

# Born to Die! Christ's Mass

## The True Meaning of Christmas

**For the first three hundred years of the church's existence, birthdays were not given much emphasis--not even the birth of Christ. The day on which a saint died was considered more significant than his or her birth, as it ushered him or her into the kingdom of heaven. Christ's baptism received more attention than his birthday in the January 6th feast of Epiphany.** <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/301-600/the-1st-recorded-celebration-of-christmas-116>

As noted, the early Church combined the celebrations of Christmas, Epiphany and the Baptism of Jesus on January 6<sup>th</sup>, emphasizing Jesus' baptism because it marked the beginning of His mission on earth and the reason for His birth, the redemption of mankind. Emperor Constantine's 313 Edict of Milan brought tolerance for Christianity to the Roman Empire, but Emperor Theodosius made it the official religion in 380. Hence, the desire to celebrate Jesus' birth separately arose, and so the question of when He was born. Some reasoned the Romans would not order a census in winter when it would be too difficult for people to travel to the cities of their origin, so it must have been in the springtime. The Gospel speaks of shepherds tending their flocks in the fields near Bethlehem, but they would not be in the fields in winter. Some placed Jesus' birth in March at the time of Passover, noting Jesus is the new Passover Lamb at the exodus from slavery to sin. Cultures around the Mediterranean held celebrations around the winter solstice, December 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, the shortest days of the year, which are cold and dark. The Jewish people had a festival of lights called Hanukkah to celebrate the end of winter. The Romans celebrated the feast of Saturnalia in honor of their sun god, who gives light and warmth. Lest their people indulge in the pagan excesses, some bishops "christianized" the season and began to celebrate Christ's birth on December 25<sup>th</sup>, for He is the true deliverer from the dark, cold winter of sin and is the true Light of the world Who leads the way to salvation. The most plausible reason for celebrating the birth of Christ on December 25<sup>th</sup> was the acceptance of the feast of the Annunciation and Christ's conception on March 25<sup>th</sup>. Naturally, then, one would celebrate His birth nine months later on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

The early Church always bound Christ's birth to His Redemptive mission, His Passion, death and Resurrection, accomplished on Calvary and made present on every altar during the Mass. They understood the true meaning of Christmas was "Christ 's Mass," the gift of Christ to us in His redemptive death on the cross and His gift of Himself to us, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Eucharistic bread. The Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery are like two sides of a coin; neither is complete without the other. For many today, the celebration of Christmas is far from any consciousness of redeeming grace or entrance into a spiritual kingdom. We need to put Christ and the Mass back into Christmas. It takes a mature faith to see more than an infant in the manger. It means seeing the wood that held the child in the manger in light of the wood of the cross on which He would one day hang. It means seeing in the shepherds who came to adore the Child the Good Shepherd He would become Who would lay down His life for His sheep. It means seeing in the little lambs, silent in His presence, the many lambs Whom

He would call by name to come and follow Him to His Father's house. It means seeing in those lambs, soon to be offered on the altars in the temple of Jerusalem not far away, the Lamb of God who would be a perfect sacrifice to end all animal and other sacrifices by His perfect atonement for all mankind's sin. Here lies our ancient promise and long-awaited Savior, stripped of all His heavenly glory, born naked just like one of us, prefiguring how He would be stripped on the cross in order to clothe us in the heavenly glory that must have filled that barren cave that holy night. We watch as the three Kings from the Orient come bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, and we recall Jesus' royal descent from the House of David, the Shepherd King, His Eternal Priesthood, and his sacrificial death as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, all so we might live a more abundant life. Here lies the King of kings and Lord of lords at the center of the universe and at the center of all time, ready to do battle for us with the evil one, armed only with a flame of love and the humility of a child, the two things Satan is not capable of.

Reference: <https://www.whychristmas.com/customs/25th.shtml>

**Without a doubt, Jesus Christ is the most outstanding person in human history. So overwhelming is He that the Western world has traditionally marked its centuries into two periods of time by the year of His birth: BC (before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, from the Latin "in the year of our Lord"). ...**

**Satan may appear in many disguises like Christ, and at the end of the world will appear as a benefactor and philanthropist—but Satan never has and never will appear with scars.**

(The Most Reverend Fulton J. Sheen, *THE LIFE OF CHRIST*, Image Books/Doubleday, New York, Introduction and Preface.)

Bishop Sheen speaks of two philosophies of life, one is first the feast and then the headache, and the other is first the fast and then the feast. The ancients taught that prosperity enjoyed and achieved without suffering displeased the gods. The Christian view is expressed well in the words of Our Lady to Sister Mildred Neuzil on the role of suffering in the workings of grace.

**"My child, nothing is accomplished without pain. Prepare to suffer much. You see the sword in the Heart of your Mother. Suffering completed the work of divine grace in my soul. He who refuses to suffer will never abide in the Spirit of Christ, will never be formed into His image." (Our Lady to Sister, Feb. 11, 1958)**

(Sister Mildred Neuzil, *The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA*©, Lodi, OH, Pg. 23.)

Of great importance are Jesus' words to Sister Mildred on July 13, 1981, refuting the false prophets whose lies deceive so many. There is no easy path to redemption; it is a way of the cross with blood, tears and a love that knows no bounds in pouring itself out.

**"My dearest one, many false doctrines are being taught and for many the true Christ is never made known. The false prophets and self-proclaimed Messiahs are drawing many away from Me, the Way, the Truth and the Life. I am the true messiah who was sent and the only one proclaimed as such by My Father. Seek Me for I only am truth, I only am the Christ."**

Christmas celebrates the birth of our Savior who redeems us in His Blood. We claim His victory on Calvary each time it is made present on our altars at Holy Mass. **Jesus is the only person born precisely to die.** Bishop Sheen states that the cross,

long before it was at the end of Jesus' life, was at the very beginning of it in the intent and purpose of His coming. Hence, His biographers, martyrs in witness to Him, devoted one-third of the first three Gospels and one-fourth of the fourth Gospel to the events of Jesus' Passion, death and Resurrection. **His legacy was not an ethic or a collection of moral precepts, nor an awakening to social sin because men would not hear of personal sin; it was a confrontation of human guilt with the forgiving love of God, which cost God something.** (Sheen, Preface.)

Jesus' birth cost God something! It cost Him the sacrifice of His beloved Son to the horrors, humiliations and sacrileges of human sin, neglect and opposition. God willed that His Son should bear on His back all the sins of the world that would be beaten into His flesh while the sword of ultimate betrayal would pierce His side, spilling out the last drop of His most Precious Blood and breaking open His most Sacred Heart to form a huge cavern for our entrance. Not only did Jesus give us Himself and the Face of His Father and the breath of His Spirit, He gave us His dear Mother who stood beneath His cross as if she had carried it herself. She lived every moment of His life with Him and walked every step of that bitter path. This is love. This is our salvation. The sword that split Jesus' heart open split hers, too. He is the Mercy of God. She is the Mother of Mercy.

**It was not enough that the Son of God should come down from the heavens and appear as the Son of Man, for then He would have been only a great teacher and a great example, but not a Redeemer. It was more important for Him to fulfill the purpose of the coming, to redeem man from sin while in the likeness of human flesh. Teachers change men by their lives; Our Blessed Lord would change men by His death. The poison of hate, sensuality, and envy which is in the hearts of men could not be healed simply by wise exhortations and social reforms. The wages of sin is death, and therefore it was to be by death that sin would be atoned for. As in the ancient sacrifices the fire symbolically burned up the imputed sin along with the victim, so on the Cross the world's sin would be put away in Christ's sufferings, for He would be upright as a priest and prostrate as a victim.** (Sheen, Pg. 110.)

When we are children we think like children. As adults we must put away our childish thoughts. So--as we stand before the creche and gaze upon the Child and His Mother, let us visualize the nails that soon would scar those baby hands, and the sword that would pierce both hearts through. For this were they both born—to be our Savior and to be our Mother, Mother of the Redeemer! And Mother of the redeemed!

**O Father, Infinite Goodness, behold Your child, clothed in the likeness of Your Son. Extend to me your arms that I may belong to You forever.**

**O Son, Divine Lord, made man, crucify me with Yourself that I may become, in union with You, a sacrifice of praise for the glory of Your Father.**

**O Holy Spirit, Fire of Everlasting Love, consume me on the altar of Divine Charity, that at the end of life, nothing may remain but that which bears the likeness of Christ.**  
(From The Prayer to the Indwelling Most Holy Trinity, The Diary.)

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