

OUR LADY OF PROVIDENCE CHAPEL
SAINT VINCENT HOSPITAL
WORCESTER MEDICAL CENTER
Christmas—The Nativity of the Lord
December 25, 2024



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CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Weekday Masses: (Monday—Friday at 12 noon)
Weekend Masses: Saturday 4:00pm—Sunday: 7:30am & 4:00pm
Holy Day Mass Schedule: afternoon prior at 4:00pm
Holyday proper at 12 noon and 4:00pm
Confessions: First Saturday of every month at 3:30pm
Department Telephone: 508.363.6246
Chapel Website: www.ourladyofprovidence.net

Christmas 2024

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On Christmas Eve, Pope Francis will open and enter the Holy Door of Saint Peter's Basilica to celebrate Christmas Mass and begin a Jubilee Year. A Jubilee Year is a special time of remission of sin and punishment due to sin. It involves pilgrimages, prayer, and works of mercy and penance. Jubilee Years awaken in us a profound awareness of the depth of God's love, mercy and solicitude for each one of us. That deepened awareness leads to a great hope of sharing in the glory of God (Romans 5:2).

At Christmas, the glory of God briefly shone down on quaking shepherds tending their flocks as angels announced good news of great joy: God's Eternal Son was born of the Virgin Mary. Through the Holy Spirit, He took on our lowly humanity that we might forever share in the glory of His divinity. As Jesus was fully God and fully man, no one can claim that God is distant from us, or unaware of our trials. He walked among us and died for us. He is that close. He cares that much. This gives us hope throughout life and in every circumstance of life. Pope Francis has called us "Pilgrims of Hope" as the theme for this year's Jubilee. It is a hope that will not disappoint because it is based in Jesus Christ who is the Eternal Word of God made flesh.

The New Year 2025 is not only a Jubilee Year, but an anniversary year. It is the 1900th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, which defined the dogma of the divinity of Christ as true God and true man. It is also the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Diocese of Worcester, for which we give thanks. 2025 will be a year full of opportunities for grace, hope and joy. They all stem from the Son of God and Son of Mary who was born in Bethlehem. I pray that you and your loved ones will have a blessed Christmas and that the observances and celebrations of 2025 will prolong those joys, deepen your faith and strengthen your hope.

With every prayerful best wish for a Merry Christmas, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester

GLORIA + IN + EXCELSIS + DEO



ET + IN + TERRA + PAX + HOMINIBUS

Toward a Deeper Understanding of Christmas and Its Liturgical Practices

In the *Universal Norms of the Liturgical Year and Calendar (UNLYC)*, this directive is given, "On the day of the Nativity of the Lord, following ancient Roman tradition, Mass may be celebrated three times, that is, in the night, at dawn and during the day" (UNLYC, n. 34). Thus, a unique and centuries old tradition, dating back to the sixth century, allows every priest to celebrate three Masses on Christmas: Mass at Night (Lat. *Missa in nocte*), Mass at Dawn (Lat. *Missa in aurora*), and Mass during the Day (Lat. *Missa in die*). A few centuries earlier, the Pope celebrated only one Mass on that day, usually around 9:00 in the morning. Then, a century later, Midnight Mass was offered at the Basilica of Saint Mary Major and following the conciliar declaration that Mary was the Mother of God, the current basilica was erected honoring Mary's divine maternity. A subterranean chapel was built in front of the papal altar as a replica of the cave in Bethlehem. For that reason, the basilica was once known as *Sancta Maria ad Praesepe* because of its relic of the crib or manger of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, four boards of sycamore wood believed to have been brought to the church and along with a fifth, in the time of Pope Theodore I (640-649). The Holy Father would celebrate the Midnight Mass in that basilica. Finally, the third Mass of Christmas was added and celebrated at the Church of Saint Anastasia, who was a martyr highly regarded among the Byzantine Greeks who, at that time, were governing Rome and parts of present-day Italy. Anastasia's feast day was December 25 and, due to the political situation, the Pope himself celebrated this Mass. Each of those three Masses has a different Gospel: *Mass at Night* is the most well-known (Lk 2:1-14) recounting the birth of the Christ Child in Bethlehem; *Mass at Dawn* focuses the hastening of the shepherds to see the Child, after the angel made the announcement of the Savior's birth to them (Lk 2:15-20); and *Mass during the Day* is assigned the Prologue from Saint John's Gospel (Jn 1:1-18) that proclaims the mystery of the Incarnation as the eternal Word become flesh.

Saint Augustine— Sermo 191

When the Maker of time the Word of the Father, was made flesh, He gave us His birthday in time; and He without whose divine bidding no day runs its course, in His Incarnation reserved one day for Himself. He Himself with the Father precedes all spans of time; but on this day, issuing from his mother, He stepped into the tide of the years. Man's Maker was made man, that He, Ruler of the stars, might nurse at His mother's breasts; that the Bread might be hungry, the Fountain thirst, the Light sleep, the Way be tired from the journey; that the Truth might be accused by false witnesses, the Judge of the living and the Dead be judged by a mortal judge, Justice be sentenced by the unjust, the Teacher be beaten with whips, the Vine be crowned with thorns, the Foundation be suspended on wood; that Strength might be made weak, that He who makes well might be wounded, that Life might die. He was made man to suffer these and similar undeserved things for us, that He might free us who were undeserving; and He who on account of us endured such great evils, merited no evil, while we who through Him were so bountifully blessed, had no merits to show for such blessings.

Christmas and the Incarnation

As mentioned earlier, in the *Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, Christmas is observed by what could be identified as a Triduum of Masses. According to tradition, the Child Jesus was born at midnight in Bethlehem. Thus, to honor the very hour when the Savior came into the world to save us, the custom of Midnight Mass began. Moreover, the darkness of midnight also parallels humanity's condition of spiritual darkness as the world awaited the radiant birth of the promised Messiah. The Gospel is the first part of the second Chapter of Saint Luke that recounts the Christmas Angel heralding the good news to the shepherds; hence, it is often called the *Angels' Mass*. The Mass at dawn because the shepherds hurried to Bethlehem to see what those angels had proclaimed, it is traditionally called the *Shepherds' Mass*. The third Mass, celebrated in the full light of Christmas day, constitutes a clarion call for all people and every nation to worship the newborn King of Kings. And, so it has been traditionally referred to as the *King's Mass*. Each Mass highlights a different aspect of the miraculous Birth of the Savior — Jesus as both God and man: one Person with two natures.

Gospel for Mass during the Day or the King's Mass: In 1:1-18

These are the opening verses (vv. 1-3), “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” The third of the Christmas Gospels begins by making reference to the creation account in the Book of Genesis and, thereby, equating Jesus with God and prefacing the divinity of the Child of Bethlehem. Belief in the Trinity reveals that God is not alone, though God has one nature but yet God is three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God is a communion of love: The Father loves the Son, the Son receives love from the Father, and the Holy Spirit is the bond of the love between the Father and Son. Christmas is all about the Incarnation which reveals that Jesus Christ is the second Person of the Trinity and the Word-made-flesh (or Logos) through which God made all things. In Genesis we see that God specifically created through his Word: “And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen 1:6). Jesus is both fully human and fully divine. God is three Persons because He is love and love always needs an object to love. Love includes the lover, the beloved, and the love between them. Then, in verse 14, you read, “And the Word (Gk. Λόγος) became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The Greek word for flesh is *sarx* (Gk. σάρξ) and it refers to the entire human person in all its weakness and mortality. In taking on our human nature, Jesus the eternal Word made Himself vulnerable for our sake. The Word or Logos ‘made his dwelling among us’. The original text literally means that Jesus *tabernacled* or *pitched his tent* among us. The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, the architectural expression of God's presence in Israel, is a prophetic image of Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of divine wisdom in the flesh. In regard to the Incarnation, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states these reasons why the Word became flesh: (1) in order to save us by reconciling us with God, (2) so that thus we might know God's love, (3) to be our model of holiness, and (4) to make us partakers of the divine nature (CCC, nn. 457-460).

Saint Augustine – Sermon 185

Awake, mankind! For your sake God has become man. ... You would have suffered eternal death, had he not been born in time. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had he not taken on himself the likeness of sinful flesh. You would have suffered everlasting unhappiness, had it not been for his mercy. You would not have returned to life, had he not shared your death. You would have been lost if he had not hastened to your aid. You would have perished, had he not come.

After Christmas – Is It the Octave of Christmas or the Twelve Days of Christmas?

Introduction

Whether the post-Christmas season is eight or twelve days, the time after Christmas is important because those subsequent days afford us a way of reflecting on the meaning of the Messiah's Birth or the Incarnation. The Octave of Christmas refers to both the eight-day period during which what took place on December 25th is gradually unveiled and the octave or eighth day after Christmas is also called an octave. This is the prolongation of the joys and blessings that came about through the Word-becoming-flesh or God's entry into the world as the Child of Bethlehem. In regard to Christmas and its octave, Father Pius Parsch wrote "Today is the octave or the eighth day after the feast of Christmas. In the spirit of the Church the great feasts of redemption should not be restricted to a single celebration but should continue on through a full week... When a feast comes, the soul is amazed and not quite prepared to think profoundly about its mystery; but on the following days the mind finds it easy to consider the mystery from all sides, sympathetically and deeply; and an eighth day affords a wonderful opportunity to make a synthesis..." (*The Church's Year of Grace*, vol. 1). The sacred character of the number eight is often ascribed to the dedication of the Temple of Solomon and its purification which lasted for eight consecutive days.

Understanding the Octave of Christmas

In the first three days of the Octave, immediately following Christmas, those feasts have been identified as the *comites Christi* or the *companions of Christ* which exemplify the various ways that the Incarnation should be lived out. *December 26* is the Feast of Saint Stephen, the first martyr who witnessed to Christ by the sacrifice of his own life. On the following day, the Church honors *Saint John the Apostle* and Evangelist. In the Prologue to the Gospel that bears his name, John wrote, "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us..." (Jn 1:14). Then, on *December 28*, the tragedy of the Holy Innocents (Childermas) is commemorated, "the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under" (Mt 2:16). Those multiple companions illustrate different forms of martyrdom: voluntary and by suffering death (St. Stephen), voluntary and not lethal, though still facing off against hatred for Christ (St. John) and non-voluntary dying (Holy Innocents). Stephen died heroically, privileged to see a vision of Christ in glory. John was inspired by the Spirit to speak the Word (or Logos) of life and to plumb the depths of the mysteries of God. The Holy Innocents died unjustly, before the age of self-awareness and will. On the *Fifth Day* in the Octave of Christmas, Saint Thomas Beckett (1118-1170) is memorialized, martyred by King Henry II on that day. The *Breviarum romanum* contains this description, "Calumniators informed the king that the bishop was agitating against him and the peace of the realm; and the king retorted that with one such priest he could not live in peace. Hearing the royal displeasure, several godless courtiers agreed to do their sovereign a favor by assassinating Thomas. Secretly they traveled to Canterbury and fell upon the bishop while he was attending Vespers. His priests rushed to his

aid and tried to bar the church door; Thomas opened it himself with these words, 'The house of God may not be defended like a fortress. I gladly face death for the Church of God.' Then to the soldiers, he said, 'I command it in the Name of God: No harm may be done to any of mine.' Thereupon he cast himself on his knees, commended his flock and himself to God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to St. Denis and other holy patrons of his church, and with the same heroic courage with which he had withstood the king's laws, he bowed his holy head to the sacrilegious sword on December 29, 1170." On the *Sixth Day* of the Octave, while no particular saint is honored, throughout most of the Octave the First Letter of Saint John is read. As the last of the Apostles, as a kind of patriarch, John addresses children, fathers, and young men about priorities and warns them about the world in opposition to God. Sons and daughters of God, then, we must live for God and not for the world. The *next-to-the last day* of the Octave (December 31) honors St. Sylvester I who represents the whole class of unmartyred saints, yet who were confessors or Christ's promoters who suffered for the faith and, after the age of persecution, professed the faith, lived a holy life, and died in peace. Saint Sylvester often received strangers into his home and cared for them. During a persecution, he took in Timothy of Antioch who lived with him for an extended period of time. Eventually Timothy was arrested and executed. Sylvester removed his body and gave the future saint proper burial. The brutal imperial prefect, in turn, arrested Sylvester and demanded he renounce Christ, threatening him with torture and death. Saint Sylvester was not intimidated, and he remained steadfast in his confession of faith, and was then thrown into prison. When Tarquinius suddenly died after the trial, the saint was set free and fearlessly he evangelized the pagans, converting many to Christianity. Tradition has it that this Pope converted the emperor Constantine and cured him of leprosy. The *Eighth Day* of the Octave is known as *The Octave Day of the Nativity of the Lord* and the *Solemnity of Mary the Holy Mother of God*. Thus, as is intended, it not only repeats the feast of Christmas and honors the Lord, but also honors Mary as the Child's Holy Mother. According to Saint Pope Paul VI, "The Christmas season is a prolonged commemoration of the divine, virginal and salvific motherhood of her whose 'inviolable virginity brought the Savior into the world.' In fact, on the Solemnity of the Birth of Christ the Church both adores the Savior and venerates His glorious Mother... the attention of all should be directed towards the restored Solemnity of Mary the holy Mother of God. This celebration... is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation" (*Marialis cultus*, n. 5). Following the conclusion of the Octave of Christmas, the Church continues the Christmas season, though not as in the eight days wherein the actual Solemnity of the Nativity itself is continued. The post-octave period is known by the collective title of Christmastide last twelve days until the evening of January 5 or Twelfth Night. Then, its festival tone continues through the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.