

December: Special Days and the Liturgical Year

Days to Honor Mary in December:

- December 8: The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
- December 12: Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8)

- We honor Mary who was conceived without original sin, and who remained sinless for her entire life
- Patroness of the United States and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia
- It is a holy day of obligation
 - We are required to attend Mass on that Day.
 - There are 6 holy days of obligation in the US. (Two in December since Christmas is also one!)
- We celebrate the birth of the Blessed Mother nine months *after* the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (on September 8.)

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Dec. 12)

- Mary first appeared to St. Juan Diego on December 9 (now his feast day)
- The bishop didn't believe St. Juan Diego, who was a poor Aztec, when he said that he saw the Blessed Mother and she told him to build a church.
- Three days later, on December 12, Mary again appeared to St. Juan Diego and arranged roses in his cloak ("tilma"). When St. Juan Diego opened his cloak to give the bishop the roses, there was a picture of Mary on his cloak. The bishop then believed and build a church to honor Mary on the hill.

The Liturgical Year

- A new liturgical year begins at the start of Advent

Advent

- Period of 4 weeks of preparation for celebrating the birth of Jesus at Christmas
- Liturgical color: Purple for preparation and repentance from sin
- Advent symbols:
 - The Advent wreath:
 - The circle of green reminds us that God has no beginning and no end
 - There are four candles, one for each week of Advent (purple, purple, pink, purple)
 - The third candle is PINK and represents JOY

- One additional candle is lit each week
- The Jesse Tree (6th grade)
 - The Jesse Tree is named after Jesse, King David's father. The prophet Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would spring from the root (family) of David.
 - Each ornament is a symbol representing a person, a place, or an event leading to the coming of the Messiah. (Not every Jesse tree is the same; the Bible stories/ornaments can vary.) Most Jesse trees begin with the story of creation and lead up to Christmas.

Christmas

- Is a liturgical season that begins on Christmas Day, December 25.
- The liturgical color is white (The priests are also permitted to wear gold and often do for both the Christmas and Easter season...but the official color on the liturgical calendar is white.)
- Christmas is a Holy Day of obligation, so Catholics are supposed to attend Mass on either Christmas Eve or Christmas Day
 - It's always strange when Christmas Eve falls on the fourth Sunday of Advent as it does this year, but Catholics are expected to fulfill both our Sunday obligation (Mass on either Saturday night or on Sunday morning) for the Fourth Sunday of Advent and our Christmas Holy Day obligation (Mass on either Christmas Eve in the evening or on Christmas Day)
 - (Technically, you could go on Christmas Eve at night and count it as your 4th Sunday of Advent Mass... but then you'd still have to go on Christmas morning for your Christmas Day Mass. There's no two for one deal in the Catholic Church. 😊)
- We celebrate **The Nativity** (birth) **of the Lord**
- We celebrate the mystery of the **incarnation**.
 - **Incarnation:** The Son of God, Jesus, being born as a full human being in order to save us. The Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, is both true God and true Man
- We'll talk more about Christmas after you return from Christmas break... because it will still be the Christmas season!
 - Two Christmas feasts that fall over the break (not included on your test):
 - The Feast of the Holy Family - celebrated on the first Sunday after Christmas
 - The Solemnity of Mary - January 1 - usually a Holy Day of obligation, but on years like 2024 when it falls on a Monday, there's an exemption. (You can still go to Mass that day but you don't have to!)