

Christmas and the Christmas Season

1. God reveals God's self to us as the One who loves us. The feast days during Christmas remind us of this revelation and seek our response to it.
2. The color is white or gold, and it is ideal if vestments and fabrics used are different from those used at Easter.
3. A good Penitential Act is the third form, # II (now found in Appendix VI of the Missal)
4. Sing the Gloria the entire season. The carol "Angels We Have Heard On High" may not replace the Gloria.
5. Christ is present here and now. TODAY is born our Savior. Avoid historicizing. For example, use Christmas music with good theology for the whole season (ex. Hark the Herald Angels Sing) and avoid historical settings (O Little Town of Bethlehem).
6. Make sure your decorating reflects all that is important: the Word, the people... Enhance the whole building, not just the sanctuary. Remember: less is more!
7. Remember that Advent and Christmas are the perfect times to remember Mary, our ultimate model for behavior. The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, observed on January 1, is also a Holy Day of obligation (unless it falls on a Saturday or Monday). Ritual and Funeral Masses may not be celebrated.
8. There are two customary proclamations used during the Christmas Season. The deacon, reader, or cantor may sing/proclaim these texts, which will now be found in Appendix I of the Missal.
 - a. At Christmas Midnight Mass, after the greeting and introduction, the "Proclamation of the Birth of Christ" is sung or proclaimed. The Gloria immediately follows.
 - b. On Epiphany, the "Proclamation of the Date of Easter" is sung or proclaimed after the homily or after the prayer after communion.
9. During most of the year, we make a profound bow during the Proclamation of Faith while speaking the words: "by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man." During the Vigil of Christmas and all the Masses of Christmas, we genuflect at this time—highlighting the awesome mystery of the Incarnation.
10. Regarding the various Christmas Masses:
 - a. For prayers, the *Sacramentary* has five different Masses for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. The Mass for December 24 is the proper text for Masses in the morning of December 24. The proper text for Masses in the evening (= after 4 p.m.) of December 24 is the Christmas – Vigil Mass. The text for Christmas – Mass at Midnight is to be used for Masses beginning "at night," preferably on or around midnight between December 24 and 25. The proper text for the first Mass in the morning of December 25 is the Christmas – Mass at Dawn. Later Masses on December 25 should use the text for Christmas – Mass during the Day.

b. The Mass at Midnight may be preceded by a more prolonged vigil, taken from the Office of Readings (see the *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours* #71-73, 98, 215). This extended vigil is the preferred time for the blessing of the crèche (*Book of Blessings*, chapter 48, §1542-44).

c. According to the *Lectionary for Mass*, for the three Masses of Christmas (Midnight, Dawn, Day), the proper readings for the Mass may be used or the readings may be chosen from among any of the readings for Christmas or the Vigil—based on pastoral need. Pastors should carefully discern those needs before selecting readings other than those proper to each Mass. Only the Vigil readings may be used at the Vigil Mass.

11. The crèche does not go under the altar or even in the sanctuary. It is preferable to put out a crèche that represents the whole story; there is no need to have “traveling kings.” Please see the *Book of Blessings*, chapter 48, §1544:

“If the manger is set up in church, it must not be placed in the *presbyterium*. A place should be chosen that is suitable for prayer and devotion and is easily accessible by the faithful. (The *presbyterium* is that part of the church where bishops, priests and ministers perform their ministry. This would be the altar, ambo [pulpit], and presidential chair area of the sanctuary. The placement of the crib should not interfere with the dignity and function of these areas. Likewise, the crib should not impede a minister from getting to the tabernacle.)”

Additional information can be found in the GIRM §299 and in *Built of Living Stones* §§124, 125, and 128.

12. There is a tradition of blessing chalk on the Epiphany, which is then used by the faithful to bless their homes. In addition, this would be a proper time to celebrate the “Order for the Blessing of Homes.”