

Journey to the Inn: An Advent Celebration



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Introduction

With the bustle of Christmas shopping and the frequent removal of religious imagery from Christmas displays, it seems that communities have forgotten the incredible gift of Christ and the beauty of his birth.

What should we, as Knights of Columbus, do in the face of this secularism? How can we teach our communities that Christmas is a holy day celebrating the birth of Christ?

Such questions, of course, are not wholly new; Franciscan missionaries in the 16th-century faced similar concerns when first introducing Christ and his beloved Mother to the New World. In the tradition of their founder, St. Francis of Assisi, the missionaries found that simple reenactments of the story of Christ's birth could touch the hearts of the Mexican people. The Spanish missionaries referred to these ceremonies as Las Posadas — meaning “the inns” or “the shelters” — as they gave emphasis to Mary and Joseph's search for shelter before Our Savior's birth.

These festivities have remained popular throughout Latin America and the southwestern United States, yet children and adults from all cultural backgrounds can use similar celebrations to embrace the true meaning of the Christmas season and share the joy of Christ's birth.

Planning Your Advent Celebration

To help your council and parish community prepare its own Advent celebration, the Knights of Columbus offers this booklet containing a simplified one-day ceremony in the tradition of Las Posadas. Be sure to review the booklet carefully to determine whether you should further adapt the event to fit the unique needs of your own community.

Traditionally, Las Posadas celebrations are held on nine consecutive nights just prior to Christmas, but your celebration may be held any time during Advent. Councils are encouraged to appoint a committee sometime before the First Sunday of Advent to work with their chaplain or parish priest to set an appropriate date and review the chosen prayers and readings.

Once a date is set, ask parishioners and members of the community to volunteer. They might help young performers memorize their roles; set up the outdoor stations, which represent the inns of Bethlehem; or help design costumes, which may be as simple or ornate as resources allow. The committee should also select a master of ceremonies, to direct and explain the celebration as needed.

Part 1 — Advent and Christmas Meditations

The celebration begins with an outdoor procession in which the community makes its way to five stations. At each station, two participants — preferably children — are asked to read or recite selected Scripture passages, which offer simple reflections on the mysteries of Christ's birth. Children might also dress as the Biblical characters and organize short performances based on the Scripture reading for each mystery.

As each mystery concludes, the participants sing a Christmas carol while making their way to the next station. There, the next mystery is announced.

Chaplain: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All respond: Amen.

Chaplain: Let us meditate on these holy mysteries, by first expressing sorrow for our offenses.

All: O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you and I detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend you, my God, who are all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life.

Amen.

The 1st Mystery

Chaplain: The first mystery, “the prophet condemns unfairness and announces the coming of our Savior.”

Reader 1: A reading from the book of Isaiah (Is 11: 1-4, 35: 3-6, and 10).

The royal line of David is like a tree that has been cut down; but just as new branches sprout from a stump, so a new king will arise from among David’s descendants. The spirit of the Lord will give him wisdom and the knowledge and skill to rule his people. He will know the Lord’s will and honor him, and find pleasure in obeying him. He will not judge by appearance or hearsay; he will judge the poor fairly and defend the rights of the helpless.

Give strength to hands that are tired and to knees that tremble with weakness. Tell everyone who is discouraged, “Be strong and don’t be afraid! God is coming to your rescue, coming to punish your enemies.” The blind will be able to see, and the deaf will hear. The lame will leap and dance, and those who cannot speak will shout for joy.

They will reach Jerusalem with gladness, singing and shouting for joy. They will be happy forever, forever free from sorrow and grief.

Reader 2: The prophet joyfully considers the coming of new king. This king is to be the messiah — a Hebrew word that means “savior” — who will come to help even the poorest and saddest people on earth.

This messiah that the prophet speaks of is Jesus. Like the shepherd who doesn’t give up when looking for his lost sheep, Jesus continues to seek those who are lost in sin. He keeps his promise and comes to our rescue, healing our wounds and comforting us when we are saddened and hurt.

Let us pray in this mystery: Come Jesus! Do not be long, your people await you, need and trust you.

Chaplain: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Chaplain: Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(Recite The Hail Mary three times).

Chaplain: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

As the procession makes its way to the next station, all join in singing the hymn:

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
Who orders all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, great Lord of might,
Who to your tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times once gave the law,
In cloud, and majesty, and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Words: Latin, twelfth century; trans. John Mason Neale (1818-1866).

The 2nd Mystery

Chaplain: The second mystery: the Annunciation.

Reader 1: A reading from the Gospel of Luke (adapted from Lk 1:26-36 and 38).

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a town in Galilee named Nazareth. He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph, who was a descendant of King David. Her name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, "Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!"

Mary was deeply troubled by the angel's message, and she wondered what his words meant. The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end!"

Mary said to the angel, “How, then, can this be?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God’s power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God.”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” said Mary; “may it happen to me as you have said.” And the angel left her.

Reader 2: When Mary agreed to be the mother of God, the history of the world changed forever. God became like us! Just as we did, God came into the world as a tiny, helpless baby. He became man, dwelling among us, to show us the will of his Father and to save us from our sins.

As we think on Christ’s coming, let us ask God our Father that all the members of the Church may imitate Christ and his blessed mother. Let us pray that we may be considerate and kind in our own actions, and, like Mary, always follow God’s holy will.

Chaplain: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Chaplain: Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(Recite The Hail Mary three times).

Chaplain: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

As the procession makes its way to the next station, all join in singing the hymn:

O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shining
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary,
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of his Heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming
But in the world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem!
Descend to us we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in,
Be born in us today.

We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel!

Words: Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), 1868

The 3rd Mystery

Chaplain: The third mystery, “Mary and Joseph ask for shelter.”

Reader 1: A reading from the Gospel of Luke (*Lk 2: 1, 3-7*).

At that time Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own hometown.

Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to a son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger — there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

Reader 2:

Mary and Joseph traveled a long distance to register in the emperor’s census. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the city was already crowded. They knocked on many doors, but no one had room for them to stay. Finally, they were offered a place in a cowshed. And it was there, among the animals, that “God made man, king of the universe” was born.

Today, Joseph and Mary are still asking for shelter and knocking on doors, for God the Father entrusted them with a mission: Jesus should be born in every heart. Let us welcome him and make room for these wonderful guests! Let each of us, through faith, turn our hearts into a loving cradle for Jesus, our Redeemer.

Chaplain: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Chaplain: Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(Recite The Hail Mary three times).

Chaplain: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

As the procession makes its way to the next station, all join in singing the hymn:

Silent Night

Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child,
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord at thy birth.
Jesus, Lord at thy birth.

Words: Josef Mohr (1792-1848), 1818; trans. John F. Young (1820-1885).

The 4th Mystery

Chaplain: The fourth mystery, “The angels’ announcement to the shepherds.”

Reader 1: A reading from the Gospel of Luke (Adapted from Lk 2: 8-14).

There were some shepherds in that part of the country who were spending the night in the fields, taking care of their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone over them. They were terribly afraid, but the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people. This very day in David’s town your Savior was born —Christ the Lord! And this is what will prove it to you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great army of heaven’s angels appeared with the angel, singing praises to God:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom he is pleased!”

Reader 2: Who are these people who please God and receive his peace?

God is pleased by people who do not get angry, or speak badly about anyone. He is pleased by people who believe in him, hope in his salvation, know how to forgive and know how to love.

Let's ask humbly in this mystery that we, too, please God. Let us pray that God fills our souls, minds and hearts with his peace, that we may share it with our family, our neighbors and our nation, and among all peoples on earth.

Chaplain: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Chaplain: Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(Recite The Hail Mary three times).

Chaplain: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

As the procession makes its way to the next station, all join in singing the hymn:

Angels We Have Heard on High

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echo back their joyous strains.
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?

Say what may the tidings be,
Which inspire your heavenly song?
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ, the Lord, the newborn King.
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

See him in a manger laid,
Whom the choirs of angels praise;
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,
While our hearts in love we raise.
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Words: 18th-century French carol; trans. from Crown of Jesus Music, London, 1862

The 5th Mystery

Chaplain: The fifth mystery, “the three wise men worship Jesus.”

Reader 1: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 2: 1-5, 9-11).

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterward, some men who studied the stars came from the East to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, “Where will the Messiah be born?”

“In the town of Bethlehem in Judea,” they answered. “For this is what the prophet wrote.”

And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the East. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshiped him. They brought out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and presented them to him.

Reader 2: Just as Joseph and Mary traveled a long way before Christ’s birth, the wise men left their homeland, trusting in the light of a star, to find the Lord and worship him.

Like the wise men, we are asked to leave aside certain things — our own interests, our selfishness and our pride — as we seek Jesus and travel on our long journey to perfection.

The Holy Spirit is the light guiding us. Through his guidance, we may find Christ, and offer him the gold of our faith, the incense of our prayers and the myrrh of our good actions.

Chaplain: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Chaplain: Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.

(Recite The Hail Mary three times).

Chaplain: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.

Participants dressed as MARY and JOSEPH, or carrying their images, now lead the procession. All join in singing the hymn:

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him, born the King of angels;
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

God of God, Light of Light,
Lo! He comes forth from the Virgin's womb;
Our very God, begotten not created;
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!
Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest;
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

Words: John Francis Wade (1711-1786); trans. Frederick Oakeley (1802-1880).

Part 2 — Procession With Mary and Joseph

The procession, led by MARY and JOSEPH, continues as the community intones or recites the following shortened form of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. During this part of the procession, you may distribute candles and invite the community to light them as symbols of the hope and joy with which the Church awaits her savior, Jesus Christ.

During the Litany, the procession makes its way to a doorway (representing the inns of Bethlehem), where participants reenact Mary and Joseph's asking for shelter.

Chaplain: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.

Chaplain: Holy Mary, daughter of God the Father, in your hands we place our faith that you may enlighten it.

All: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.

Chaplain: Holy Mary, mother of God the Son, in your hands we lay our hope that you may strengthen it.

All: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.

Chaplain: Holy Mary, mother of God the Son, in your hands we lay our love that you may increase it.

The community responds “pray for us” as the chaplain intones the following.

Holy Mary,
Holy Mother of God,
Mother of Christ,
Mother of the Church,
Mother of divine grace,
Mother most pure,
Mother of good counsel,
Mother of our Savior,
Virgin most renowned,
Gate of heaven,
Queen of Angels,
Queen of Apostles,
Queen of all Saints,
Queen conceived without original sin,
Queen assumed into heaven,
Queen of the most holy Rosary,
Queen of families,
Queen of peace,

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, *Spare us, O Lord.*

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, *Graciously hear us, O Lord.*

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, *Have mercy upon us.*

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, *that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.*

Let us pray. O God, you who willed that, at the message of an angel, your word should take flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary; grant to your suppliant people, that we, who believe her to be truly the Mother of God, may be helped by her intercession.

Chaplain: Through the same Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Part 3 — Asking for Shelter

As the procession comes to the doorway, the community should separate into two groups. One group leads the following verses, while the other reads the response as they reenact Mary and Joseph's quest for shelter in Bethlehem.

The first group stands outside the door and speaks the part of Joseph, who asks for shelter. The second group stands behind the door and speaks the part of the innkeeper, who says there is no room.

At the end of the innkeeper's last verse, as he decides to let them in, the door is opened. The last verse is recited together and everyone goes inside, where the celebration continues.

1. In the name of heaven, please give us some shelter. My wife is weary and cannot walk.

Response: Go on your way! We will not open the doors for strangers.

2. Please, would you open the door? I am a carpenter from Nazareth; my wife and I are tired from our long journey.

Response: We don't care what your trade is or where you are from. We will not open the door.

3. Would you give one night's shelter to my wife?

Response: Why is she out in this freezing night?

4. My wife, Mary, has traveled with me through this night.

Response: You are Joseph and your wife is Mary? Let us welcome you into our poor dwelling.

5. May God reward you, and may Heaven fill you with joy.

Response: Blessed is the house that shelters this day the beautiful Mary as she awaits the birth of her child.

All: Oh most holy pilgrims, I offer you my soul so you may have lodging. Oh, most beautiful Mary and holy Joseph, I ask that you prepare my heart for the coming of the Christ Child, so that he may dwell there forever. Amen.

Part 4 — Concluding Your Celebration

As the participants follow Mary and Joseph through the doorway, invite them to stay and celebrate. Serve Christmas cookies and invite participants to learn of the piñata, a traditional part of the Las Posadas tradition.

The Master of Ceremonies should explain how early celebrations included a piñata that was shaped like a star with seven points. These points represented the seven deadly sins, and the bright colors of the piñata symbolized temptation. The blindfold represented faith, while the stick stood for the virtue and grace required to overcome sin. The candies and treats inside the piñata were the riches of the kingdom of heaven. The piñata shows us that through faith, virtue, grace, and the help and guidance of those who surround us, we can overcome sin, break its chains and receive all the rewards of heaven.

Should your council wish to include the rich symbolism of the piñata in your celebrations, it is recommended to have a separate piñata for each age group. You may wish to hold a piñata contest, distributing awards and certificates of participation prior to the event's end.

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We hope that this booklet helps you
share the joy of Christ's birth
with your family and all your community.
Have a very Merry Christmas!



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