



Each of the many feasts during the octave of Christmas enhances our understanding of the incarnation.

An Octave of Days to Rejoice

Greetings!

The liturgical year is among the many gifts that Catholicism offers for which I am grateful. The year's feasts and seasons are a reminder that all time belongs to God, and they provide a rhythm that grounds my life in joy.

One time of year this especially comes to mind is during the octave of Christmas. For many, December 26 is a big let-down. But for Catholics, the celebration of the Nativity of the Lord has just begun. For eight days, we celebrate as though it were Christmas Day.

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The joy of the incarnation is so immense that it cannot be contained in a single-day celebration. God wanted to give us the greatest gift: the gift of himself. God wanted to walk with us, talk with us, and share life with us. How could such a gift be celebrated only one day per year?

Even though we celebrate the octave of Christmas with as much joy as the first day, we also have the gift of many celebrations within the larger celebration. These are:

- December 26: St. Stephen, the first martyr, who was a deacon and cared for the poor. In Acts, we read about how he

followed Jesus and how his proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah led him to be rejected and killed.

- December 27: St. John the Evangelist, through whom we hear about the life of Jesus and the promises of the messianic kingdom.

- December 28: The Holy Innocents, children whom Herod killed to protect his position of power. He feared the coming of the messiah and sought to kill him through indiscriminate violence. The kingdom of God that Jesus came to proclaim will always challenge the idea that power is the highest value.

- December 30: The Feast of the Holy Family. Usually, the feast is celebrated on the Sunday after Christmas but this year it observed on a Friday. This feast celebrates where Jesus was born and raised, where he loved and was loved by those closest to him. Through the Holy Family, all families are made holy.

- January 1: The Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God. We celebrate the special role of Mary in history as the one chosen to bear Jesus. She is held up as a model of faith, hope, and love. She models contemplation as she reflects in her heart on the events of the incarnation.

The celebration of each of these feasts within the octave enhances our understanding of what has occurred in the incarnation. The octave of Christmas is one feast, made up of many feasts, each one deepening our understanding of what has happened in the mystery of the incarnation. May we, like the Mother of God, keep all of these things, reflecting on them in our hearts.