

# Advent Celebrations



## Advent Stations of Christmas

### Stations of Christmas

During Lent, the Church gives us the Stations of the Cross, allowing us to reflect on the events of Holy Week. Perhaps these "Stations of Christmas" can remind us of the events leading to the wonderful miracle of the Lord's birth. Why not use them as a basis for your family prayer during the Christmas season?

#### *Opening Prayer*

Lord Jesus, the miracle of your Nativity has inspired Christians for generations. Inspire us now with the beautiful story of your birth. Help us to clear our minds of the concerns of the day and fill us with the peace and hope of Advent.

#### **The Annunciation**

For centuries, the Jewish people had prayed for a Messiah. Age after age, their hopes were met with disappointment. Yet they kept faith. At last, in a small Judaeon town, an angel of God asks a young Jewish girl to carry within her the hope of her nation. Mary accepts God's call and changes the course of her life to take on the role of the Mother of God. Heavenly Father, just as Mary accepted life-changing challenges when she opened herself to your call, so I know I may have to do the same. Help me to remember her courage and be comforted by it. May I always be open to your challenges.

## Spirit of Christmas

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#### **The Visitation**

Now Mary, having accepted the Lord's call, finds herself in a most lonely situation. Only she knows what has happened to her. The magnitude of this news is enough to cause her to doubt even her own senses. Yet God in his goodness left her a word of comfort. Her cousin Elizabeth has also been blessed by God's grace; she has conceived a child in her old age. Mary sets off to see this miracle, so similar yet to different from her own. On her arrival, Mary is rewarded with the reassurance that God has indeed called her.

God in heaven, may I never lose heart. I know that if I but do your will, you will give me strength and means to carry it out. And should I waver in my faith, may I be strengthened by the signs and miracles, large and small, you provide along the way.

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## Joseph's Vision

Joseph now finds himself caught up in the faith decision of his future wife, Mary. Confronted with her condition, he must respond. Like many of us, he responds in a worldly way. He will divorce Mary quietly. But God intervenes. An angel comes to Joseph in a dream to reassure him that what has happened is the work of God. Joseph makes his own faith decision and takes Mary as his wife.

Lord, many times we are alone in our decision to accept your will. Even family and friends may turn away. Remind us that we are never alone, and give us faith that you will always help us to carry out your will.

**The Journey** Now Joseph and Mary are confronted with another obstacle. Rome has ordered a census. Joseph must travel to Bethlehem to register his new family. Mary, heavy with child, must go with him. They spend their nights outside in the cold desert air, yet they know nothing can happen to this special child. God's presence will guide them along the way. With loving patience, they set out for Bethlehem, the city long prophesied as the birthplace of the Messiah. Father, at times we are surprised by the twists and turns of life. Give us the patience of the Holy Family to realize that no matter where our lives lead, you will be waiting at the end of our journey.

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## Arrival in Bethlehem

At last Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem, now bustling with travelers. Tired and dusty from the trip, they search for lodging. Mary says they must hurry, for her baby will be born this night. But no one has room to take them in.

Holy God, disappointments are so hard. We cannot understand why we must endure hardship, even when we try to do your will, or why favour seems to go to those less deserving. Help us to remember that even our disappointments can serve to give you glory.



## The Manger

As despair closes in on the Holy Family, the innkeeper tells them of the stable where they are welcome to stay. Here Mary can find a warm, private place to delivery her baby. They make their way to the stable, where horses, cattle, and other animals become their lodging companions. Mary may rest from the journey.

Loving Father, may we always be open to your kindness. Help us to accept your gifts at face value, to realise that you always give us what is best for us. May we be grateful for the gifts given in your love.

The Nativity

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## The Nativity

Now is the most important moment of Mary's life, and she must face it alone; just as her Son would face his moment of truth some thirty years later. The holy Son of God is born in a stable. As the animals look on, God performs his greatest miracle. The promise of salvation, dreamed of for thousands of years, is accomplished by a loving God and a poor girl in a stable.

Holy Lord, as we sit in awe of your blessed Nativity, we are shaken by the wonder of your glory and your meekness. Having so humbled yourself, help us not to be caught up in our own importance. Remind us of the great things that are accomplished when we are perfectly submissive to your will.

## The heavenly choir

Unaware of the miracle happening that night, shepherds keep watch over their sheep. Suddenly their familiar night sky is filled with glorious angels singing divine praises. The angels reassure the shepherds. They have come with good news.

God has sent them a Saviour. When the angels vanish, the shepherds are left in wonderment. If the Saviour has come, why didn't God send his angels to the king or the high priests? Yet they seek to confirm the truth of the angel's words, the strange tale of a baby in a manger.

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**The shepherds' visit** Mary and Joseph, alone for the first time with the baby, look with pride at what God has entrusted to them. They hear calls of greeting. Going to the stable entrance, Joseph sees shepherds asking to see the baby. Joseph does not want the privacy or safety of his family invaded. The shepherds tell of the angels, and Joseph's heart is softened. They enter timidly and, upon seeing what the angels had proclaimed, fall to their knees to worship their Messiah.

Dear Father, often I want only to be left alone, but the world floods in. My life is awash with distractions. Help me to remember that my purpose in this life is not to centre upon myself but to look outward and proclaim the Word of your Son's holy mission.



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## The star

In the East, men search the night sky as they have done so many nights before, looking for a sign. Why, we cannot know. They see a new star rise. Researching ancient writings, they learn of a king to be born to the Jews. They pack their belongings and prepare gifts for the new king. On their journey, they pay their respects to King Herod. The wicked Herod slyly ask the Magi to return news to him of the child's whereabouts. The Magi set off again to follow the star.

Lord of all, the star of Bethlehem teaches us that your Word and your love have no limits. As the Magi searched the night sky for a sign they did not fully understand, so I search patiently for those times you come into my life and give me direction.

**The Epiphany** More visitors to the stable. These are in fine dress and speak in a foreign tongue. They explain who they are and why they have come, and Joseph allows them to enter. They fall to their knees at the sight of Jesus. How ironic to see these visitors, so different from the shepherds, react in such a similar fashion. The Magi offer gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then they are gone. Before they return to Herod, God warns them to return by another route. Holy God, as the magi humbled themselves before you, may I always do the same. May I also be willing to spread your Word to peoples of all lands. For all people, great and small, are humbled in your presence.



## Closing prayer

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for this time together. Just as the Father used Mary to bring you into this world, help us to use this time to bring your message into the world. May we never forget the love you have for all of us, and may we never forget to share that love with others as you shared yourself with us.