

December

The month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, which is celebrated on December 8th.

There can be no doubt that the feast of the pure and sinless Conception of the Virgin Mary, which is a fundamental preparation for the Lord's coming into the World, harmonizes perfectly with many of the salient themes of Advent. This feast also makes reference to the long messianic waiting for the Saviour's birth and recalls events and prophecies from the Old Testament, which are also used in the Liturgy of Advent.

"From all eternity God chose with infinite wisdom the woman who would be the Mother of His divine Son. To prepare for the Word Incarnate a spotless and holy tabernacle, God created Mary in grace and endowed her from the moment of her conception with all the perfections suited to her exalted dignity. St. Thomas teaches that through her intimacy with Christ, the principle of grace, she possessed beyond all creatures a fullness of divine life." — Liturgical Meditations, The Sisters of St. Dominic

This feast invites us to meditate on the virtue of purity. "Mary alone — 'our tainted nature's solitary boast' — never saw her soul's purity darkened with the dust of any stain, nor did she see in any part of her triumphal course toward heaven any sin or trace of worldliness. By a unique and singular privilege from God she was preserved from original sin from the first moment of her Immaculate Conception; by another privilege derived from the first, the Lord did not permit her ever to be stained even with those unavoidable failings of human weakness." — Luis M. Martinez

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception is an occasion for many displays of popular piety and especially for the Novena of the Immaculate Conception. The Novena of the Immaculate Conception, wherever it is celebrated, should highlight the prophetic texts which begin with Genesis 3, 15 and end in Gabriel's salutation of the one who is "full of grace" (Lk 1, 31-33)

The start of December sometimes still falls within Ordinary Time and so is represented by the colour green. It depends on which day the Feast of St Andrew falls, as the first Sunday of Advent is always the Sunday after it. However, the majority of days fall during the liturgical season of Advent and so are represented by the liturgical colour purple. The remaining days of December, after the 24th December, mark the beginning of the Christmas Season. The liturgical colour changes to white or gold — a symbol of joy, purity and innocence.

The month of December is filled with expectation and celebration. Preparation is the key word for the first twenty-four days of December. Everyone is getting ready for Christmas — shopping and decorating, baking and cleaning. Too often, however, we are so busy with the material preparations that we lose sight of the real reason for our activity.

The Liturgy of Advent focuses on remembering Christ's first coming at Bethlehem, which then directs our mind to Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. The readings focus on the people of the Old Testament awaiting the Messiah, John the Baptist, heralding the way for Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary and her maternal preparations.

Christmas is a Christian feast — and we must remember and celebrate it as such! In the same way that a family eagerly prepares for a baby, so in Advent should we prepare for the coming of the Christ Child. We should keep Advent as a season of waiting and longing, of conversion and of hope and keep our thoughts on the incredible love and humility of our God in taking on the flesh of the Virgin Mary. Let us not forget to prepare a peaceful place in our hearts wherein our Saviour may come to dwell.

The best person we can turn to for help during Advent is Mary, Christ's and our Mother. She awaited the day of His birth with more eagerness than any other human being. Her preparation was complete in every respect. We should remember to borrow something of Mary's prayerfulness, her purity and whole-hearted submission to God's will during our own Advent preparations.

This month the main liturgical feasts are:

St. Francis Xavier (December 3rd)
St. John Damascene, (December 4th)
St. Nicholas (December 6th)
St. Ambrose (December 7th)
Immaculate Conception (December 8th)
St. Juan Diego (December 9th)
St. Damascus (December 11th)
Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12th)
St. Lucy (December 13th)
St. John of the Cross (December 14th)
St. Peter Canisius (December 21st)
St. John of Kanity (December 23rd)

Christmastide begins with the First Vespers (Evening Prayer) of Christmas on December 24th (It ends in January.) Christmas and Easter are the only solemnities with Octaves attached in the revised calendar. The Christmas Octave differs from Easter in that it includes some major feasts: St. Stephen (December 26th), St. John the Evangelist (December 27th), The Holy Innocents (December 28th), St. Thomas Becket (December 29th) and the Holy Family (December 30th). The octave closes on January 1st, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.



Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10

I can do ALL THINGS through Christ who STRENGTHENS me.
—Phillippians 4:13

