

# Read

Isaiah 9:1-6

Psalm 96:1-2, 2-3,  
11-12, 13

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

## LIVING THE WORD

# Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas)

December 24 and 25, 2023



## REFLECTION

Sometimes the anticipation of unwrapping presents under the tree is even better than the gift inside. Before it is opened, the present could be anything. It is a world of possibilities wrapped in paper.

In Luke's Gospel the greatest gift the world could know was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laying in a manger (see Lk 1:7). It was better than what anyone could imagine. While the world slept, not knowing that the nativity of the Lord was upon them, the angels had been anticipating this moment. The heavenly host sought someone to tell. Did they go to the kings and princes of the country? Were the rich and powerful informed of his arrival? No. The Good News was first announced to shepherds in the field. They would be the first to meet the Good Shepherd. Heaven came out to sing his praise. Today a savior has been born!

This Good News is given to you today. You are worthy to receive this message. Hope is born today. Simple, humble, and poor, Jesus is born for you. His birth is the fulfillment of God's promise made long ago, but it is his life we should watch and learn from. In his footsteps we will walk. Now the anticipation is in the unfolding of our lives. His birth has opened new possibilities for us, so let us give Jesus our lives as our gift to him.



## ACTION

Christmas is often a time full of joy and celebration. With all the presents, parties, and fun it can be easy to forget the reason for the season. Remember in prayer those who struggle during the holidays. Be generous with your sharing, in both material possessions and human connection. In your personal prayer time, reflect on the words of Christmas songs used at Mass. Meditate on their meanings as you celebrate the birth of the messiah.



**"Hope for Everyone"**  
—Matt Maher <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQVUOVpMSW4>



## QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ The Good News was first announced to poor shepherds. How do your own attitudes toward the poor and marginalized reflect God's special care for them?
- ❖ Angels greeted Jesus with song. What songs speak to you in this holy season?

# Introduction to CHRISTMAS TIME



## The Season

Merry Christmas! It can be sad and frustrating that Christmas Time is often lost in sentimentality, stressful family tradition, out-of-control gift giving, and the prevailing belief that it is a day, not a season. While the focus of Christmas Time is on God's great love for humanity, which requires preparation, a period of celebration, and time for reflection, it is not uncommon to hear people say how grateful they are that Christmas is over on December 26! Those who leave Christmas decorations up until the end of the season may be viewed by neighbors and friends as either lazy or unduly nostalgic! Keeping the season of Christmas is worth the misunderstanding of others, however. The Gospel passages for this season are filled with familiar stories that bear repeating. And these are stories that we grow into as time passes. While children love the story of the baby Jesus, teens and adults may find themselves grasping small details and the larger themes of the season with greater depth each year.

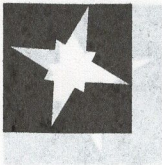
This holy season provides time for us to immerse ourselves in the mysteries of God's love, our responsibility for ourselves and others, and the ways in which faith and life intersect through the decisions we make, the relationships we nurture, and the impact we have on the people around us. Christmas Time truly is a blessed season; a time of grace and wonder, a moment in which to linger spiritually, with lasting impact in our lives, relationships, and the way we love, now and into the future.

## Celebrating Christmas Time with Teens

Christmas Time is a season that is filled with many emotions. Teens likely look forward to Christmas as a season they remember from the time they are very young. Like many adults, they anticipate time with family, the giving of gifts, and time away from the regular routines of school and activities. They may also approach Christmas tenderly or with anxiety if someone close has recently died, if family members are estranged, or if some are not (or no longer consider themselves) Catholic. Such situations may feel like open wounds at this time of the year. Foster open discussions among the teens to help them experience God's great love in this season of life and grace.

## Preparing the Liturgical Environment

Use Christmas white lavishly to help set the tone for your gatherings with the youth in this season. Some pine boughs and candles will add a touch of the special quality of the season. The crèche (nativity scene) is a perfect accompaniment to your Christmas prayer area, along with the Bible open to the one of the Christmas narratives or a song book with a favorite carol displayed.



December 24 and 25, 2023

# SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS)

## LECTIONARY #15ABC

The readings are from the Mass at Dawn.

Isaiah 62:11-12

Psalms 97:1, 6, 11-12

Titus 3:4-7

Luke 2:15-20

## Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

### Leader's Context

Many of the teens might be surprised by how short today's Gospel is. And they might also be surprised that the Gospel used for this session skips the actual account of Jesus' birth, instead highlighting what happened afterwards. The reason for this is because it is the Gospel for the Mass at Dawn for Christmas. There are four unique Christmas Masses, each with its own set of readings that tell different parts of the Christmas story. Although this shorter reading might not be as interesting to teens, we can use it to highlight how we should respond to this celebration of Jesus' birth and not miss out on the great things God is doing in our lives.

**Q FOCUS:** We should respond to the news of Jesus' birth with joy and faith.

### Liturgical Calendar Connection

Today marks the beginning of Christmas Time, which means our restrained joy and simplicity of Advent now turns to exultant praise! In a way, that sudden shift to jubilation that we experience when we begin Christmas is relatable to the experience of the shepherds today—they went from knowing nothing about the birth of Christ to suddenly seeing him in the flesh, and it changed their lives. The challenge for both the shepherds, and for us, is the question of how we continue to sustain this joy and love

through the whole season of Christmas. It's not just a single day, so how can we keep this awareness of what Christmas calls us to? If our belief is true, like the shepherds, then our rejoicing should not last just a single day, but should shape our whole lives.

### Church Teaching Connection

"In the Child of Bethlehem, God comes to meet us and make us active sharers in the life around us. He offers himself to us, so that we can take him into our arms, raise up and embrace the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned. . . . In this Child, God invites us to be messengers of hope. He invites us to become sentinels for all those bowed down by the despair born of encountering so many closed doors. In this child, God makes us agents of his hospitality" (Pope Francis, Homily, December 24, 2017).

## Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

### Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

### Gospel

Luke 2:15-20

**Reader:** A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

**All:** Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went

in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told to them.

**Reader:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**All:** Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

*Everyone may be seated.*

## Reflect on the Word

*When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:*

Christmas is such an important feast that the Church provides four unique Masses to celebrate: the Vigil Mass, Mass during the Night, Mass at Dawn, and Mass during the Day. Each of these liturgies has different readings that invite us into different parts of the Christmas story. The Gospel we hear today and are reflecting on is from the Mass at Dawn.

This Gospel might not seem very exciting. After all, here on Christmas we're not even reading about the birth of Jesus, we're just hearing about what happens after. That can be a bit of a letdown, and it's often something we can relate to in our lives. Many of us experience the desire to always be there when something fun or exciting is happening. FOMO, or the fear of missing out, can control our lives. When we are motivated by the fear of missing out, we might forget to take time for rest or for ourselves, because we're so worried about not being around for something important. Or it can damage our relationships when we resent others for doing anything without us or we get jealous because we did miss something. Regardless, we should always try to avoid being motivated by fear, and the fear of missing out is no different.

► **What was something that you missed out on that was hard to get over? How did you move on from that feeling of missing out?**

Let's look at the shepherds in this story. They likely had no idea that the messiah was to be born in the same time and place where they were. We don't really know anything about these shepherds, except that they were working that night. We can guess that they were Jews and would have been aware of their tradition's belief that God would send the promised messiah. And yet as people living in a small town with their own labors to attend to, they might not have been overly concerned with the where and when of God fulfilling his promise. So now let's imagine that angels suddenly appeared to these men while they are tending their sheep. They take in the words of the angels on faith and believe the messiah has been born.

► **When have you had to take someone at their word? What was it about them that made you believe what they were saying?**

Knowing that this was a very important event for their faith, the shepherds' reaction upon hearing that this great miracle has come about isn't to dismiss it as something they've missed out on. Even though they weren't there for the birth, they don't become angry or jealous at those who were there. Instead, they travel to Bethlehem "to see this thing that has taken place." Upon discovering Mary and Joseph with the infant Jesus, they begin to tell people about what they had seen and heard. Even though they missed the event itself, they still allowed their hearts to be open to this miracle. They went forth praising God, clearly having been moved by this experience. So today, as we celebrate Christmas, let's not be focused on what we didn't get (or what we might be missing out on). Instead, let's focus on the gifts God has given us: Jesus, our families and friends, and our time together.

## Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 102.

**Upon seeing the newborn Jesus, the shepherds' lives were changed and their faith deepened.**

**We too should strive to leave our hearts open to Christ and to his action in our lives.**

**We don't want to get so caught up with worldly things that we miss out on what God is doing in our lives.**

## Act on the Word

### Sketching the Scene

For this activity, you will need paper and art materials (like colored pencils, pens, markers, and so on), and extra copies of the Gospel reading.

The purpose of this activity is to help the young people to see that even the small moments in Scripture can reveal God's presence. It will help them to see the scene from the Gospel passage clearly in their minds. Distribute the paper and art materials and invite them to creatively depict the scene from this Gospel passage. Read the following set of questions for them to think about before they begin:

What is the setting of this scene? Where is it happening? At which time of day? What about the temperature, the weather?

Who is present in the scene? Who is central to the action and who is on the periphery? Do you imagine anybody present who isn't mentioned in the reading?

What is the main action happening in your scene? Why do you think you're feeling called to capture that particular moment?

Then read the Gospel story aloud as they work. You may want to project the Gospel for students to look at or have extra copies available for them to take for reference.

After most of the teens have finished, or when time is reaching its end, ask them to gather in small groups to share their work. Encourage them to focus less on the quality of the artwork, and instead to talk about where their imagination was taking them. Why did they choose to depict what they did? What thoughts or emotions did they ascribe to the people in the scene? If time permits, you might call back the whole group and give them the option of sharing what they liked about each other's artwork, or what stood out to them in this discussion. Did they gain any new insight into this Gospel passage?

### Closing Prayer

*Prince of Peace,*

*come fill our world with what only  
you can give:*

*comfort, healing, joy, wisdom,  
compassion, peace.*

*We celebrate your light and your glory.*

*All our hope is in you,*

*who live and reign with God the Father,*

*in the unity of the Holy Spirit,*

*God, for ever and ever.*

*Amen.*

### For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at [www.ltp.org/lwgr](http://www.ltp.org/lwgr). Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.