

Saint Columbkille School of Religion
Religious Education Newsletter

Christmastide 2011 – Epiphany 2012



Christmas 2011

*God of All Goodness,
Your love for us was so great
That you sent your son,
Jesus, into our world.*

*He is the gift of Life and Love.
We praise you and thank you
For this Christmas
And everyday of grace.
Amen.*

Christmas Nativity Scene: Decoration or Symbol

The Christmas manger or nativity scene in our homes, is it just a decoration or does it have a special place in your home? Do your children have nativity sets in their bedrooms? Are the figures of the nativity scene placed in a special area or is it just one of many decorations on a dresser or nightstand? The Christmas scene or the Christmas manger is not just a decoration; it is the focal point of what Christmas is. The incarnation of Jesus is celebrated. God became man was born in a humble stall and laid in a manger.

St. Francis of Assisi is attributed as creating the first Nativity scene or crèche as it is sometimes called. Way back in 1223, St. Francis was concerned that the true meaning of Christmas was being lost and he wanted to do something about it in his city of Greccio, Italy.

Today when we think about the meaning of the real message of Christmas being lost we have a tendency to think that “we have too much” there are too many ‘things’ in our way. Too many parties with fine foods...too many gifts...too much to do. This was not the problem in Greccio centuries ago. The people lived in poverty and their conditions were very poor. They worried that they would not be able to properly celebrate the “feast of feasts” because they did not have enough food, or good clothes, or any gifts. They were distracted, because of what they did not have.

During Advent of 1223, St. Francis asked permission of the Pope to hold a reenactment of the first Christmas in his parish church. St. Francis tried to reconstruct the actual scene of the birth of Christ. The people of Greccio who came to attend Midnight Mass witnessed an impressive scene. No one expected that there outside of the church a “manger” scene was created complete with real people portraying the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph as well as shepherds. Animals were even brought in to represent those who were found in the stall on the night when Jesus was born. The idea of having a nativity scene or crèche in homes spread throughout the world from that small city centuries ago.

This Christmas Eve focus on the birth of Jesus and not on what you have or have not. Gather around the Christmas manger and talk about how blessed we are to have Jesus in our lives. Let’s try not to take for granted the nativity scene.



Blessing the Family Crèche

The annual unpacking of the family crèche—handing out the figures one by one, holding them up for all to see and admire once again—can be fun for the whole family. This is a beautiful way for your family to honor the Holy Family!

Parents: If you have a stable for the figures, set it in place first, then hand a figure to each family member to keep until it is to be placed in the crèche. Unless your family is quite large, you will have more figures than children. So you will need to put each child in charge of more than one. For the service you will need the crèche, a small bowl of holy water for the blessing, and a copy of this service for each participant. Either mom or dad, or both together, can act as leader. When calling on the children to bring forward their figures, call each child by name.

Leader: God, our Father, bless our family as we put together this holy scene to remind us of the birth of Jesus.

All: Amen.

Leader: *(name)*, please bring forward Mary, the mother of God's own Son, Jesus, and our mother, too. *(places figure in crèche)* God, help us to believe and trust and hope in your promises as faithfully as Mary did.

All: We will believe and trust and hope.

Leader: *(name)*, please bring forward St. Joseph. *(places figure in crèche)* God, help us to believe and trust and hope in God's promises as faithfully as St. Joseph did.

All: We will believe and trust and hope.

Leader: *(name)*, please bring forward the Holy Infant. *(places figure in crèche)* God, we thank you for the birth of our brother and savior, Jesus. Help us to follow him faithfully all our lives.

All: We will follow him faithfully.

Leader: *(name)*, please bring forward the angel(s). *(places figure(s) in crèche)* God, thank you for the angels who watched over this holy scene and filled the night sky with song.

All: We will praise God as the angels did.

Leader: *(name)*, please bring forward the ox and the donkey. *(places figures in crèche)* God, thank you for the ox and the donkey who shared this joyful time. The donkey carried Mary and the unborn Jesus all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem and the ox warmed the cold night air with his breath.

All: God, thank you for letting us share this joyful time.

Leader: *(name)*, please bring forward the shepherds and their sheep. *(places figures in crèche)* God, help us to be as simple and sincere in our faith as these first visitors to the Christ Child.

All: We will be simple and sincere in our faith.

Leader: *(name)*, please bring forward the wise men and their camels. *(places figures in crèche)* God, help us to be as steadfast in our search for the truth as these wise men who came from afar.

All: We will search for the truth always.

Leader: God, our Father, we ask your blessing on this holy scene. *(Take some holy water and sprinkle it lightly on the crèche.)* Let us make this a special place of personal as well as family prayer throughout this holy season. Each time we pause to enjoy the crèche, let us praise God for the gift of Jesus who came to save us, Mary who consented to be his mother, and Joseph who cared for them.

All: God, we praise you for this holy season. Bless our crèche and bless our home and all who dwell in it.

(Close by singing together "O Little Town of Bethlehem" or another favorite carol.)

The Blessing the Family Crèche is taken from *Pflaum Gospel Weeklies*.
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CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENTS

The Holy Eucharist

Holy Mass Offered 364 Days Per Year

During the Christmas Season, many families will take the time from busy schedules to go to church together for the celebration of Mass, which is the central celebration of our faith. During Mass we celebrate the Eucharist, Jesus present with us. It is important that our children learn that our faith is not just celebrating Mass on special occasions or attending religious classes. It is who we are, a Eucharistic people, those saved by the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. Holy Mass is offered 364 days per year (every day of the year except on Good Friday when we have special services including the distribution of Holy Communion.) Try to celebrate Mass as a family especially on Sundays.

Reconciliation

Parish Penance Service – TBA-Check Bulletin for more information

We, Catholics, believe in the power of forgiveness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and further believe that we should be in the “state of grace,” that is free from serious sin to receive the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist, Holy Communion. The Parish Penance Service date has not yet been announced.

Confessions – Every Saturday from 12:00 (Noon) to 1:00 PM

All parish families (especially with children in 3rd grade and older) are encouraged to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation on Saturdays from Noon until 1 PM or to contact Fr. Domenic for other arrangements. There will not be time for Fr. Domenic to hear each of the children’s confessions during regular religious education classes this year during Advent so please avail your family of the convenience of Saturday afternoon confession.

First Reconciliation

Mrs. Crawford’s Second Grade class will make their First Reconciliation on Saturday, March 3, 2012. Mrs. Snatchko’s class will go to confession for the first time on Saturday, February 25, 2012, Mrs. Zelesnik's class on March 10, 2012, and Mrs. Bordo's class on March 17, 2012. All First Reconciliations will begin at 11:00 AM with a brief reception immediately following. Please keep all of our St. Columbkille First Reconciliation students in your prayers.

First Holy Communion Parents

A meeting for Parents of First Holy Communion Students will be held on Wednesday, February 15, 2012 at 5:30 PM in St. Columbkille Parish Hall. Please try to have at least one parent present for the meeting where we will discuss the Sacrament of Eucharist, First Reconciliation, Celebration of Jesus’ Love Day (First Communicants Retreat), and details regarding First Communion Mass.

Confirmation

The sacrament of Confirmation will be celebrated on Thursday, March 8 at 7 PM in St. Columbkille Church. Bishop David Zubik will be the confirming bishop. Please pray for our confirmandi.

Confirmation Retreats

Two dates, January 12 and 18, 2012, are scheduled for our Confirmation candidates and their sponsors and/or parents to attend a Confirmation retreat at St. Paul of the Cross Retreat Center. Mr. Ploof's and Mrs. Mundis' classes are scheduled to attend the January 12 retreat and Mrs. Csonka's and Mr. Grecko's classes on January 18. The cost for each retreat participant is \$20 per person (\$40 for student and sponsor or parent, \$60 for student, sponsor, and parent, etc.). The parish will pay for bus transportation. The retreat focuses on prayer, what it means to be a confirmed Catholic, what are the responsibilities are for the confirmed, and the role of sponsors & parents with the newly confirmed. All participants are invited to go to confession during the retreat. Please pray for our Confirmation students that they are open to the spiritual benefits of their retreat.

K- 8 Religious Education/ CCD Class January 2011 Schedule

<u>Mondays</u>	<u>Mondays</u>	<u>Wednesdays</u>	<u>Saturdays</u>
4:30-6:00 PM	6:30 – 8:00 PM	5:30 – 7:00 PM	9:00-10:30 AM
Jan 2 – Regular Class	Jan 2 – Regular Class	Jan 4 – Regular Class	Jan 7 – Regular Class
Jan 9 – Regular Class	Jan 9 – Regular Class	Jan 11 – Regular Class	Jan 14 – Regular Class
Jan 16 – Regular Class	Jan 16 – Regular Class	Jan 18 – Regular Class	Jan 21 – Regular Class
Jan 23 – Regular Class	Jan 23 – Regular Class	Jan 25 – No Class	Jan 28 – No Class
Jan 30 – Regular Class	Jan 30 – Regular Class	In-Service	In-Service

Christmas Pageant and “Come To Bethlehem” Program December 10, 2011 Noon – 2 PM

All St. Columbkille parishioners, family members, and friends are invited to attend our annual Christmas pageant and special program “Come to Bethlehem.” Call the religious ed office for more details (724.695.21346).

Epiphany Celebration for all Religious ED Classes On the first day back in 2012

All St. Columbkille children (grades K-8) invited

The first day of CCD classes in 2012 will be as follows: Monday, January 2, Wednesday, January 4, and Saturday, January 7. On the first day of class after our Christmas break, we will have an Epiphany Celebration. The season of Christmas does not end the day after Christmas. Sometimes we get confused and think that the shopping world knows when to celebrate Christmas. The result is that we lose sight of the wonderful season of Advent and of the fantastic feast days after Christmas until Epiphany Sunday. Our Epiphany Celebration will include a lesson about the visit of the Magi, an interesting Epiphany game with a real message, and refreshments. This is a regular Religious Ed (CCD) class day, however, our celebration also includes all St. Columbkille children including those who attend Catholic schools. All are welcome.

Adult Volunteer Help Needed for Each Epiphany Celebration

Parents, grandparents, guardians, and other interested adults are you interested in helping at one of our Epiphany Celebrations? Please call the Religious Education Office (724.695.2146) and let us know which day you can help: Monday, January 2, Wednesday, January 4, or Saturday, January 7. All volunteers must have taken the Protecting God’s Children workshop, registered on the Diocese of Pittsburgh database, have PA Clearances, and signed appropriate Church documents to work with our children. Donations of cookies and other treats will be appreciated.

Christmas Outreach Program – THANK YOU

Gift items were collected for the residents of the Little Sisters of the Poor Nursing Home (Wall Memorial Home) during December. Thanks for your generosity. A special thanks to those who came and packed the gift items as well as to those who delivered the gifts to the homes.

Christmas Blessings to All!

