Christ’s birth on this same day as a way of counteracting the pagan celebrations and directing the attention of the general populace to a more noble reason for their joyous feasting: namely, the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Christians during this period often pointed to the writings of the prophet Malachi, who described the Redeemer as the “sun of righteousness,” (3:20) as well as the many Johannine references to Christ as the “light of the world.” In so doing, they were able to offer a Scriptural justification for the celebration marked by Christians on December 25; this was a day that proclaimed the Incarnation of God’s Son, who alone gives light and salvation to the world.

Other scholars have proposed that the date of this feast might be related to various events surrounding the birth of Christ. One such theory maintains that, as early as the third century, some Christian theologians sought to determine the day of Christ’s birth with reference to the life of Saint John the Baptist. They proposed that John the Baptist was born on the day of the summer solstice in the Julian calendar (June 25), since this event was the most obvious cosmological reflection of Saint John’s declaration that he must decrease, while Christ, the light of the world, must increase. With this in mind, Saint John the Baptist’s conception would have then occurred nine months earlier on September 25, the day of the autumn equinox. According to Luke 1:26, Christ was conceived six months after John, and so this would place Christ’s conception on March 25, and His birth nine months later on December 25.

Another and related theory involves the idea that, to the ancient mind, the perfect man would be conceived and die on the same day. It was determined by early Christian theologians that Christ had died on the Cross on March 25 (the day of the Jewish Passover). Jesus, being the perfect Man and Son of God, would have also, therefore, been conceived on March 25, and then born nine months later on December 25.

Needless to say, modern scholars are not sure which, if any, of these factors may have led Christians to begin their celebration of the birth of the Savior on December 25 in the West. However, these theories offer intriguing insights into our own observance of this feast today, recalling to us the way in which God works through nature and the prophecies of Scripture to reveal His saving plan for all of humanity.





The various Masses of Christmas have an interesting historical development as well. Pope Saint Gregory the Great mentions in a Christmas homily the priestly practice of celebrating three Masses on this day, a custom which is still observed in our own time. The first such Christmas Mass was that which was celebrated during the day, originally at Saint Peter's Basilica, by the pope, at 9am. In the fifth century, a replica of the cave where Christ was born was constructed underneath the Basilica of Saint Mary Major; here, the pope began to celebrate a Midnight Mass in this small chapel as a way of marking the timing and setting of the event of Christ's birth that took place in Bethlehem. The last of the three Christmas Masses began to be observed in the sixth century. At the time, Eastern Christians celebrated the birth of Christ, not on December 25, but on January 6. In the East, December 25 was, instead, a feast of Saint Anastasia. After the Byzantine Greeks conquered Rome, popes began the practice of traveling to the Church of Saint Anastasia on the Palatine Hill to celebrate a Mass at dawn on December 25 as a sign of respect for the emperor, before then moving to Saint Peter's Basilica for the usual 9am Christmas Mass.



In our current *Roman Missal*, these three traditional Christmas Masses (in the night, at dawn, and during the day) continue to be observed, and are accompanied by a Vigil Mass for Christmas. While distinct sets of readings are assigned to each of these Masses, these passages may be used interchangeably as a group at each Mass. Other liturgical features that mark this day include the rubric to genuflect at the mention of the Incarnation during the recitation of the Creed, and the option to sing the announcement of the "Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ," which is taken from the *Roman Martyrology*.

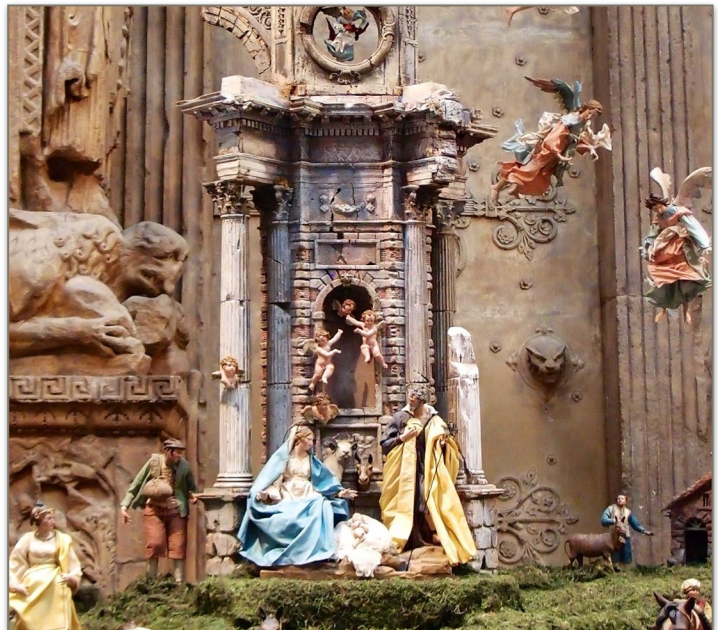
Of course, this year, Christmas celebrations will uniquely take place during a time of global pandemic. These liturgies, like all those which have been celebrated since our return to public worship, will include certain restrictions on the number of persons who will be able to be present in our churches for reasons of safety and health. In response, some parishes may be adding more Christmas Masses to their schedule to accommodate the expected

numbers of those who wish to attend Mass on this day. In these exceptional times, permission has even been given (for this year only) to celebrate Christmas Eve Masses as early as 2pm in the Archdiocese of New York. A related indult has also been granted this year to priests, who have been given permission to celebrate up to four Masses (rather than the usual three) on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Parishes will want to keep a close eye on current conditions and follow health guidance directives when deciding whether, in fact, it will be necessary or prudent to schedule additional Christmas Masses.

When making plans for Masses this Christmas, parishes may wish to consider the following recommended practices:

- If the parish has a regular “help-out” priest, it may be possible to offer simultaneous Masses on the parish campus, such as a Mass in the gym or parish hall at the same time as in church.
- When live-streaming to another area, parishes should ensure that the space is contiguous to the church proper (such as the narthex).
- Parishes are urged to be creative in communicating their Christmas Mass schedule, including making automated phone calls to parishioners, utilizing parish social media accounts, and placing ads in local newspapers, listing Mass times several weeks in advance. In these communications, it would be helpful to make note of the comprehensive health and safety protocols observed in the parish.
- It is recommended to begin speaking now about Mass options for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, encouraging parishioners to spread out amongst the different Masses. In some cases, parishes may find it helpful or even necessary to utilize a ticketing system for the Christmas Masses, particularly those on Christmas Eve.
- For music, parishes are urged to consider using non-aerosol producing instruments (e.g., organ, piano, handbells and other percussion, strings), microphones for cantors and small groups, and instrumental improvisations on Christmas carols, rather than congregational hymns, as a way of mitigating more robust singing.
- Weather permitting, Christmas pageants and concerts could be safely held outdoors or even virtually, using small groups of socially distanced and masked participants. Alternatively, recordings of previous years’ events could be shown on parish social media accounts.



### *New, Free Online Course: “How to Add Antiphons to Your Parish Sunday Mass”*

Since the return to public worship following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many parishes have chosen to avoid singing hymns in an effort to reduce the amount of congregational singing. This free online and on-demand seminar will discuss introducing simple antiphons and other proper chants, which can be sung in place of hymns at your parish's Sunday Mass. This workshop is designed for parish musicians, pastors, and anyone who wishes to learn more about new and creative ways to introduce new musical forms to a parish music program. Presented by Dr. Jennifer Donelson-Nowicka, DMA. Register today for FREE at: [nyliturgy.teachable.com](http://nyliturgy.teachable.com).





### *Liturgical Preparation Aid for Seasons of Advent and Christmas*

The *Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions* has published a free resource for the seasons of Advent and Christmas. This preparation aid includes: the full text of the Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution, music suggestions, sample penances, calendar advisories for the seasons of Advent and Christmas, the text of the Christmas Proclamation (to be sung before the Mass at Midnight), and the text of the Proclamation of the date of Easter (to be sung before the Mass on Epiphany). This resource may be downloaded in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) from the Liturgy Office website and distributed freely with the permission of the Confraternity for Christian Doctrine, the USCCB, and the International Commission on English in the Liturgy.

### *“Renewing Your Parish Music Program” Online Webinar: February 1*

As parishes return to public Mass, many are using this time as an opportunity to renew their parish music programs by enhancing different areas of their sung worship. This musical renewal often consists of introducing new hymns, Mass parts, instrumentation, the use of proper antiphons, and new voices. Making changes to a parish's musical repertoire requires thoughtful dialogue between musicians and pastors, taking into consideration the pastoral needs and musical history of the parish, while seeking to offer new and uplifting ways to glorify God and enthuse a congregation for sung worship. This online seminar will discuss the musical, pastoral, and professional/ interpersonal aspects of renewing a parish music program. Presented by Dr. Mary Jane Ballou, D.S.M., Harpist, Organist, and Director of Cantorae St. Augustine. Tickets are \$15, and registration is at: [renewyourparishmusicprogram.eventbrite.com](https://renewyourparishmusicprogram.eventbrite.com).





## *Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions Continues Weekly Presentations on the Liturgical Books*

The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions has announced an ongoing series of webinars which will feature expert presenters, online chats, and downloadable handouts on the liturgical books. The intended audience is any student of the Liturgy -- seminarians, deacon candidates, undergraduate students, parish worship commissions, musicians, youth ministers, catechists, and more! Each presentation is 75 minutes in length. More information and registration may be found on the [FDLC website](#).

December 2, 2020	<i>Order of Christian Initiation of Adults</i>	Todd Williamson
December 9, 2020	<i>Order of Baptism for Children</i>	Rita A. Thiron
December 16, 2020	<i>Order of Confirmation</i>	Fr. Michael Lewis
January 6, 2021	<i>Order of Celebrating Matrimony</i>	Fr. Thomas Ranzino
January 13, 2021	<i>The Rite of Ordination</i>	Fr. Leon Strieder
January 21, 2021	<i>The Rite of Penance</i>	Fr. Robert Kennedy
January 27, 2021	<i>The Pastoral Care of the Sick</i>	Leticia Thornton
February 3, 2021	<i>Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass</i>	Fr. John T. Lane, SSS
February 10, 2021	<i>Book of Blessings</i>	Dr. Patricia Hughes
February 24, 2021	<i>The Order of Christian Funerals</i>	Fr. John Sauer
March 3, 2021	<i>Dedication of a Church and an Altar</i>	Dr. James Starke
March 10, 2021	<i>The Liturgy of the Hours</i>	Christopher Ferraro

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